ASEA-UNINET National Coordinators' Meeting 2023

Meeting Minutes

2nd – 3rd October 2023
held at the University of Padua, Italy

PARTICIPANTS
15 Participants

EXECUTIVES
- Prof. Dato' Dr. **Narimah Samat**, ASEA-UNINET President (Malaysia)
- Univ.-Prof. Dr. **Wolfgang Obenaus**, ASEA-UNINET Vice President and Regional Coordinator for Europe (Austria)
- Assoc.-Prof. Dr. **Mohamad Farizal bin Rajemi**, ASEA-UNINET Vice President and Regional Coordinator for South-East Asia (Malaysia)
- Univ.-Prof. **A Min Tjoa**, Coordinator for Technology, Innovation and Sustainability Projects for Europe (Austria)
- Assoc.-Prof. Dr. **Ngo Chi Trung**, Coordinator for Technology, Innovation and Sustainability Projects for South-East Asia (Vietnam)

NATIONAL COORDINATORS (in alphabetical order of country)
- Univ.-Prof. Dr. **Gabriele Kotsis** (Austria)
- Prof. **Roberto Ranzi**, PhD (Italy)
- Mr. **Phouvong Phimmakong** (Laos)
- Dr. **Mullika Sungsanit** (Thailand)
- Assoc.-Prof. Dr. **Ngo Chi Trung** (Vietnam)

GUESTS (in alphabetical order of country)
- Prof. Dr. **Cristina Basso** (University of Padua, Italy)
- Ms. **Alessandra Gallerano** (University of Padua, Italy)
- Ms. **Dora Maria Cornelia Longoni** (University of Padua, Italy)
- Mr. **Salvatore Messina** (University of Padua, Italy)

ASEA-UNINET STAFF (Austria)
- **Barbara Karahan**, BA BA MA (ASEA-UNINET Network Office)
- **Christoph Wayu Niederhauser**, MSc (ASEA-UNINET Network Office)

1.   Welcome and Opening

Samat opens the National Coordinators' Meeting (NC Meeting), welcomes the participants, and presents the agenda, as listed above, as topics proposed by the ASEA-UNINET Executives and National Coordinators (NCs).

An introduction of all NCs and Executives follows. **Phimmakong** makes an introduction as the NC of Laos and is pleased to meet the network in person for the first time.

2.   NC Reports

Austria NC Report

Laos NC Report

> **Phimmakong** presents the Laos NC Report verbally: Laos has been following ASEA activities. Despite having made experiences with Erasmus+, cooperations with other members is still in development. They were not successful with Erasmus Mundus, so they are trying to learn how to improve.
>
> Laos only has 5 public universities. They are still young and not as competitive compared to other ASEAN countries like Thailand, and they are currently at a capacity building stage. **Phimmakong** is looking forward to learn from other NCs and foster cooperations.

Italy NC Report

Malaysia NC Report

Thailand NC Report

Vietnam NC Report

3.   Topics of the ASEA-UNINET Executives & National Coordinators

a. Ernst Mach Grant – ASEA-UNINET, Call 2024/25

Niederhauser announces that preparations for the upcoming call for the Ernst Mach Grant – ASEA-UNINET are underway, and that the opening of the call is imminent following a pending ratification of the grant announcement by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research (BMBWF). The grant is presented as summarised in the following overview document.

Noteworthy changes include a standardised monthly scholarship rate for all grant types (i.e., EUR 1,250.--/month), as well as an increased mobility subsidy for Full PhD Grant holders (i.e., EUR 300.--/month). **Niederhauser** clarifies that all Full PhD Grant holders receive the mobility subsidy automatically alongside the monthly grant rate without having to request it individually, and that this means Full PhD Grant holders have an effective scholarship rate of EUR 1,550.--/month.

Once the call is officially opened, all University Coordinators (UCs) and National Coordinators, as well as relevant Embassies will be contacted by **Niederhauser**. NCs are therefore not required to inform their country's UCs about the call separately; however, they are invited to do so. **Niederhauser** will send a separate message to NCs with recommendations for further promotion of the call information.

Kotsis suggests that NCs can collect questions their UCs receive regarding the grant (both questions from their institutions and from potential applicants) and to share these with **Niederhauser** So that FAqs can be continuously improved and updated.

b. Applicant   Guidance: Info-Sessions/Webinars,   Communication Culture

Based on experiences from the selection procedure in recent years, **Obenaus** and **Niederhauser** wish to discuss how the network might better offer guidance to prospective applicants, as well as how designated scholars may be supported prior to their arrival in Austria.

