

Professors of propaganda

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How the EU's Jean Monnet Programme corrodes academia

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Executive summary

Enormous reach and funding for political influence

The Jean Monnet Programme channels around **€25million per year** to universities and research institutes globally and reaches **around 500,000 students annually** across more than 70 countries. **This is not for open-ended research; it's an investment explicitly designed to influence academic curricula, align educational content with the EU's political agenda** and promote Brussels's legitimacy. As former Jean Monnet Chair Joseph H. H. Weiler candidly admitted: 'Part of our mission as [a] Jean Monnet Professor is to disseminate the values of European integration. The EU Commission think of us openly as intellectual ambassadors of the Union and its values.' **This directly challenges any claim of impartial academic freedom.**

An explicitly political project – beyond academic study

While proponents often frame the Jean Monnet Programme as fostering excellence, our report demonstrates that its core purpose, as openly acknowledged by the European Commission itself, is not merely to study European integration but to 'promote' it. **The EU's own directives require** Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence and Designated Institutions to **maintain 'continuous and frequent alignment' of their teaching and research with EU policy priorities** and to promote European identity. This goes far beyond neutral academic inquiry.

Explicitly pro-EU agenda

Direct quotes from funded projects reveal the ideological mission of supporting EU institutions: funded projects openly aim to **'promote EU integration', 'foster European identity', 'enforce EU values', and 'challenge the rise of euroscepticism and of populist, extreme right parties'**. They are also designed to 'counter anti-EU disinformation and propaganda' and 'reverse de-Europeanisation dynamics'.

Transforming academics into activists

Recipients of Jean Monnet funding are not just expected to produce EU-aligned research, but to **act as 'outreach agents'**, organizing public events, engaging with media and NGOs, and disseminating EU-approved narratives to the public. This creates a 'self-reinforcing feedback loop' where EU-funded research legitimizes EU policies.

Academic freedom under threat

The funding structure incentivises conformity with EU priorities, discourages critical perspectives, and promotes research with predetermined political outcomes. This 'undermines the Humboldtian principles of academic autonomy' and **transforms students into 'subjects to be moulded into "right-thinking" citizens'**.

Narrative control

While the EU claims to combat 'disinformation', our report demonstrates that this is **often a strategy to curtail dissenting views**, narrow the spectrum of public debate and consolidate institutional control over the flow of information. Projects explicitly target 'eurosceptic framing of EU activities' and what are labelled as 'denialisms and conspiracy theories' related to EU policy positions on issues like climate change and Covid-19. We highlight how this provides academic justification to the EU's increasingly pervasive online censorship framework, exemplified by the bloc's adoption, in 2022, of the Digital Services Act (DSA), which aims at secretly **controlling the online narrative**.

Report overview

The Jean Monnet Programme, launched in 1989 and now part of Erasmus+, was originally framed as an initiative to promote excellence in teaching and research on European integration. It has since evolved into a powerful instrument for embedding the EU's political priorities and integrationist agenda within academia and society at large.

Scope and reach

- The Jean Monnet Programme channels around €25million per year to universities and research institutes worldwide through professorial chairs, modules, centres of excellence and designated institutions.
- Activities extend beyond classrooms into media, civil society and policymaking circles.
- Jean Monnet activities are spread across more than 70 countries, involving over 1,500 professors and reaching around 500,000 students annually.

Ideological alignment

- Many funded projects explicitly aim to ‘promote EU integration’, ‘foster European identity’, ‘enforce EU values’, ‘challenge the rise of euroscepticism and of populist, extreme-right parties’, ‘reverse de-Europeanisation dynamics in the EU and beyond’ and ‘counter anti-EU disinformation and propaganda’.
- These are clearly designed to shape students’ perceptions of the EU and to amplify pro-EU narratives, by embedding them in all the fields of social sciences: history, law, political science, economy, etc.
- Jean Monnet activities are structurally aligned with the EU’s strategic priorities – from the Green Deal and ‘countering disinformation’ to rule-of-law initiatives and global governance.
- Overall, the programme transforms academic research – which should be open-ended, free from political influence and ultimately aimed at advancing knowledge and understanding – into advocacy research, which begins from a value position (‘the EU is beneficial’) and aims to produce ‘evidence’ in support for it.

Erosion of academic freedom

- Funding structures incentivise conformity with EU priorities, discourage critical perspectives, and promote research with predetermined political outcomes – that is, advocacy research.
- This undermines the Humboldtian principles of academic autonomy and the pursuit of knowledge free from political interference.

Top-tier actors

- Jean Monnet centres of excellence and Jean Monnet designated institutions are the central hubs of the EU's academic propaganda branch. They are formally required to maintain 'continuous and frequent alignment' of their teaching and research with EU policy priorities and to promote European identity.
- The seven designated institutions, such as the European University Institute and the College of Europe, work closely with EU institutions and receive substantial funding.

From the classroom to society at large

- Jean Monnet activities aren't aimed at promoting the EU's policies and goals just within education, but also among society at large. Recipients of Jean Monnet funding grants aren't just expected to produce research that aligns with the EU's normative and geopolitical agenda, but also to act as outreach agents – organising public events, engaging with the media, NGOs and other civil-society organisations, and spreading the content of their 'research' to the public. This is another trademark of advocacy research, as opposed to academic research.
- This may be described as a form of 'propaganda by proxy', where research is funded and shaped according to EU priorities, which then produces EU-approved narratives that are subsequently disseminated to the mainstream through conferences, media engagement and outreach activities.

Integration into a wider propaganda network

- These academic entities form part of a larger EU-NGO-media-academia complex, in which each sector amplifies and legitimises the other's narratives.
- Partnerships with media and civil society on initiatives like the 'anti-disinformation' European Digital Media Observatory blur the lines between research, advocacy and institutional propaganda.

Public diplomacy

- The EU's enlisting of academic institutions for political goals isn't limited to the Union itself. The Jean Monnet Programme today operates in over 70 countries, where it is part and parcel of the EU's broader public diplomacy or soft-power efforts, shaping how the EU is perceived internationally and promoting the bloc's geopolitical interests.
- The programme's foreign operations tend to focus on countries that are pivotal to the EU's geopolitical strategy: in recent years, for example, hundreds of Jean Monnet projects have been implemented in Ukraine, many explicitly aimed at furthering Ukraine's integration into the EU and the Euro-Atlantic bloc in general.
- The Jean Monnet Programme is also used to advance EU enlargement by pre-aligning the national legal, regulatory and educational systems of prospective member states with EU standards.

Key finding

- The Jean Monnet Programme, far from being just an educational initiative, is explicitly structured, at all levels, as an academic tool aimed at projecting and promoting the EU's policy preferences – by embedding pro-EU content in curricula, shaping discourse around European integration and extending the EU's ideological reach far beyond its borders.

Policy recommendation

Safeguarding academic integrity requires ending politically driven funding mechanisms, restoring institutional independence and reaffirming the Humboldtian model as the cornerstone of higher education, for example by:

- De-politicising research funding
- Respecting academic freedom and authority
- Allocating grants based on scientific and intellectual merit
- Encouraging diversity of views and critical inquiry
- Rejecting the use of academia as a tool of propaganda
- Promoting transparency and accountability in EU-academic relations

Introduction

The Jean Monnet Programme was launched by the European Commission in 1989 to encourage teaching and research on European integration in universities. Since then, it has evolved into one of the European Union's most effective – and least scrutinised – tools for shaping the way Europe is taught, researched and understood. Under the respectable banner of 'fostering excellence in teaching and research on EU matters', it channels millions of euros into universities and research institutes, rewarding those that align their work with Brussels's political agenda.

What began as an academic initiative has grown into a sprawling network of professorial chairs, modules, centres of excellence and designated institutions that now function as the EU's academic outreach arm – embedding pro-integration narratives across curricula, producing research that mirrors official priorities and extending influence far beyond campus walls into media, civil society and policymaking circles.

This paper examines how the programme operates, the ideological assumptions built into its funding mechanisms, and its role in what can be described as the EU-NGO-media-academia complex – a self-reinforcing ecosystem that blurs the line between education and political advocacy. It also explains why this politicisation of higher education represents not just a distortion of scholarly priorities, but a direct challenge to academic freedom itself.

1 From exchange to influence: from Erasmus to Erasmus+

In 1987, the EU launched the Erasmus Programme. It was presented as a pioneering initiative aimed at promoting cross-border mobility in higher education by allowing students to spend a semester or year studying in another European country. But the ambitions behind the project went far deeper: from its very inception, Erasmus was conceived as a tool to foster a shared European identity, helping to bind together what was then still the European Economic Community (EEC), the precursor to the EU.

The programme was launched in the political context of the Single European Act (1986) and the preparations for the Maastricht Treaty (1992). Given the top-down nature of the European integration project, and the enduring strength of citizens' attachments to their nation-states, European leaders recognised the need to deliberately cultivate a post-national 'European identity' as a means of generating consensus for the supranational political project they had in mind.

