



Pécsi Tudományegyetem  
University of Pécs



**WESTERN BALKANS**  
**FORUM** on Higher Education  
and Innovation

 studyportals

**Venue:** Kodály Centre, University of Pécs, Hungary

**Date:** October 8-9, 2026

**Co-hosts:** University of Pécs & Studyportals

**Potential Partner:** Western Balkans Fund

**Expected Attendance:** 300 participants

**Duration:** 1.5 days

## **Day 1: Strategic Vision & Regional Cooperation**

**Theme:** *The Future of Higher Education in the Western Balkans: Integration, Innovation, and Internationalisation*

### **08:00–09:00 | Arrival & Registration**

- Welcome coffee & informal networking

### **09:00–09:30 | Opening Ceremony**

- **Host welcome:** Rector, University of Pécs
- **Co-host welcome:** CEO of Studyportals
- **Guests of honour:** Hungarian Prime Minister and EU Commissioner for Education

### **09:30–10:15 | Opening Keynote**

**Title:** *Bridging Regions, Building Futures: The Role of Higher Education in Regional Integration*

- **Speaker:** Prof. Jo Ritzen (previously Dutch Minister for Education and Science, then President of Maastricht University, and is now the driving force behind 'Empower European Universities' (EEU) (confirmed)





## 10:15–11:00 | Panel 1 – Regional Leadership Dialogue

**Topic:** *From Aspiration to Accession: What Role Does Higher Education Play in EU Integration?*

- Format: Ministerial panel discussion
- Participants:
  - Ministers of Education in Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina (confirmed) and Serbia (confirmed), and EU Commissioner for Enlargement
  - Moderator: Senior ICEF journalist

## 11:00–11:30 | Coffee Break

## 11:30–12:30 | Panel 2 – Global Trends & Regional Impact

**Topic:** *The Changing Landscape of International Higher Education: Challenges & Opportunities for the Western Balkans*

- Speakers:
  - Dr. Gjergj Murra, executive director, Western Balkans Fund (confirmed)
  - Studyportals representative on global student demand data
  - Gro Tjore, President of the Academic Collaboration Association (ACA)
  - Provost Rector Prof. Antonella Polimeni, La Sapienza, Rome, IT
  - Moderator: Prof. István Tarrósy, University of Pécs

## 12:30–14:00 | Networking Lunch

## 14:00–15:15 | Parallel Workshops – Session I





## Track A: Strategy & Policy

- *How Can Universities Strategically Prepare for EU Membership?*
  - Speakers:
    - A Bosnian university president,
    - the Serbian national agency,
    - Danilo Popovich, project manager at Montenegro EU Project Consulting (confirmed),
    - Prof. Valentyna Yakubiv, Rector of the EDUC Alliance associated member from Ukraine, Vasil Stefanyk Carpathian National University (confirmed)

## Track B: Marketing & International Recruitment

- *Making the Western Balkans More Attractive to International Students*
  - Speakers: Studyportals, successful regional recruiters, student representatives

## Track C: Research & Innovation

- *Accessing Horizon Europe and Other EU Research Frameworks*
  - Speakers: Ms Réka Jankovics, Head of International Grants' Department, University of Pécs
  - International Director Violeta Osouchová, Masaryk University Brno
  - iASK Kőszeg Balkan Observatory

## Track D: The Role of Corporate Partnerships in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Higher Education

- MOL
- Bank of China
- Serbian IT company

**15:15–15:45 | Coffee Break**





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## 15:45–17:00 | Panel 3 – Building Competitive Universities

**Topic:** *Excellence from the Edge: What Makes a Regional University Globally Competitive?*

- Speakers:
  - Christopher Cripps, VP at Institut Polytechnique de Paris
  - Prof. Stepjan Lakusic, Rector of the University of Zagreb
  - Rectors' Forum of Southeast Europe and Western Balkans (<https://rectorsforum.eu/>)
  - Representative of the 'Study in Greece' initiative
  - Judith Azema, Campus France
  - THE data analyst on competitiveness metrics

## 19:00 | Gala Dinner & Cultural Evening

## Day 2: Collaboration & Practical Solutions

**Theme:** *Turning Dialogue into Action: Tools, Networks, and Partnerships*

## 09:00–09:45 | Fireside Chat

**Topic:** *Why Stakeholders from the EU, Gulf, and Asia Should Invest in the Western Balkans Higher Education Ecosystem*





- Participants:
  - Francisco Marmolejo, President of Higher Education at the Qatar Foundation
  - Mudhita Nagpal, Office of Digital Learning, Jindal Global University
  - Dr. Wang Zhijiang, University of Pécs Confucius Institute (confirmed)
  - Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen, Director-General for Education, Youth, Sports and Culture

## **09:45–11:00 | Parallel Workshops – Session II**

### **Track A: Institutional Development & Governance**

- *From Bologna to Beyond: Quality Assurance & Governance Models*
- Speaker: Kathy Charles, Exec. Dean of Learning and Teaching, Nottingham Trent University (confirmed)

### **Track B: University–Industry Collaboration**

- *Skills & Innovation: How to Build Meaningful Public–Private Partnerships*
- Speaker: Prof. Florian Schweigert, former VP at University of Potsdam, CEO of BioAnalyst GmbH (confirmed)

### **Track C: Student Experience & Employability**

- *International Student Support & Career Services: Making Regional Universities Competitive*
- Speaker: Ágnes Tóth, CEO of Prohuman (confirmed)

## **11:00–11:30 | Coffee Break**





## 11:30–12:30 | Panel 4 – Partnerships in Practice

**Topic:** *What Makes Regional and Cross-Border Partnerships Work?*

- Format: Case studies & short panel interventions
- Examples:
  - Gábor Zupkó, head of representation of the European Commission in Hungary - EU Twinning or Capacity-Building projects
  - Ass.Prof. Rozafa Basha, VP of University of Prishtina, and one of their main Turkish partner
  - Prof. Oliver Günther, Rector of the University of Potsdam: German DAAD-funded Western Balkans project
  - Prof. István Tarrósy, University of Pécs - Pécs' partnerships with the region

## 12:30–13:00 | Closing Session & Takeaways

- Summary of key insights from moderators
- Remarks by the co-hosts (Pécs & StudyPortals)
- Launch or announcement of a possible joint initiative or working group

## 13:00 | Light Farewell Lunch & Departures

### Parallel events:

- **Hungarian Rectors' Conference General Assembly**
- **Meeting of Rectors' Conferences from the region**
- **"A Day of Indigenous Grape Varieties" Conference on Viticulture and Oenology in the Western Balkans**