INFO-SESSIONS/WEBINARS: The NCs are thanked for info-sessions and workshops held (e.g., by Thailand and Malaysia), which help raise awareness of the grant and, beyond this, provide support to prospective applicants in submitting polished research proposals. According to NCs, feedback by participants for these info-sessions has been positive. **Niederhauser** emphasises the positive effects of these types of events on the applications received and recommends all NCs to offer these; support may be provided by the ASEA-UNINET Network Office and also Executives as guest speakers if requested in advance. **Obenaus** reminds NCs to organise such info-sessions well in advance, as applicants often require several weeks not only to complete their research proposal but, crucially, to ask for their Letter of Invitation as well as their two Letters of Reference. Regrettably, there were quite a few applications during the last call that were ineligible due to applicants not having been able to secure a Letter of Invitation from a prospective supervisor by the call deadline.

GRANT DECLINATIONS: **Niederhauser** elaborates on individual cases where a scholarship was awarded and later declined. While such cases are generally rare, there has been one such case per year in the most recent calls. In one case, the applicant declined after having been awarded the scholarship due to wanting to arrive in Austria with family members. In another case, the applicant did not formally decline the scholarship and did not show up. Furthermore, **Kotsis** recalls one applicant from a previous call who approached three professors in the same department with a near identical proposal; the

student did not inform **Kotsis** of these parallel requests for a Letter of Invitation, nor did the student inform the other professors once one Letter of Invitation was issued.

COMMUNICATION CULTURE: These cases do not constitute good etiquette and may damage the reputation of the network and its member institutions. Likewise, this may also disincentivise supervisors from issuing a Letter of Invitation in the future. Therefore, if a scholarship is declined, it is expected from the applicant to inform not only the OeAD as the body awarding the scholarship but also the supervisor who issued the Letter of Invitation and, if possible, also the affiliated NC – this should be done as soon as possible. Furthermore, it would be expected to thank the supervisor for their time. Student should inform any other professors they may have contacted and should ensure they tailor their research proposal to the research focus of a given professor. NCs are encouraged to touch upon communication culture when offering info-sessions or workshops to prospective applicants, in particular on how to communicate with prospective supervisors from the early stages of their application to hypothetical situations such as when declining a scholarship.

STATE OF APPLICATIONS: Finally, **Obenaus** reflects on the recent applications, which, although qualitative, have quantitively been rather low considering the number of member institutions. A higher number of qualitative applications would be desirable for future calls, and **Obenaus** asks the participants what the individual institutions could do more to achieve this outcome? **Farizal** stresses that NCs have all the important information on the call and should redouble their efforts to disseminate call information. **Samat** agrees and emphasises that workshops on how to complete a qualitative application and addressing communication expectations will offer good guidance for prospective applicants. On the topic of whether NCs should provide support at the request of an applicant (e.g., reviewing a project proposal), **Kotsis** replies that out of fairness NCs should never look at specific proposals to remain impartial and uphold the integrity of the selection procedure. **Ranzi** recommends considering the point of view of students: What is their feedback on the selection (e.g., interview length)? Would shortening the interview help attract more students? Feedback mechanisms from interviewed students should be considered to further optimise the selection procedure.

c. New Member Joining Requests

BRUNEI: **Farizal** suggests **Universiti Brunei Darulssalam** (UBD) as a potential new member institution and will approach the university given approval from the other NCs. The UBD office has expressed verbal interest to join the network; if they can submit the required documents by then, they may be invited to the upcoming Plenary either as an institution seeking membership or otherwise as a guest.

The participants approve of this proposal and invite UBD to hold a new member presentation at the upcoming Plenary Meeting.

THAILAND: Three institutions have applied for candidate membership status through **Sungsanit**. In addition to these, the University of Phayao (UP) – formally part of the member institution Naresuan University (NU) – has also expressed interest to join but has yet to submit a Letter of Intent.

Sungsanit reports that [Walailak University (WU)](#) is coming strong in terms of various ranking recently. In particular, the institution has a research focus and features top-cited scientists with research achievements in Scopus Q1 and Q2. The institution is very keen on increasing international research networks (e.g., lecturer internationalisation, education internationalisation). Incidentally, the founder of WU is also the founder of the Suranaree University of Technology (SUT). Other Thai UCs are in favour of WU joining the network. **Kotsis** states that WU meets the formal requirements; however, either existing and/or intended cooperations within the network should be presented in the Plenary Meeting.

The participants approve of this proposal and invite WU to hold a new member presentation at the upcoming Plenary Meeting.