Erasmus was designed to achieve this through mobility. By enabling students to spend some time studying abroad, the programme deliberately took young people out of their national environments, immersing them in different cultures, languages and academic traditions. The idea was that participants would build cross-national friendships and networks, forming ties that would outlast their exchange period. This lived experience of

European diversity was intended to weaken narrow national identifications and nurture a generation that felt equally European in identity and outlook.

EU officials were remarkably candid about this intention. The programme would ‘help to reinforce the spirit of European identity’, the European Council noted at the time,¹ while the European Commission described it as ‘an essential element in developing the awareness of a Community identity, thus fostering the implementation of the internal market’.² The programme was explicitly linked to the idea of ‘European consciousness’: if young people lived and learned together across borders, it was thought that they would naturally develop a stronger attachment to the European project.

The main driving force behind the creation of the Erasmus Programme was Jacques Delors, the highly influential president of the European Commission between 1985 and 1995, who gave the process of European supranational integration a momentum lacking in the preceding decade. Years later, he recalled having to overcome strong political resistance from national governments in order to push the programme through. ‘Member states were deeply suspicious – if not openly hostile – towards the idea of European institutions intervening in university affairs’, he recounted.³

As we will see, those concerns were far from unfounded. After all, one may very well describe the Erasmus Programme as a form of soft social engineering, albeit a relatively benign one – at least in its original incarnation. After all, being allowed to spend some time studying abroad doesn’t sound particularly nefarious. Indeed, by the early 2000s, Erasmus had become a symbol of the EU’s success: popular, visible and widely supported. By then, more than one million students had already taken part in Erasmus exchanges.

As to whether the programme had actually fostered a sense of European identity, however, the results were mixed.⁴ Some studies concluded that

Erasmus had indeed strengthened the participants' European identity, calling this the 'Erasmus effect'. Others thought it had not and still others argued that it depended on where the students came from.

This is probably why, beginning in the 2010s – particularly in light of the financial crisis and the subsequent decline in public confidence in the European project and rise of anti-establishment populist parties across member states – the decision was made to expand the Erasmus Programme far beyond its original mission, and to significantly bolster its role as a vector for political and ideological consolidation. This was part of a wider ideological offensive targeting both civil society and the media, areas that the author has examined in detail in previous reports.⁵

The pivotal transformation came in 2014 with the launch of Erasmus+, which consolidated several EU programmes in education, training, youth and sport under one umbrella. The programme now included not just university exchanges, but also school and vocational education, adult learning, youth and volunteer activities, policy reform and capacity building, and international cooperation with non-EU countries. The budget also expanded dramatically – from €2.7billion over the 2007–2013 period to €14.7billion for 2014–2020.⁶ Since then, the scope of Erasmus+ has kept expanding, alongside its budget, which rose to over €26billion for the 2021–2027 cycle.⁷

With this expansion came a strategic shift: Erasmus was now no longer just about mobility and soft identity socialisation, but about active mobilisation – of values, policies and political alignment. As a result, what began in 1987 as a modest student-exchange programme aimed at fostering cross-border mobility has evolved into one of the European Union's most powerful instruments of soft power, embracing a broad agenda of policy alignment, strategic influence and normative promotion. At the heart of this shift lies the Jean Monnet Programme.

2 The evolution of the Jean Monnet Programme

The Jean Monnet Programme was launched by the European Commission in 1989 to encourage teaching and research on European integration in universities. Named after Jean Monnet – one of the founding architects of the European project – the programme initially focused on supporting law, economics and political science departments within the European Economic Community (EEC). In a very basic sense, one might say that, through the programme, the EEC sought to institutionalise the study of its own development and governance across higher-education systems in Europe – chiefly through the establishment of Jean Monnet chairs (professorships in EU studies), modules (EU-related courses) and centres of excellence (focal points of competence and knowledge on EU subjects).

But, just like Erasmus, the Jean Monnet Programme was conceived as far more than just an academic initiative. Its purpose was not merely to study European integration but to ‘promote’ it, as the European Commission itself openly acknowledges.⁸ In other words, it was an explicitly political project designed to enlist academic institutions in the service of European integration.

During the 1990s and 2000s, the programme expanded geographically and structurally. It was opened to non-EU countries, particularly candidate states and EU neighbours, as part of the EU’s broader pre-accession and neighbourhood strategies. At the same time, the programme developed more sophisticated funding lines, supporting not only professors and courses, but also research networks, conferences and academic publications. The incorporation into Erasmus+, in 2014, marked a turning point.

By then, the Jean Monnet Programme had become a familiar presence in EU-affiliated academic circles. But under the new framework, the programme was expanded even further – no longer limited to academia, but extended to policy debates, civil-society engagement and even teacher training. The geographical reach expanded dramatically as well. Today, Jean Monnet chairs and modules operate in over 70 countries, including the United States, India, Brazil, China and many others.

Under Erasmus+, the Jean Monnet Programme comprises the following actions and activities (these may slightly change from one funding call to another):

Jean Monnet Action in the field of higher education

This action, according to the European Commission, ‘supports higher-education institutions inside and outside Europe in promoting teaching and research on European integration and promoting policy debate and exchanges involving the academic world and policymakers on Union policy priorities’.⁹ The following sub-actions are supported:

- Jean Monnet chairs: longer teaching posts with a specialisation in EU studies for individual university professors
- Jean Monnet modules: short teaching programmes in one or more discipline of EU studies
- Jean Monnet centres of excellence: focal points gathering knowledge of experts in various disciplines of European studies, as well as developing transnational activities and structural links with academic institutions in other countries
- Jean Monnet designated institutions: this action supports institutions that ‘play a crucial role in pursuing an aim of European interest and European integration’.¹⁰

- Jean Monnet action in other fields of education and training: this action ‘promotes knowledge on the European Union in schools ... in the EU member states and third countries associated with the programme’.¹¹

The following sub-actions are supported:

- Teacher training: training courses on EU subjects to teachers
- Learning EU initiative: training activities that aim to ‘promote better understanding of the EU, in general education and vocational training’.¹²
- Jean Monnet policy debate activities: these are mainly supported through the Jean Monnet Networks in Higher Education and in other fields of education. Their aim is to foster the establishment of international networks in the area of EU studies to ‘build knowledge and promote the European integration process around the world’.¹³

Since their creation, around 9,000 university teachers and more than 1,000 universities in around 100 countries have received financial support for nearly 7,000 actions.¹⁴ The Jean Monnet Programme under Erasmus+ currently includes approximately:

- 875 Jean Monnet chairs
- 1,000 Jean Monnet modules
- 160 Jean Monnet centres of excellence
- Seven designated institutions

These are spread across 72 countries, involving over 1,500 professors and reaching around 500,000 students annually.¹⁵ In 2025, the Jean Monnet Programme was allocated a total indicative budget of €23.5million,¹⁶ divided as follows:

- Funding for modules, chairs and centres of excellence: €12.3million
- Funding for teacher training and Learning EU initiatives: €7million
- Funding for policy debates: €4million

More specifically, each Jean Monnet chair is eligible for a lump-sum grant of up to €60,000 for a three-year period; modules (short courses) are eligible for up to €35,000 per grant; and centres of excellence can receive up to €100,000. Overall, since the integration of the Jean Monnet Programme into Erasmus+, in 2014, total spending can be estimated at around €220–275 million (around €20–25 million annually), or around a quarter of a billion euros.

The various Jean Monnet actions are analysed in detail below. However, even from a cursory glance, it is evident that the Jean Monnet Programme is much more than just an initiative to promote excellence in teaching and research on European integration, as is often claimed. Rather, it is a programme explicitly designed to influence academic curricula, align educational content with the EU's political agenda and promote Brussels's legitimacy.

3 Embedding pro-EU narratives in the classroom – and society

While some of the teaching activities funded through the Jean Monnet programme could be seen as relatively benign and politically neutral – focused primarily on providing knowledge of technical subjects such as EU law or AI regulation, which are increasingly relevant to many professions – many projects (courses, textbooks, seminars and entire academic modules) are explicitly normative in nature. In practice, they are designed to shape students' perceptions of the EU and to amplify pro-EU narratives, by embedding them in all the fields of social sciences: history, law, political science, economy, etc.

Jean Monnet-funded courses and initiatives often echo EU policy priorities – from the Green Deal and disinformation to migration and foreign policy – effectively promoting the EU's normative positions within academic and civil-society circles. In many cases, these projects aren't even focused on specific policies, but are simply aimed at championing the EU itself and the very principle of supranational integration – that is, the need to move towards post-national societies. In this sense, they are explicitly aligned with the Commission's vision of deeper European integration. The aim is clear: to embed pro-EU narratives in the classroom. It's interesting to note that EU institutions are very candid about this. As a Commission report summarising the results of a Jean Monnet cluster meeting succinctly put it, the programme is an instrument to promote 'European citizenship and integration'.¹⁷

The aforementioned Commission report acknowledges that ‘This type of discourse is often branded as EU propaganda’, but nonetheless argues that, given the existence of ‘a number of strong voices against the EU, systematically working to destroy the EU legacy’, the Jean Monnet Programme should ‘play an instrumental role’ to ‘counterbalance effectively’ these narratives.¹⁸

This is evident in the way these educational projects are presented. Some of the recurrent stated aims include strengthening ‘citizens’ European identity and their sense of belonging to the EU’,¹⁹ ‘fostering European identity among their students or training participants’,²⁰ challenging ‘the rise of euroscepticism and of populist, extreme-right parties’,²¹ to ‘reverse de-Europeanisation dynamics in the EU and beyond’,²² ‘promoting EU values’,²³ counter the way ‘history is once more being successfully exploited by populist movements to exalt one’s own nation and feelings of cultural superiority and to boost Euroscepticism’,²⁴ etc. (Detailed examples are presented below.)

