



## ASEA-UNINET National Coordinators' Meeting 2024

### Meeting Minutes

26<sup>th</sup> February 2024

held at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Malaysia

#### PARTICIPANTS

13 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)

#### NATIONAL COORDINATORS (in alphabetical order of country)

- Univ.-Prof. Dr. **Gabriele Kotsis** (Austria)
- Ir. **Muhammad Iqbal Djawad**, MSc, PhD (Indonesia)
- Prof. **Roberto Ranzi**, PhD (Italy)
- Dr. **Patricia Nora Riget** (Malaysia)
- Dr. **Mullika Sungsanit** (Thailand)

#### GUESTS (in alphabetical order of country)

- Mag. **Gerhard Volz** (OeAD, Austria)
- Ms. **Puan Nor Ezliza Binti Hasim** (Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia)

#### ASEA-UNINET STAFF (Austria)

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

## AGENDA

1. **Welcome and Opening**
2. **Final Itinerary of Plenary Meeting 2024**
3. **Member Countries Highlights**
4. **Topics of the ASEA-UNINET Executives & National Coordinators**
  - i. Points Discussed during previous NC Meeting with Follow-Up (**Samat**)
  - ii. Election Nominations Review (**Samat**)
  - iii. Call 24/25 Update: ASEA-UNINET Projects & Ernst Mach Grant – ASEA-UNINET (**Karahan, Niederhauser**)
  - iv. Update: Strategic Development of European Member Institutions (**Samat**)
  - v. Strategic Development of ASEAN Partner Countries (**Tjoa**)
  - vi. Nomination of University Coordinators (**Kotsis**)
5. **Further Topics and Meeting Closure**
  - i. New Member Joining Requests for consideration after the 2024 Plenary Meeting (**Ranzi**)

### 1. Welcome and Opening

**Samat** extends a warm welcome to all participants who arrived at USM and in Malaysia. **Samat** opens the National Coordinators' Meeting (NC Meeting) and presents the agenda, as listed above, as topics proposed by the ASEA-UNINET Executives and National Coordinators (NCs).

### 2. Final Itinerary of Plenary Meeting 2024

With the support of the participants, **Samat** reviews the final itinerary of the Plenary Meeting, confirming individual programme points, the arrangements made for hotel shuttle pick-up, event moderation, photography, institutional and keynote speaker inputs, planned cultural experiences, and budgetary items.

### 3. Member Countries Highlights

No contributions were shared from participants at this time. Individual country reports are planned to be presented as a programme point in the upcoming Plenary Meeting.

### 4. Topics of the ASEA-UNINET Executives & National Coordinators

- i. **Points Discussed during previous NC Meeting with Follow-Up (Samat)**
  - a. **New Member Request: Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music**

At the previous NC Meeting in Padova in October 2023, it was agreed upon by the participants to consult the three Austrian music universities for their recommendation on making exceptions for potential members considering institutions within the Fine Arts do not necessarily offer PhD programmes. Given that the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music (PGVIM) has placed a joining request, yet does not offer PhD programmes, the decision regarding their joining request is postponed until after this Plenary Meeting.

**All participants agree to nominate Prof. Dr. Sarah Weiss (University of Music and Performing Arts Graz) as a network representative who will establish contact to the three Austrian music universities regarding PGVIM's joining request and similar requests**

in the future by institutions within the Fine Arts. As such, PGVIM will be giving a presentation at this Plenary Meeting, however, a vote will occur at a later point.

## b. Proposal for New Positions within the Network

At the previous NC Meeting in Padova in October 2023, it was agreed upon by the participants to establish a new role within the network for strategic agendas to bring together people with specific visions for the network, preliminary called the “Strategic Advisory Team”. **Kotsis** confirms that **Dr. Thakerng Wongsirichot** (PSU) has agreed to accept the role of “Coordinator for Alumni Affairs” within this team who will host a working group on an alumni topic at this Plenary Meeting.

No further persons are confirmed at this time, and participants are invited to consider which strategic agendas the network should prioritise going forward, and which individuals may be nominated to steer a proposed agenda as part of this team.

## ii. Election Nominations Review (**Samat**)

**Kotsis** thanks **Samat** for her stewardship of the network throughout her term. While every Plenary Meeting is the end of the term of the sitting President, as per tradition, the presidency would again shift from Southeast Asia to Europe. As per the NC Meeting in Padova in 2023, **Ranzi** is proposed as nominee for President. It is further suggested that the other Executives who are not required to change be nominated to maintain their roles.