Vidyasirimedhi Institute of Science and Technology (VISTEC) has placed the first joining request by a Private University. VISTEC has invested significantly in its infrastructure, and the goal of the university is to be an innovation hub with a focus on research to connect and be utilised in the industry. Its research focus lies in in four main areas: Energy & Environment, Bio Technologies, Advanced Materials, and Digital. It is the leading institution in Chemistry in Thailand and Number 1 in terms of publication and research. Similar to WU, **Kotsis** states that VISTEC meets the formal requirements; however, either existing and/or intended cooperations within the network should be presented in the Plenary Meeting. The policy for private membership as outlined during the last Plenary Meeting (see Plenary Meeting 2022 Minutes, Day 3, Point 2) is summarised in brief.

The participants approve of this proposal and invite VISTEC to hold a new member presentation at the upcoming Plenary Meeting.

The **Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music** (PGVIM) is named after Princess Galyani who is a significant patron of music in Thailand. The institute has existing cooperations, including with the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (mdw). Beyond Bachelor and Master programmes, it does not offer PhD programmes. **Kotsis** points out that offering Master and PhD programmes is a minimum requirement to join the network, while **Tjoa** states that the three Austrian music institutions did not originally offer PhD programmes themselves. **Kotsis** suggests to consult the three Austrian music universities for their recommendation given that PGVIM does not offer PhD programmes.

The participants approve of this proposal and agree to postpone the decision regarding the PGVIM membership request until further input is provided by the Austrian music universities.

VIETNAM: **Trung** shares that the **Posts and Telecommunications Institute of Technology (PTIT)** recently celebrated its 70th year anniversary. It has ca. 20.000 students across two campus locations, one in Hanoi and another in Hồ Chí Minh. The institution has existing partnerships with ASEA-UNINET member institutions (e.g., with TU Wien) and could contribute well to further network cooperations. **Kotsis** states that PTIT meets the formal requirements; however, further information on its publication standing should be presented in the Plenary Meeting.

The participants approve of this proposal and invite PTIT to hold a new member presentation at the upcoming Plenary Meeting.

Regarding new member requests, **Obenaus** voices concern about new universities petitioning to join due to not knowing very much about them beforehand. **Kotsis** suggests that, given a recommendation of the President who determines whether a member is invited to a Plenary, **one month after the NC Meeting may be handled as time to further consider the joining request (including possible objections)**. To this end, Niederhauser suggests sharing the Letter of Intention with NCs and Executives along with the finalised agenda for future NC Meetings. The participants agree, and **Kotsis** adds that it would be helpful for the affiliated NC to share not only the Letter of Intent but also a paragraph outlining the extent to which the NC recommends the addition of the institution requesting membership.

These recommendations as outlined above are agreed upon by the participants.

d. Preparation for ASEA-UNINET Plenary Meeting in USM, Penang, Malaysia: 26.02. - 01.03.2024

Samat presents a preliminary schedule of the Plenary Meeting. An invitation has been sent to the Vice Chancellor of USM, and opening remarks from the Austrian Ambassador are under consideration. Two keynotes are proposed for Day 1, namely by the EU Ambassador to Malaysia as well the Adviser to the Minister of the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia; verbal agreement has been given by the latter. Thematic discussions via breakout rooms are planned for the afternoon. Day 2 includes country reports and a campus tour. Day 3 is scheduled to feature the Bernd Rhode Award Ceremony and Elections. **Kotsis** recommends not to include the dinner on Friday, as participants may wish to return home by then. **Samat** proposes the Plenary Meeting to centre around the theme of "Higher Education in the Post-pandemic Era".

Participants suggest the topic of "Strategic Membership" as one of the workshop items, in particular European membership (see "Further Topics", 4., b.).

e. Suggested Preparation for 2024 Elections

Kotsis explains that in accordance with ASEA-UNINET election rules, new elections take place with every Plenary Meeting (i.e., after 18 months). It is common standard within the network to rotate the Presidency between an ASEAN and a European member institution. A proposal for a candidate nomination is discussed.

With the support of the NCs and Executives, Ranzi is proposed as a nominee for the position of President.

Furthermore, with regard to the other Executive roles (i.e., Vice President and Regional Coordinator as well as Coordinator for Technology, Innovation and Sustainability Projects for Europe for the ASEAN and European side respectively) which are not required to change, **the proposal is made to nominate the current holders to ensure continuity and thus renew their positions. This proposal is agreed upon by the participants.**

Finally, the addition of further roles is discussed. Given the current size of the network, the current organisation of positions is regarded as slim. A need is identified to engage alumni further, and thus a proposal is made to install at least one more position that coordinates alumni affairs with former Thai NC, **Asst. Prof. Dr. Thakerng Wongsirichot**, suggested for this role who has indicated willingness to support in this capacity. The discussion on this topic is to be continued in item 4.c.