This thematic alignment is not incidental. Funding calls under the Jean Monnet Programme now explicitly encourage the ‘alignment of study and training programmes or capacity-building activities with EU and European Commission’s policy agenda and priorities’,²⁵ creating a system where applicants must align with EU policies to secure support – while critical or alternative views on the EU and its policies have little to no chance of receiving funding. As Georges Berthu, a former French senior civil servant, put it: ‘Control by the European Commission takes the form of a scientific committee carefully selected by the Commission, which validates the attribution of the “Jean Monnet” labels and grants subsidies only to the teachers who present sufficient political guarantees on the matter.’²⁶

This system of ideological alignment within academia becomes even more deeply entrenched in the case of the Jean Monnet centres of excellence and, particularly, its designated institutions, which are explicitly expected

to embed pro-EU narratives across all EU-related areas of teaching. This inevitably exerts a corrupting and distorting influence on the academic system as a whole, fostering ideological conformity and skewing both curricula and research towards euro-federalist or pro-integration viewpoints – at the expense of pluralism and critical voices within academia. What emerges is not a commitment to genuine education, but rather a form of ideological indoctrination, in which universities are transformed into vehicles of institutional propaganda.

In this context, students are no longer regarded as independent minds to be trained in critical thinking about the world – which should include the EU itself – but as subjects to be moulded into ‘right-thinking’ citizens aligned with the official orthodoxy. One project proudly boasted that its goal was to ‘instill the advantages and responsibilities of European citizenship’ in students.²⁷ Indeed, the Commission report cited above goes as far as saying that the Jean Monnet Programme should reconcile the ‘paradox of education as necessary for democracy vs education as social engineering’.²⁸

But the activities of the Jean Monnet Programme are by no means limited to the classroom. These aren’t aimed at promoting the EU’s policies and goals just within education, but also among society at large. Indeed, recipients of Jean Monnet funding grants aren’t just expected to produce research that aligns with the EU’s normative and geopolitical agenda, but also to act as outreach agents – organising public events, engaging with the media, NGOs and other civil-society organisations, and spreading the content of their ‘research’ to the public. This is often a prerequisite for accessing funding, as explained below.

Indeed, the Commission report notes that Jean Monnet academics and universities should ‘contribute to the public debate’ and play a key role in shaping public opinion, by engaging with the media at all levels –

local, regional and national – and developing communication strategies to reach a broader public. In particular, it suggests ‘recruiting’ journalists due to their crucial role in ‘tendency setting’ and shaping public debate, which is described as being ‘most often against the EU’. The strategy also encourages cooperation between Jean Monnet chairs and businesses, think tanks and political actors, promoting cross-sectoral collaboration. Jean Monnet centres of excellence are expected to act as ‘multipliers’ within institutions, helping to ‘shape favourably the public debate about the EU’ and promote outreach to diverse audiences.

Jean Monnet research outcomes should be presented at ‘top-level political forums and meetings’, leveraging the influence of institutions. The programme is also framed as a tool for reshaping public perception on sensitive topics, such as immigration. For example, the report notes that Jean Monnet activities should ‘overcome the stereotypes on the refugees’ by fostering real encounters between society and immigrants, thereby ‘re-educating the perception of immigrants as people and not as statistics’, further arguing that in this framework ‘teaching students about EU-scepticism is not sufficient’; hence ‘studies on multiculturalism should be stimulated within Jean Monnet activities’. It concludes by noting that participants in the seminar ‘confirmed that Jean Monnet Community can be seen as a lobby for the spread of European values’.²⁹

This dynamic clearly reveals the existence of a pipeline: research is funded and shaped according to EU priorities, which then produces EU-approved narratives that are subsequently disseminated to the mainstream through conferences, media engagement and outreach activities. In other words, the Jean Monnet Programme functions as another form of ‘propaganda by proxy’, a concept the author previously applied in the context of NGO funding. Just as the Commission strategically channels resources to

NGOs that align with its priorities in order to create a network of ‘independent’ actors that legitimise and promote its policies, it deploys the same strategy in academia.

Universities, academics and research centres funded through the Jean Monnet Programme are incentivised to amplify EU narratives while appearing to do so autonomously, thus conferring an aura of neutrality on the messages they propagate. This demonstrates how the EU operates a multi-layered propaganda infrastructure spanning civil society, academia and the media, each reinforcing and legitimising the other.

Recipients of Jean Monnet funding, and its chairs in particular, are effectively expected to serve as ‘ambassadors’ for the EU.³⁰ Indeed, many of them maintain a high public profile, frequently publishing op-eds and giving media interviews. During the Brexit campaign, for example, pro-Brexit campaigners accused the BBC of frequently relying on Jean Monnet professors as supposedly impartial speakers on the EU, despite the fact that they were ‘being paid by the EU to promote EU integration’.³¹

Moreover, the Commission – and in many cases national governments – routinely rely on the outputs of Commission-funded academic studies as evidence of support for their own agendas. As the Commission report put it, Jean Monnet academics specialised in different policy fields should ‘be at the disposal of the European Union legislative and consultative bodies, notably the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions’, in order to give a ‘sense of direction’ to the European Commission and act as ‘knowledge providers’ at the political level.³² This dynamic represents yet another clear parallel with the way NGO funding operates, where legislators and policymakers cite the advocacy and reports of EU-funded NGOs as independent validation of their policies.

This creates a self-reinforcing feedback loop: research is funded in line with EU priorities, the results naturally reflect those priorities and those same results are then presented as impartial confirmation of the validity of EU policies. As with NGO funding, the veneer of independence masks a circular system in which the institutions effectively legitimise themselves through the voices they finance.

Both these dynamics – propaganda by proxy and self-validating research – are particularly evident in the case the Jean Monnet designated institutions, which enjoy what can only be described as a structural relationship with the EU's institutions. These may be considered the central hubs of the EU's academic propaganda branch, participating as academic partners in numerous EU-funded projects involving both the media and civil society. The European University Institute (EUI) in Florence – through its School of Transnational Governance, which 'trains current and future leaders in the methods, skills and theory of governance beyond the state' – is a perfect case in point.³³

Among the numerous projects the institute is involved in, we find the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), an initiative established by the European Commission, to the tune of almost €30million, to 'fight against disinformation across Europe' by bringing together fact-checkers, academic researchers, media organisations and news agencies, many of which are involved in several other media partnerships with the EU;³⁴ and Democratic Odyssey, an initiative aiming to 'embed citizen participation and deliberation in the multi-layered ecosystem of representative democracy in the EU', involving dozens of pro-EU (and EU-funded) NGOs.³⁵

This illustrates just how deeply Jean Monnet designated institutions, like the EUI, are embedded within the Brussels machinery, providing both ideological and academic support for the EU's policies and agendas.

No wonder *The Economist* ironically described the EUI as ‘Europe’s Hogwarts’.³⁶ In fact, what the author has previously described as the EU-NGO and EU-media propaganda complexes – referring to the vast sums of funding channelled by the EU into ‘civil society’ and the media to promote its narratives – would perhaps be more accurately understood as interlocking components of a single, sprawling EU-NGO-media-academia complex that operates seamlessly across multiple areas of the infosphere, with each component supporting and legitimising the others in a mutually reinforcing cycle.

It’s worth noting that the EU’s enlisting of academic institutions for political goals is by no means limited to the Union itself. As noted, the Jean Monnet Programme today operates in over 70 countries, where it is part and parcel of the EU’s broader public diplomacy or soft-power efforts, shaping how the EU is perceived internationally and promoting the bloc’s geopolitical interests. This is openly acknowledged by the European Commission itself, which claims: ‘The Jean Monnet actions also strive to function as a vector of public diplomacy towards third countries, promoting EU values and enhancing the visibility of what the European Union stands for and what it intends to achieve.’³⁷ This is a candid admission of the programme’s promotional aims.

This means that instead of engaging foreign publics directly, the EU relies on the Jean Monnet Programme to communicate the EU through professors in target countries. In this process, the messages of EU public diplomacy travel from the EU to its academic proxies and then from the proxies to its end recipients, a process that has been described as ‘public diplomacy by proxy’.³⁸ No wonder that many of the programme’s foreign projects – including chairs and centres of excellence – are framed in terms of ‘strengthening the role of the EU in the world’.

As one might expect, the programme's foreign operations tend to focus on countries that are pivotal to the EU's geopolitical strategy. It is therefore hardly surprising that, in recent years, hundreds of Jean Monnet projects have been implemented in Ukraine, many explicitly aimed at 'integrating Ukrainian society into the European axiological framework', as one project candidly describes it.³⁹ This represents yet another blatant corruption of academia, where professors are effectively transformed into vehicles of institutional messaging and (geo)political instrumentalisation. Rather than operating as independent scholars fostering critical inquiry, they are incentivised to align their teaching and outreach with the EU's priorities, often under the guise of neutrality.

Overall, it is clear that the Jean Monnet Programme is explicitly structured, at all levels, as an academic tool aimed at projecting and promoting the EU's policy preferences – by embedding pro-EU content in curricula, shaping discourse around European integration and extending the EU's ideological reach far beyond its borders. Effectively, the programme transforms academic research – which should be open-ended, free from political influence and ultimately aimed at advancing knowledge and understanding – into advocacy research, which begins from a value position ('the EU is beneficial') and aims to produce 'evidence' in support for it, which is then spread to policymakers, journalists, activists and the general public in order to promote specific policies and agendas. As such, it is a striking example of how Erasmus+ has evolved into a tool of ideological alignment – and of the corruptive effects that politics and money can have on academia.

It's worth noting that the Jean Monnet Programme represents a small portion of the overall money allocated by the EU to universities. The lion's share of the funding comes from the Horizon Programme, the EU's flagship funding programme for research, with a budget of around €95.5 billion for

the 2021–2027 cycle.⁴⁰ Though an analysis of Horizon is beyond the scope of this report, it should be noted that, in many respects, Horizon also suffers from the same biases as the Jean Monnet Programme: by conditioning grants on alignment with EU strategies, it too shapes research agendas and embeds EU priorities in scientific and technological development – mirroring how Erasmus+ and Jean Monnet actions do the same in education and academia.

In the following section, the various Jean Monnet actions and projects are examined in greater detail.

4 Jean Monnet chairs: professorships in European integration

As noted, since its launch in 1989, the Jean Monnet Programme has played a key role in embedding EU studies, and pro-EU narratives, within academia and society at large. At the centre of this initiative are the Jean Monnet chairs – professorships awarded to university academics who specialise in topics related to the EU. Although framed as a way to promote excellence in teaching and research, the programme’s underlying purpose is openly normative: to promote the values, policies and priorities of the European Union through the academic sphere.

A Jean Monnet chair is a three-year teaching and research position awarded to a single named professor with recognised expertise in European Union studies. The chairholder, who is eligible for a lump-sum grant of up to €60,000, must be a permanent member of staff at a higher-education institution and is required to deliver a minimum of 90 teaching hours per academic year on EU-related topics. The programme supports the development of courses, public lectures, publications, student supervision and outreach activities. Chairs are expected not just to teach but also to actively promote the EU within and beyond the university. Hosts range from major EU integration hubs like the College of Europe to national universities and partner-country institutions worldwide.

Since the programme’s creation, more than 1,500 chairs have been granted to over 1,300 professors in 700 universities in more than 70 countries.⁴¹ Between 1990 and 2022, the countries that were awarded the most chairs were Spain (203, 13 per cent), Italy (182, 11.5 per cent),

France (139, nine per cent), the United Kingdom (133, 8.5 per cent) and Germany (110, seven per cent).⁴²

The universities with the most chairs awarded were

Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain)	25
Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna (Italy)	16
Università degli Studi di Milano (Italy)	15
Universidad de Valencia (Spain)	14
University of Maastricht (Netherlands)	11
Université de Strasbourg (France)	11
University College Dublin (Ireland)	11
Universiteit Leiden (Netherlands)	10
Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (Spain)	10
Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences (Greece)	10
Università degli Studi di Genova (Italy)	10
Charles University (Czech Republic)	9
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (Spain)	9
Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands)	8
Universidad Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain)	8
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece)	8
Universidad de Granada (Spain)	8
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (Netherlands)	8
Università degli Studi di Siena (Italy)	8
Università degli Studi di Firenze (Italy)	8
Università degli Studi di Trento (Italy)	8
Sapienza Università di Roma (Italy)	8
Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Spain)	8

There are currently over 875 Jean Monnet chairs active worldwide, hosted by universities in both EU and non-EU countries.⁴³ Topics covered by Jean Monnet chairs span a wide range of EU-relevant areas, including:

- EU law and fundamental rights
- European political economy
- Foreign and security policy
- Climate action and digital regulation
- Democratic values, identity and citizenship

A 2022 report noted that the most popular chair subjects among applicants were EU Legal Studies (427 chairs, 30 per cent), EU Political and Administrative Studies (250, 18 per cent) and EU Economic Studies (209, 15 per cent).⁴⁴ It was observed that, until 2006, the traditional Jean Monnet subjects had a greater presence: EU Legal Studies, EU Political and Administrative Studies, EU Economic Studies, EU Interdisciplinary Studies and EU Historical Studies. Since then, new subjects have emerged, gaining more prominence, including STEM subjects related to EU strategies.

Chairholders are also encouraged to adopt interdisciplinary approaches that tie EU studies to fields such as public policy, technology, environmental studies and social cohesion. In recent years, this thematic scope has increasingly mirrored the EU's strategic priorities – from the Green Deal and digital transition to rule-of-law initiatives and global governance. Crucially, as noted above, Jean Monnet chairs are not confined to academic instruction. Professors are expected to engage in research and publication aligned with EU policy objectives, policy outreach (through seminars, workshops and conferences, media engagement and civil-society collaboration) and curriculum development that integrates EU-focused content into broader academic programmes.

This often entails ‘lobbying’ European institutions by pushing for policies that reflect the priorities of Brussels elites, while presenting these efforts as the work of ostensibly ‘independent’ academic voices. For example, in 2018, nearly 30 Jean Monnet chairs signed an open letter to EU leaders to express their ‘profound disappointment and outrage about the EU’s failure to respond more robustly to recent developments in Hungary’ – namely the Orbán government’s decision to force the Central European University (CEU), founded by George Soros, to shift most of its activities abroad.⁴⁵

Chairholders are thus transformed into both educators and informal ambassadors of the EU and its agenda, responsible for shaping how students – and by extension, the wider public – understand the European project. Moreover, in non-EU countries – from India to Brazil, Turkey to China – the programme is increasingly used as a tool of public diplomacy, exporting EU narratives abroad under the banner of academic cooperation. While framed as academic in nature, the chairs often function as part of a broader communications strategy, embedding pro-EU perspectives in national and international academic discourse.

The Jean Monnet chair programme is emblematic of the European Union’s use of education as a strategic instrument. Far from being a neutral academic initiative, it serves as a key mechanism for advancing the EU’s political and normative agenda through the university system. While it undoubtedly supports academic work on European integration, it does so with a clear expectation: that recipients will not only study the EU, but also help to promote it. In this sense, the chair system contributes to the instrumentalisation of academia, transforming universities into platforms for EU soft power rather than spaces for independent thought, encouraging ideological conformity and discouraging critical perspectives on European integration.

This bias becomes apparent when looking at some real-world examples of Jean Monnet chairs, both the actual chairholders as well as chair projects.

Evidence of bias in (current and former) Jean Monnet chairholders

R. Daniel Kelemen, former Jean Monnet Chair in EU Politics at Rutgers University (United States)

Kelemen, who has since moved to Georgetown University, has written frequently about the need for the EU to respond more aggressively to the rise of ‘autocratic member state governments’ – in other words, eurosceptic governments in countries like Hungary and (formerly) Poland⁴⁶ – while praising ‘the European Union’s status as a regulatory superpower’.⁴⁷ On X, he frequently posts against the Orbán government.⁴⁸

Laurent Pech, former Jean Monnet Chair of EU Public Law at Middlesex University (United Kingdom)

Before leaving X for Bluesky in 2024, Pech, who now teaches at UCD Sutherland School of Law, would frequently write and post about the ‘rise of democratic illiberalism across Europe and the West’⁴⁹ – that is, growing ‘populist’ and eurosceptic sentiment in countries like Romania, Poland and Hungary.⁵⁰

Joseph H. H. Weiler, Jean Monnet Chair at New York University School of Law (United States)

In a 2014 essay, Weiler, then president of the European University Institute in Florence, openly described the goals of his position in ideological terms: ‘Part of our mission as [a] Jean Monnet professor is to disseminate the values of European integration. The EU Commission think of us openly as intellectual ambassadors of the Union and its values’. He also acknowledged 🗣

that defending the EU sometimes conflicts with scholarly impartiality: ‘Most of us become Jean Monnet professors because, in complicated ways, we believe in European integration’, he wrote. ‘It is not only a professional commitment to many of us, but also a kind of credo; for example, when the European Union is criticised, our instinct is to defend it.’⁵¹

Michael Dougan, Jean Monnet Chair in EU Law at the University of Liverpool (United Kingdom)

Dougan gained notoriety during the Brexit debate for his strongly pro-EU commentary. In a widely shared lecture video, he harshly criticised Leave campaign arguments. He described them as ‘degenerat[ing] into dishonesty on an industrial scale’.⁵² Moreover, Dougan leveraged his expertise in EU law to provide evidence in UK parliamentary hearings, further aligning his public persona with pro-EU advocacy.