4.   Further Agenda Topics and Meeting Closure

a. Institution Presentation: University of Padua (UNIPD)

An institution presentation is held by **Gallerano** for UNIPD. The institution recently celebrated its 800th anniversary in 2022. A presentation of UNIPD is given, including its standing as a very research-intensive and also multidisciplinary institution with over 70.000 students of which 6.500 are international students. It offers 54 degree-awarding programmes in English with some Bachelor programmes (7) and the majority being Master programmes (46). Internationalisation, abroad and at home, is a strategic priority for UNIPD (e.g., through partnership opportunities, MoU agreements, joint programmes, student and staff mobilities, EU-funded projects, intensive programmes, and virtual exchanges). The importance of international students is highlighted when considering national trends of de-growth.

b. State of European Member Institutions

Against the backdrop of active European members that have been dropping out of the network as well as a few inactive members, **Kotsis** discusses with the other participants how the network may be better imbedded in Europe. The current state is posited as a chance for strategic expansion: What countries would be of interest to network members? **Obenaus** suggests the network take a proactive approach and look at which qualitative universities the networks would like to include within Europe. To this end, **Samat** asks if it would be helpful if ASEAN members looked at existing partnerships within Erasmus for example? **Kotsis** agrees but adds that it is also about which connections members and member countries would like to establish within the network.

Participants agree that ASEAN members should let European members know so that the latter can approach their contacts within European institutions.

c. Proposal for New Positions within the Network

Kotsis reflects that outside of the positions of NC and UC, there have been individuals who have been imperative to the growth and stability of the network. However, as these individuals step down over time and to ensure continuity within the network, participants discuss if there may be an official mandate from the network for such individuals. For example, either as a proposal from the NC Meeting or from such individuals themselves, there could be a "Liaison Role". These roles are invested in the strategic development of the network, should be limited in quantity, do not have to be distributed amongst each member country, and would be confirmed at the Plenary Meeting. "Strategic Development Team" is suggested as a preliminary position title.

The participants agree on the proposal made.

d. ASEA-UNINET Alumni Engagement

Ranzi proposes that alumni should be represented on the ASEA-UNINET homepage to promote their research and also their status as network alumni. **Kotsis** adds that to be featured should not just be based on completion of a project or graduation from a programme, but should also take into account accomplishments such as a top-tier paper, award received, etc. Supervisors should inform the network of such success stories.

The definition of "ASEA-UNINET alumni" is agreed upon as no longer being part of a member institution. Furthermore, the Liaison Role within the Strategic Development Team should write a proposal for the network, how such a feature could look like. This proposal is to be discussed at the Plenary Meeting (e.g., as a topic for one of the Plenary Meeting working groups with request to **Wongsirichot** to lead the session).

e. Preliminary Agenda for the NC Meeting 2024

Samat proposes the following preliminary agenda for the next NC Meeting prior to the Plenary Meeting:
- Welcome
- Final Itinerary of Plenary Meeting 2024

- Member Countries Highlights (n.b. but not Country Reports, as these are presented in the Plenary Meeting)
- Points Discussed during this NC Meeting with Follow-Up
- Election Nominations Review
- Developments on Topic of Strategic Development of European Member Institutions

At the meeting closure, **Kotsis** asks the NCs and Executives, including those not present, to maintain work on the open topics discussed – in particular regarding the strategy for European Member Institutions, Alumni Engagement, and Nominations for the proposed New Positions within the Network. **Samat** thanks the participants for their engagement and closes the NC Meeting.

Meeting Minutes by ASEA-UNINET Network Office

NC Meeting Photos

A selection of individual photos, courtesy of Assoc.-Prof. Dr. **Mohamad Farizal bin Rajemi**, can be accessed using the following link.

These files have been compressed due to their size and are accessible up until 19.10.2023. If access is requested beyond the date listed, kindly get in touch with us at asea-uninet@oead.at .

APPENDIX:
NC Meeting Agenda
Overview of Ernst Mach Grant – ASEA-UNINET, Call 2024/25
Preliminary Schedule of the Plenary Meeting 2024
Austria NC Report
Italy NC Report
Malaysia NC Report
Thailand NC Report
Vietnam NC Report
Letter of Intent: Walailak University (WU)
Letter of Intent: Vidyasirimedhi Institute of Science and Technology (VISTEC)
Letter of Intent: Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music (PGVIM)
Letter of Intent: Posts and Telecommunications Institute of Technology (PTIT)
NC Meeting Photos