Evidence of bias in Jean Monnet chair projects⁵³

Chair in Democratic and Effective Governance led by Eva Heidbreder at Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg (Germany)⁵⁴

The chair rather ominously aims to address ‘how key EU policies can be delivered against the background of rising contestation, dissent and active anti-EU positioning ... [by] shifting emphasis from participatory governance to policy delivery in the digital and green transformation’.

The description reflects a clear anti-democratic bias by framing public dissent and political contestation as obstacles to be overcome, rather than legitimate components of democratic debate. The shift from ‘participatory governance’ to a focus on ‘policy delivery’ suggests a technocratic approach that sidelines citizen involvement in favour of top-down implementation – especially troubling given the sweeping scope of the digital and green transformations.

Chair in ‘Judges vs Illiberalism: Legal Mobilization for the Rule of Law’, led by Pola Cebulak, assistant professor at the Transnational Legal Studies Department at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (Netherlands)⁵⁵

The chair ‘fosters teaching and research on the potential of using law as a tool to put a break [sic] on illiberal tendencies in Europe’ – a clear reference to the EU’s growing recourse to rule-of-law arguments in recent years to counter eurosceptic governments in Poland and Hungary. It argues that ‘courts can be an important arena for such challenges’ and focuses on ‘how judges can become institutional actors that help transform the society’. Cebulak frequently posts or organises debates about the threat of ‘right-wing populists’⁵⁶ and ‘Russian interference’⁵⁷ to democracy.

Chair in ‘Bridging Pathways of EU Accession – Perspectives from Romania, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova’, led by Iordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, professor at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies (Romania)⁵⁸

The chair aims to ‘contribute to strengthening the role of the EU in the world’: ‘For the students, the chair will bring an important contribution to their formation as future experts and will bring the EU closer to them. They will not only understand the process of accession but they will be trained to become multipliers of that knowledge.’

Chair in ‘Crises and Solutions in the European Union’, led by Krisztina Arató, professor at Eötvös Loránd University (Hungary)⁵⁹

The chair ‘aims to pass on science-based information on the EU and apply up-to-date teaching methods to address ... the presence of extreme eurosceptic framing of EU activities by the majority of media outlets’.

Chair in ‘Contesting the Past of the EU: The Uses of History in (De-)Legitimizing Narratives’, led by Gabriele D’Ottavio, associate professor of Modern History at the Department of Sociology and Social Research of the University of Trento (Italy)⁶⁰

The chair ‘engages with the pressing need to build a European historical consciousness’ as a response to the fact that ‘history is once more being successfully exploited by populist movements to exalt one’s own nation and feelings of cultural superiority and to boost euroscepticism’.

Chair in ‘EU Fundamental Values in the Online Digital Environment’, led by Raffaele Torino, professor of Comparative Law at Università Roma Tre (Italy)⁶¹

The chair argues that ‘the fundamental values of the European Union ... are an essential element of the European integration process and an indispensable component of its fair implementation, to be protected from new challenges and implemented in all areas (public, private) and activities (work, social life)’. In this context, it proposes to ‘disseminate knowledge about the new online challenges (and possible protections) to fundamental EU values at every political and social level’, arguing: ‘It is necessary to thoroughly study how the multilevel European legal system and that of the member states recognise, implement and enforce these EU core values, considering the specificities of the online digital context.’

It’s hard not to see this chair as providing an academic justification to the EU’s increasingly pervasive online censorship framework, exemplified by the bloc’s adoption, in 2022, of the Digital Services Act (DSA) – the most sweeping internet regulation ever implemented in Europe, obliging platforms to rapidly remove content deemed illegal by EU authorities 🍷

or face fines of up to six per cent of their global annual revenue. Marketed as a way to ‘make the internet safer’,⁶² its aim is quite clearly that of secretly controlling the online narrative, by compelling platforms to police online speech according to broad, politically charged definitions of ‘harm’ and ‘disinformation’.

Chair in ‘European Union for Peace, Prosperity and Security’, led by Guranda Chelidze, professor at the Caucasus University (Georgia)⁶³

The chair ‘emphasises the importance of the EU’s role worldwide’ by ‘creating new knowledge about the EU against background of current changes in world and Europe, to strengthen understanding of role of the EU for Georgia’. This is a clear example of how the EU uses its chairs in non-EU countries such as Georgia to promote its geopolitical interests – in this case, EU enlargement.

These examples demonstrate that the work of Jean Monnet chairs goes well beyond neutral academic analysis. Instead, their activities actively reinforce EU integration narratives in public and institutional fora. Admittedly, some chairs do also, on occasion, criticise the EU. Alberto Alemanno, Chair in EU Law and Risk Regulation at HEC Paris, is one example of a Jean Monnet professor who has often criticised the EU’s democratic deficit.⁶⁴ But the emphasis of such criticisms is always on ‘improving’ the EU, generally through greater integration, rather than questioning its foundational structure.

5 The Jean Monnet propaganda toolbox

Modules, policy debates and training activities

Jean Monnet chairs are by no means the only tools through which the EU embeds its narratives and agendas into academic curricula. As noted above, it also does so through other kinds of actions, including teaching modules (shorter EU-related courses), policy debates and training activities. An analysis of such projects reveals an ideological bias as pervasive as that found in the chairs programme. In this section, several illustrative examples will be provided.

Module: ‘EU against Disinformation through Investment in Information and Communication’⁶⁵

Institute: Università degli Studi di Teramo (Italy)

This module ‘aims at establishing in-depth knowledge and relevant skills on the connection between the EU action against disinformation and sustainable investments’ as a response to ‘military propaganda, misinformation in relation to political elections, infodemia and climate change denial’. The module’s description reads less like a coherent academic proposal and more like a string of fashionable Brussels policy buzzwords stitched together to tick funding boxes. The supposed connection between EU action against disinformation and sustainable investments is never explained, making the module’s intellectual foundation appear tenuous at best. Instead, disparate issues – military propaganda, election misinformation, ‘infodemia’ and climate change denial – are lumped together under a vaguely defined ☹

umbrella, as if their mere inclusion would demonstrate relevance to EU priorities. This is a classic example of grant-speak: aligning with multiple high-profile EU agendas (digital policy, climate action, democracy defence) without providing a clear causal or conceptual link between them. The result is less an academic inquiry than a strategic funding pitch, reflecting how universities often tailor project descriptions to Brussels's current lexicon in order to secure Jean Monnet or related EU funding.

Module: 'Rule of Law as a core standard to access the EU – the role of the media in the EU enlargement process'⁶⁶

Institute: Sapienza Università di Roma (Italy)

This module proposes to 'investigate the threats posed by the spreading of disinformation, fake news and illiberal thoughts (particularly, with the use of digital technologies and of social media) around and inside the EU, as a tool interfering with the Rule of Law and undermining the integration process in candidate countries'. Furthermore, it aims to 'involve not only the academia, but also NGOs, journalists, civil servants, practitioners and civil society at large in raising awareness and sound information of EU values in the enlargement process'.

This module's bias is built into its framing, which treats 'illiberal thoughts' as inherently illegitimate and links them directly to threats against the EU's integration agenda. By positioning disinformation and dissent in the same category, it pre-defines the EU's political objectives as the standard of legitimacy. The outreach plan illustrates how academia and civil society often operate symbiotically in such projects, with universities partnering with NGOs, journalists and officials to circulate and legitimise the same pro-integration narratives under the banner of 'raising awareness' of EU values.

Module: ‘Democracy For You in the EU’⁶⁷

Institute: Universidade de Coimbra (Portugal)

The objective of this module is ‘to study, debate and understand the threats to democracy in the EU, and to sustain proposals to face the problem and strengthen democracy, delivering innovative scientific knowledge to the academic community, to policymakers and civil society. It addresses low levels of knowledge about the EU political system and awareness of its importance in citizen’s life, promoting civic engagement and participation in political and democratic processes.’

This module’s bias is evident in its underlying assumption that ‘threats to democracy’ within the EU stem primarily from citizens’ insufficient understanding or appreciation of the Union, rather than from any structural flaws or democratic deficits within the EU itself. By framing the problem as one of public ignorance and by omitting any consideration of the EU as a potential source of democratic erosion, it implicitly equates strengthening democracy with strengthening support for the EU. The subtext is that rising euroscepticism is a symptom of misinformation or disengagement, to be remedied through greater promotion of the EU’s supposed benefits – thereby aligning academic inquiry with institutional self-justification.

Module: ‘Understanding European Identity Through Reflexion on European Citizenship’⁶⁸

Institute: Université Savoie-Mont-Blanc (France)

The premise of this module is that by ‘increasing awareness and knowledge in the EU citizenship and identity will allow to foster the democratic dimension of the EU as well as open-mindedness and excellence in higher education’. 🌀

This description appears like another example of grant-speak: ticking multiple ideological and thematic boxes (democracy promotion, European identity, educational quality) that are likely to resonate with Brussels funding bodies, often at the expense of basic logic: it's unclear, for example, why greater awareness of 'EU citizenship and identity' should foster 'excellence in higher education'.

Module: 'Revitalization of European Integration: Policies and Actorness under the Process of de-Europeanization'⁶⁹

Institute: Mardin Artuklu University (Turkey)

The purpose of this module is 'to strengthen European dimension of re-research and teaching in a way to understand and reverse de-Europeanisation dynamics in the EU and beyond'.

This description is a textbook example of normative framing rather than neutral academic inquiry. By stating that its aim is to 'reverse de-Europeanisation dynamics', the module assumes from the outset that de-Europeanisation is inherently negative and that re-Europeanisation is the desired and correct outcome. This is not the language of open-ended, critical scholarship; it is the language of policy advocacy embedded in academia.

Module: 'Transformative Power of Theatre in Fostering European Eco-values'⁷⁰

Institute: Firat University (Turkey)

This module 'aims to explore the relationship between culture and science that distinctively manifests itself within theatre and performance studies', by showing 'theatre's role in transforming humanity's attitude towards the environment as its textual and visual possibilities render it a crucial venue for the articulation of ecological issues'. ♡

This module is a clear illustration of how even the performing arts can be repurposed as a vehicle for political messaging – in this case, to promote the EU’s green agenda. By framing theatre explicitly as a tool for ‘transforming humanity’s attitude towards the environment’, the project moves beyond studying artistic expression to actively using cultural production as an instrument of behavioural and attitudinal change.

Learning EU project: ‘Una mirada a las estrellas’⁷¹

Institute: Consejería de Educación de la Junta de Castilla y León (Spain)

The project is aimed at ‘strengthening the European Identity of its students’, ‘to increase the number of curricular activities related to the European Identity’, and ‘develop a content curriculum linked to the fostering of the European Identity’.

It is part of the Jean Monnet Learning EU initiative, which is targeted at secondary institutions and aims to ‘contribute to strengthen European identity and active citizenship among students and teachers’.⁷²

Learning EU project: ‘Europa: Ayer, Hoy y Mañana’⁷³

Institute: Hermanas de Nuestra Señora de la Consolación (Spain)

The aim of the project is ‘to create citizenship and a feeling of European belonging throughout the educational community, raising awareness of the importance of being part of this Union’.

Learning EU project: ‘Vote for Europe’⁷⁴

Institute: Közgazdasági Politechnikum Alternatív Gimnázium (Hungary)

The project states: ‘The EU faces numerous challenges these days, including the rise of euroscepticism and of populist, extreme-right parties, threatening with exit from the community. Educating young people about Europe, its common values and active European citizenship at school might help solve these issues.’ 🗳️

Learning EU project: ‘Dare to Ask the Right Questions’ ⁷⁵
Institute: Colegiul Național Spiru Haret (Romania)
The project is aimed at countering ‘anti-EU propaganda’ by ‘addressing to our teachers and students as well in order to raise knowledge on EU values, to strengthen the sense of belonging to the European community and reveal all the advantages that come along [with it]’.
Learning EU project: ‘EU-PH.ORIA: European Union for Progress and Harmony, Organization for Responsibility, Innovation and Awareness’ ⁷⁶
Institute: Perifereiaki Dyethinsi Protovathmias Kai Defterovathmias Ekpaidefsis Kentrikis Makedonias (Greece)
The project aims to ‘reinforce the European dimension ... and strengthen European identity and active citizenship among students and teachers’.
Learning EU project: ‘Let’s be Europeans’ ⁷⁷
Institute: Lycée Général et Technologique Jean Moulin (France)
The project states: ‘We want to make the complex subject of European citizenship attractive and understandable, so that our students become its best ambassadors!’
Learning EU project: ‘We are European Citizens’ ⁷⁸
Institute: Liceul Teoretic Ionita Asan Caracal (Romania)
The project aims to challenge ‘euroscepticism, as well as in the influence of fake news’ and ‘instill the advantages and responsibilities of European citizenship in all the participants’.

Teacher training project: ‘Empowering European Union Citizenship: Sustainable Integration of EU Content Through Experiential, Action-Oriented and Multidisciplinary Teaching’⁷⁹

Institute: Ministry of General and Vocational Education, Science, Research and Culture of the State of Schleswig-Holstein (Germany)

The project ‘aims to systematically and sustainably integrate EU content into school curricula, utilising experiential and action-oriented pedagogical approaches’.

This project is part of the Jean Monnet teacher training initiative, aiming to ‘build knowledge about the EU among their teaching staff’ and ‘foster the confidence of teachers in integrating an EU angle in their daily work’.⁸⁰

Teacher training project: ‘Wider and Deeper EU’⁸¹

Institute: ADN Akademia Biznesu Sp Zoo (Poland)

The project ‘wants to equip Polish teachers and trainers to become ambassadors of EU values by acquiring innovative skills, competence and knowledge about the European Union, the process of European integration, the European institutions and their functioning in shaping the long-term European policies and strategies that affect (and improve!) the life of European citizens. WIDE has a strong connotation of enlargement, in the spirit of a Union that will become deeper by widening to new countries and by welcoming new Europeans in joining the dream of European integration.’

The pro-EU bias in this project is evident from the outset. Even its name, ‘Wider and Deeper EU’, echoes the long-standing Brussels slogan for expansion and deeper integration, signalling alignment with the EU’s own political vision. The description makes the normative intent explicit: the goal is to turn Polish teachers and trainers into ‘ambassadors of EU values’, equipping them not simply to teach about the EU, but to actively promote 🇪🇺

its integrationist agenda. By framing EU policies and strategies as inherently beneficial ('improve!' the life of citizens), the project eliminates any space for critical evaluation, embedding a one-sided, celebratory narrative of the Union into teacher training and, by extension, into classrooms across the country.

Teacher training project: 'Let's Make Available EU Topics For Everybody'⁸²

Institute: Konya Provincial Directorate of National Education (Turkey)

The aim of the project is 'to enhance understanding of the EU topics and create awareness of the topics that threaten the unity and EU values such as fake news, disinformation, misinformation, extremism, xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia by creating innovative and digital resources for educators and students'.

Networks and Policy Debates project: 'Post-truth Politics and the Future of Democracy in Europe'⁸³

Institute: Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)

This seminar – organised by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), a well-known Brussels-based think tank that has received €25million from the EU over the past 10 years⁸⁴ – aimed to analyse what impact 'post-truth politics had on the (de-)legitimation of European integration and on European politics and democracy more broadly'. The bias here lies in the framing of 'post-truth politics' as a factor in the '(de-)legitimation' of European integration, implicitly suggesting that challenges to the EU's legitimacy are rooted in misinformation rather than in substantive political or policy disagreements. The seminar's premise aligns with the institutional narrative that declining support for integration stems from distorted public discourse, thereby sidestepping any critical examination of the EU's own actions or democratic shortcomings.

These cases illustrate how the Jean Monnet Programme is routinely deployed to advance the cause of European integration under the veneer of neutral academic work. In some instances, however, the programme goes further, serving as a vehicle for specific strategic priorities of the Union. A notable example is the EU's growing support – under the banner of ‘combating disinformation’ – for initiatives that curtail dissenting views, narrow the spectrum of public debate and consolidate institutional control over the flow of information.

It's no surprise that academia has also been drawn into this effort, lending both ideological legitimacy and scholarly justification to ‘anti-disinformation’ and ‘anti-fake news’ policies that, in practice, are aimed at reinforcing institutional narratives. Indeed, since 2021, the Jean Monnet Programme has supported close to 60 ‘anti-disinformation’ projects.⁸⁵ These are just a few examples:

Centres of Excellence project: ‘European Security and Disinformation in Multicultural Societies’⁸⁶

Institute: George Emil Palade University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science and Technology of Târgu Mureş (Romania)

The project ‘addresses the need to combat disinformation in multicultural societies, where disinformation can be targeted towards the national integration policy and also EU institutions and policies’ and aims to ‘create a focal point of competence and knowledge on European Union security and to disseminate content by bringing EU facts and knowledge to the general public, authorities and academia’.

The bias is clear in the project's conflation of disinformation with criticism of national or EU policies, implying that such criticism is inherently false or harmful. By aiming to ‘bring EU facts and knowledge’ 🗨

to the public authorities and academia, the project positions the EU's own narrative as the authoritative truth, effectively framing its policies as beyond legitimate contestation.

Chair in 'Information and misinformation in European integration: a historical approach'⁸⁷

Institute: Université de Strasbourg (France)

The project aims to combat 'fake news, infoxes and disinformation' and their negative 'impact on the construction of Europe'.

Module: 'Debunking Political Uses of Denialisms and Conspiracy Theories in EU'⁸⁸

Institute: Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna (Italy)

The project states that 'in recent years the political uses of new denialisms and conspiracy theories have played a crucial role in the European Union', particularly insofar as it relates to climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore aims at 'increasing knowledge and critical skills to debunk political uses of climate change denial' and 'tackle disinformation linked to the spread of new conspiracy theories, including the field of digital transformation'.

The bias is evident in the project's selective focus on 'denialisms' and conspiracy theories in areas – climate change and Covid-19 – where the EU has well-defined policy positions, effectively treating opposition or scepticism toward those policies as misinformation to be 'debunked'. This frames academic inquiry as a tool for reinforcing official narratives rather than fostering open debate.

As noted above, the Jean Monnet Programme is not limited to EU countries. In non-EU countries – from India to Brazil, Turkey to China – the programme is increasingly used as a tool of public diplomacy, exporting the EU’s narratives and strategic priorities (including the bloc’s enlargement drive) abroad under the banner of academic cooperation, as the following examples make clear:

Module: ‘The Western Balkans at the crossroads: EU integration and external actors’ influence⁸⁹

Institute: University of Tirana (Albania)

This module ‘aims to analyse the influence of non-European external actors in the Western Balkans, as well as identify key potentially malign influences such as corruption of political decision-makers, economic and financial activities, and disinformation campaigns, all of which have fuelled the rise of nationalism, extremism and radicalism in the region, and to explain how they contribute to the region, including integration into the European Union’.

This module’s bias is evident in its framing of nationalism and extremism as equivalent pathologies and in its attribution of these phenomena primarily to ‘malign’ non-European influences. By externalising the causes of political discontent – rather than considering domestic grievances, governance failures or socio-economic conditions – it advances a narrative in which the EU is implicitly cast as the legitimate corrective force, with integration presented as the natural solution. This framing aligns seamlessly with EU geopolitical objectives.

Module: ‘The European Union’s external action in Africa: the practice of promoting European values and interests’⁹⁰

Institute: Universidad de Valencia (Spain)

The aim of this module is ‘to deepen the knowledge and dissemination of EU-Africa relations, given the progressive loss of influence of the EU in Africa, to the detriment of new players such as China and Russia’. It explicitly refers to the EU’s Strategic Agenda in relation to the ‘promotion of the EU’s interests and values in the world’ – a clear example of how the Jean Monnet Programme employs academia in the service of public diplomacy.

Module: ‘Defending constitutional democracy against online attacks’⁹¹

Institute: Universidad Católica de Pernambuco (Brazil)

This module ‘disseminates to the Brazilian university community European initiatives in defence of constitutional democracy, which address online threats, seeking to encourage reflection, based on these experiences, on the crisis of democracy and possible ways to overcome it and to make the Brazilian constitutional democratic regime more resilient’.

The module appears designed to export the EU’s restrictive approach to online speech to a non-EU context, in this case Brazil. By promoting ‘European initiatives’ that address so-called online threats under the banner of defending democracy, it implicitly endorses the EU’s regulatory model, which often conflates harmful content with dissenting or controversial viewpoints. Framing these measures as tools to ‘overcome’ a democratic crisis positions the EU’s approach as both correct and transferable, effectively using academic channels to legitimise and spread a governance model that narrows the boundaries of permissible online expression.

Module: ‘Towards European Union Legal Framework: Health Acquis’⁹²

Institute: Kolegji AAB (Kosovo)

The module focuses ‘on the European Union (EU) health acquis, emphasising the importance and necessity for Kosovo’s healthcare sector to align with EU health acquis’.

This is yet another clear example of how the Jean Monnet Programme is used to advance EU enlargement by pre-aligning the regulatory systems of prospective member states. In doing so, it turns academic instruction into a mechanism for regulatory convergence, smoothing the path for accession and embedding EU norms well before any formal membership negotiations are concluded.

As one might expect, the programme’s foreign operations tend to focus on countries that are pivotal to the EU’s geopolitical strategy. It is therefore hardly surprising that, in recent years, hundreds of Jean Monnet projects have been implemented in Ukraine, many explicitly aimed at furthering Ukraine’s integration into the EU and the Euro-Atlantic bloc more generally. The number of Jean Monnet projects in Ukraine has increased since 2023, when the European Council decided to open accession negotiations.⁹³ In the 2014–2023 period, the Commission funded 342 Jean Monnet projects in Ukraine: 279 modules, 29 chairs, nine centres of excellence, 10 projects and seven networks. These have involved 130 organisations from all over Ukraine, including 118 higher-education institutions, plus research institutions, professional networks and NGOs. In 2024 alone, 35 Jean Monnet projects were funded. As the Commission stated, these were explicitly aimed at promoting ‘the implementation of the European integration home task of Ukraine’.⁹⁴

Module: ‘Integrating the future-proof EU cybersecurity ecosystem in Ukraine’⁹⁵

Institute: Kharkiv National University of Radio Electronics (Ukraine)

The module aims to contribute to the creation of ‘a future-proof EU cybersecurity ecosystem’ – and to Ukraine’s integration into such a system – as a response to foreign state-sponsored cybercrimes and disinformation. The module is a clear example of how the Jean Monnet Programme can be used to enlist academia in advancing the EU’s geopolitical and security agenda, thereby compromising its independence. By framing its purpose as the creation of a ‘future-proof EU cybersecurity ecosystem’ and explicitly linking this to Ukraine’s integration, the project positions academic activity in direct support of EU strategic objectives in a highly politicised and security-sensitive domain. In doing so, the module transforms the university’s role – from fostering critical, dispassionate inquiry into that of a policy-implementing partner, effectively erasing the line between scholarship and institutional propaganda.

Module: ‘The EU cyber standardization strategy for connectivity and digital infrastructure: Experience for Ukraine’⁹⁶

Institute: Kharkiv National University of Economics (Ukraine)

The module aims ‘to empower the emerging generation of students and stakeholders by bolstering their hands-on expertise in cybersecurity and artificial intelligence (AI) standards, with a particular emphasis on advancing euro integration’. 🌀

Once again, the module's normative agenda is explicit: the stated aim is not simply to build skills in cybersecurity and AI standards, but to do so 'with a particular emphasis on advancing euro integration'. This makes EU integration not an incidental context, but a core objective of the teaching and training provided. The development of technical expertise is thus framed as a means to a political end: furthering Ukraine's alignment with EU norms and structures.

Module: 'EU Counteraction to Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference'⁹⁷

Institute: Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University (Ukraine)

The module 'is aimed to deliver advanced and critical knowledge on how the EU counteracts foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) operations' and 'contribute to maturing conscious, knowledgeable citizens of Ukraine, who share common European values and democratic principles, are keen supporters of the euro-integration process and understand that the EU counteracts the FIMI operations for the benefit of whole Europe'.

Once again, the bias here is explicit: the module's stated goal is to produce citizens who are 'keen supporters of the euro-integration process' and who uncritically accept the EU's framing of its actions as serving 'the benefit of whole Europe'. Rather than fostering open-ended critical inquiry, the course predefines both the values students should hold and the political positions they should support, effectively using academic instruction to reinforce a predetermined pro-EU narrative.

Module: ‘Developing and implementing a new methodology of teaching and studying EU Law as part of Ukrainian National Legal Order’⁹⁸

Institute: Ukrainian Catholic University (Ukraine)

The module ‘aims to provide students with a holistic perspective on the legal landscape within the EU and its application in the Ukrainian national legal system’.

This is a clear example of how Jean Monnet modules are used to prepare the ground for EU enlargement by embedding EU law into a candidate country’s legal framework. By familiarising students with both the EU’s legal system and its direct application within Ukraine’s national context, the module facilitates legal and institutional alignment – an essential step in the accession process – while normalising EU integration as the natural trajectory for the country.

Module: ‘Building European Identity Resilience for Ukrainian Society’⁹⁹

Institute: Zaporizhzhia National University (Ukraine)

The module is premised on the assumption that ‘building a multicultural and multinational society based on the concept of a common European identity is an extremely useful practice that can be transferred to Ukraine’, and to this end aims to contribute to ‘the crucial process of integrating Ukrainian society into European axiological framework’.

Once again, the bias here is overt: the module assumes, without question, that constructing a ‘common European identity’ is inherently positive and should be replicated in Ukraine. By framing integration into the ‘European axiological framework’ as a ‘crucial process’, it treats EU value-alignment as both necessary and desirable, closing off space for critical debate about the cultural, political or societal implications of such an identity project.

Module: ‘Participatory democracy and multilevel governance in the EU’¹⁰⁰

Institute: Kharkiv National University of Economics (Ukraine)

The module ‘is aimed at popularising the European constitutional values and spreading of knowledge on the peculiarities of European democratic governance’, in order to contribute to ‘the strategic goal of Ukraine – the acquisition of EU membership’.

This module is yet another unambiguous example of how Jean Monnet-funded activities are used to explicitly promote the political goal of EU accession. By framing its teaching around ‘popularising European constitutional values’ and ‘spreading knowledge’ of EU governance, the module directly links its academic content to advancing Ukraine’s ‘strategic goal’ of EU membership. This makes integration not a subject of scholarly inquiry, but the intended outcome of the educational process – turning the classroom into a tool for promoting a specific, institutionally endorsed political objective.

6 The hubs of EU academic propaganda

Centres of excellence and designated institutions

The EU's strategy of embedding its political and ideological agenda within academia reaches its most entrenched form in the Jean Monnet centres of excellence and, even more so, in the Jean Monnet designated institutions. Unlike ordinary Jean Monnet chairs or modules, these entities are explicitly tasked with integrating pro-EU narratives across all EU-related areas of teaching, while maintaining a close, structural relationship with Brussels. They can be considered the central hubs of the EU's academic propaganda branch, functioning as institutional partners in EU-funded projects that extend far beyond the university sector, often involving the media, civil-society organisations and public administrations.

Jean Monnet centres of excellence

There are currently 160 Jean Monnet centres of excellence, each eligible for grants of up to €100,000. Officially described as 'focal points of competence and knowledge on European Union subjects',¹⁰¹ they are tasked with pooling expertise across disciplines, fostering cross-border cooperation and – critically – ensuring outreach beyond academia.

Their role is not limited to students: centres of excellence are expected to 'become the academic reference for EU subjects'¹⁰² and to engage directly with policymakers, civil servants, organised civil society and the general public through lectures, workshops and public events at both the national

and European levels. This outreach function means that they act not only as teaching centres but also as nodes of public communication, channelling EU-aligned narratives into the broader infosphere.

Well-known examples include:

- Universität Osnabrück (Germany) – Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence in European Studies
- King’s College London (UK) – Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence on Next Generation EU-UK Relations
- University of Essex (UK)
- Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands) – Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence in Digital Governance (2019–2023)
- European Union Center at the University of Illinois (US)

Jean Monnet designated institutions

At the top of this hierarchy sit the seven Jean Monnet designated institutions, explicitly named in the Erasmus+ regulation as entities ‘pursuing an aim of European interest and European integration’.¹⁰³ They are:

- European University Institute (EUI), Florence (Italy) – including its School of Transnational Governance
- College of Europe, Bruges (Belgium) and Natolin (Poland) campuses
- European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), Maastricht (Netherlands)
- Academy of European Law (ERA), Trier (Germany)
- European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE), Odense (Denmark)
- International Centre for European Training (CIFE), Nice (France)

While precise budget allocations for each are not public, the amounts are substantial. The EUI alone costs the EU over €20million annually, with member states contributing an additional €30million.¹⁰⁴ These institutions are explicitly mandated to ensure the ‘continuous and frequent alignment of study and training programmes or capacity-building activities with the EU and European Commission’s policy agenda and priorities’, as well as to focus on ‘fostering European identity’ among students.¹⁰⁵ Their remit includes graduate education, training for legal and public sector professionals, policy-relevant research and public outreach. Governments and the European Commission directly influence their activities, both by commissioning specific training and by participating in governance and strategic decision-making.

The Jean Monnet designated institutions are not merely educational institutions; they are deeply embedded in the EU’s operational ecosystem, often partnering with EU bodies, media outlets and NGOs on high-profile initiatives. The EUI’s School of Transnational Governance is a prime example, training current and future political elites in ‘governance beyond the state’ and collaborating on projects like the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), a €30million European Commission initiative to combat ‘disinformation’, and Democratic Odyssey, aimed at promoting ‘citizen participation’ in EU governance, working alongside numerous pro-EU NGOs.

Such partnerships illustrate how Jean Monnet designated institutions serve as intellectual and operational extensions of EU institutions, legitimising and amplifying the Union’s priorities across multiple spheres – from academia and policymaking to media and civil society.

Taken together, the Jean Monnet centres of excellence and designated institutions represent the most institutionalised form of ideological alignment between academia and the EU. They not only shape curricula but also project

Brussels-approved narratives into public debate, policymaking circles and the media. In this sense, they are crucial nerve centres of a wider EU-NGO-media-academia complex, in which each sector reinforces the others, creating a mutually validating ecosystem that blurs the line between education and political advocacy. The result is a highly effective – and taxpayer-funded – apparatus for sustaining the EU’s political project under the guise of academic excellence and civic engagement.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this paper demonstrates that the Jean Monnet Programme, and in particular its centres of excellence and designated institutions, have evolved into powerful instruments for embedding the European Union's political priorities into academia. Through a combination of funding incentives, explicit ideological mandates and outreach activities that extend far beyond the classroom, these initiatives systematically align teaching, research and public engagement with the EU's integrationist agenda and its policy priorities – thereby transforming academic research into advocacy research. This doesn't just have a deeply corruptive effect on academia; it also represents a colossal waste of resources, channelling scarce public funds into what is essentially subsidised propaganda rather than genuine scholarship. From a scientific perspective, such politicisation undermines the very purpose of research. Instead of supporting inquiry that is open-ended, curiosity-driven and free from political interference, it rewards conformity, discourages intellectual risk-taking, and diverts talent and resources away from the pursuit of knowledge and understanding.

This politicisation of higher education represents a profound departure from the principles that have historically underpinned the university as an institution. In the Humboldtian model, as articulated by Wilhelm von Humboldt, universities should be autonomous centres of knowledge creation where teaching and research are inseparable, where academic freedom is paramount and where scholarship is guided not by political imperatives

but by the pursuit of truth. The unity of science and the cultivation of well-rounded, critically minded individuals lie at the heart of this vision.

Politically driven funding mechanisms such as the Jean Monnet Programme undermine these principles by promoting ‘research’ with predetermined political outcomes and by rewarding ideological conformity over open inquiry. In doing so, they distort the academic ecosystem, marginalise dissenting perspectives and transform universities from independent arenas of debate into conduits for institutional propaganda.

Reversing this trend is urgent. Safeguarding the integrity of academia requires restoring the autonomy of universities, insulating research agendas from political influence and reaffirming the Humboldtian commitment to critical inquiry. Only by reclaiming these principles can higher education fulfil its essential role: to produce knowledge that is independent, rigorous and genuinely in the service of society – not the political ambitions of any institution or government.

Policy recommendations

De-politicise research funding

- EU funding programmes such as the Jean Monnet Programme should end the practice of conditioning grants on alignment with political priorities.
- Academic research must be insulated from institutional propaganda aims, with funding calls written in politically neutral language that does not presuppose desired conclusions.

Respect academic freedom and authority

- Safeguard the Humboldtian principle of universities as autonomous centres of knowledge creation, free from state or supranational interference.
- Ensure that scholars are free to pursue inquiry without pressure to conform to official EU narratives or strategic priorities.

Allocate grants based on scientific and intellectual merit

- Research funding should be awarded solely on the basis of methodological rigour, originality and potential contribution to knowledge.
- Independent peer-review committees, composed of diverse and unaffiliated experts, should evaluate proposals. Political bodies should not dictate or influence outcomes.

Encourage diversity of views and critical inquiry

- Funding structures should explicitly reward pluralism of perspectives, including research that critically examines the EU, integration and related policies.
- Programmes should recognise that disagreement, dissent and competing interpretations are essential to the progress of knowledge.

Reject the use of academia as a tool of propaganda

- Universities should not be conscripted into public diplomacy campaigns or required to act as ‘ambassadors’ of political institutions.
- Outreach activities should focus on disseminating knowledge and fostering debate, not on promoting predetermined political narratives.

Promote transparency and accountability in EU-academic relations

- All funding arrangements between universities and EU institutions should be fully transparent, with clear disclosure of political or ideological conditions.
- Universities should be accountable to their academic communities – not to political bodies – for the direction of their teaching and research.

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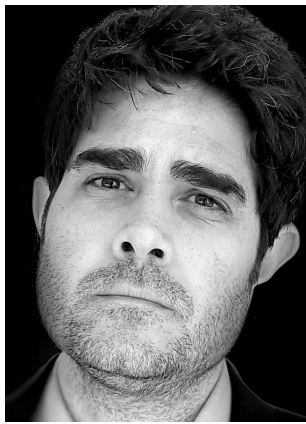
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About MCC Brussels

At a time of unprecedented political polarisation, MCC Brussels is committed to providing a home for genuine policy deliberation and an in-depth exploration of the issues of our time.

MCC Brussels is committed to asking the hard questions and working with people of goodwill from all persuasions to find solutions to our most pressing problems. An initiative of MCC (Mathias Corvinus Collegium), the leading Hungarian educational forum, MCC Brussels was founded in the autumn of 2022 to make a case for celebrating true diversity of thought, diversity of views, and the diversity of European cultures and their values.

This incisive report shines a light on the true nature of the Jean Monnet Programme – a €25million-a-year soft-power scheme that pays academics to promote EU ideology, align research with Brussels’s priorities, and marginalise dissent under the guise of ‘European studies’. This is not a neutral academic initiative, but a powerful instrument for embedding pro-EU propaganda.

It reveals how this programme has evolved to systematically push the EU’s political priorities and integrationist agenda into classrooms and society.

Discover how millions of euros are channelled annually to universities worldwide, transforming academic research into advocacy research designed to promote EU integration, foster ‘European identity’, and actively combat ‘euroscepticism’ and so-called ‘disinformation’. This is propaganda by proxy, operating as a crucial part of a vast EU-NGO-media-academia complex.

Far from supporting genuine scholarship, this system deliberately erodes academic freedom by incentivising conformity and discouraging critical inquiry. Uncover how public funds are used to promote a predetermined political narrative, fundamentally undermining the pursuit of knowledge for truth’s sake.