**All participants agree on the nominations presented.**

## iii. Call 24/25 Update: ASEA-UNINET Projects & Ernst Mach Grant – ASEA-UNINET (**Karahan, Niederhauser**)

Regarding the upcoming call for ASEA-UNINET Projects, **Karahan** shares that the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF), as the funding provider, defines the funding conditions. These conditions are laid out in guidelines, which are valid for three years, and are currently in the process of being renewed. As the guidelines are still in the process of being renewed, the new call for ASEA-UNINET Projects will have to be postponed until spring or maybe even summer. **Kotsis** asks if the funding window may be postponed, as there are few opportunities to apply if the funding window were to remain the same. She also asks who determines the deadline once the call can open. **Volz** confirms that much depends on when the guidelines are issued and assures to keep the network informed through **Kotsis**.

For the ongoing call for the Ernst Mach Grant – ASEA-UNINET, **Niederhauser** shares that the number of applications will likely be lower compared to last year’s call, as the number of applications that have been begun is lower compared to the previous call. This is regrettable, considering the additional efforts by **Niederhauser** and NCs to promote the grant this year. Participants are asked to share feedback on what may be contributing to lower application numbers.

**Farizal** shares that Malaysia hosted four seminars to promote the current call. Common questions by prospective applicants included flexibility within the age limit, both for the Full PhD Grant and the Postdoc Grant. A further concern was finding a supervisor, as applicants are required to find supervisors independently. **Niederhauser** explains that flexibility within the age limit is limited, as the limit is defined by the aforementioned guidelines. However, childbearing rights may be considered in the case of applicants for the Postdoc Grant. Regarding finding supervisors, it is noted that this process takes time, as supervisors may respond belatedly and as weeks will have

passed once a reply is given, meetings are held, and the Letter of Invitation is issued. It typically takes around one month for this letter to be issued, so applicants should prepare well in advance. **Obenaus** adds that NCs can start much earlier with informational webinars, as, although few details are updated from call to call, the framework of the scholarship programme does not change. NCs could therefore start informational webinars earlier than previously to ensure that applicants have sufficient time to do independent research and secure the required documents.

**Sungsanit** shares that with regard to research in Thailand, there is currently a significant lack of researchers owed to the large number of universities in Thailand and low demographical trends. As a result, there is a paradigm shift in the relationship between academic alumni and academic professions. The Ministry is currently making efforts to strengthen collaborations with worldclass institutions and provide funding for institutions in Thailand to increase their own researcher numbers. As a result, there is a significant decrease in the number of grant students at the Master and PhD level. **Obenaus** shares that this is a worrying sign, and there is little that can still foreseeably be done on the network side; support by university coordinators is thereby crucial. There are cases where the network does not know about the support provided or on which information is disseminated, so an appeal is expressed to NCs to be proactive with their university coordinators.

**Djawad** reports on the popular LPDP scholarship provided by the Indonesian government and wonders if there is perhaps a synergy effect that could be used to select a target institution within the network and incorporate it within the LPDP scholarship.

**Tjoa** suggests that Embassies could market Austrian universities not by institution but by discipline in terms of ranking, which would make Austria more attractive as a target country.

#### iv. Update: Strategic Development of European Member Institutions (**Samat**)

**Ranzi** proposes that in addition to the recently suggested addition of the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, the University of Turin could be considered after this Plenary Meeting. With strong linkages in university alliances, EUTOPIA and UNITA respectively, both universities are promising new members for the network and would contribute towards a strong representation of northern Italian institutions before the network would expand towards the south. Regrettably, the Ca' Foscari University of Venice is not currently interested in joining the network. **Ranzi** will reach out further to the University of Turin after this Plenary Meeting. An initial exchange with the University of Turin yielded the possibility of a small capacity of scholarships for applicants from ASEA-UNINET member institutions.

**Ranzi** and **Obenaus** share an update on their outreach to the University of Ljubljana, reporting that the institution was not interested in joining the network. Further proactive outreaches will be necessary to develop the network beyond Austrian and Italian institutions, and an upcoming working group on the topic of additions to the European side of the network during the Plenary Meeting will provide important input from network partners, particularly from its Southeast Asian partners.

#### v. Strategic Development of ASEAN Partner Countries (**Tjoa**)

During a recent visit by **Tjoa** to **Farizal**, membership of further ASEAN member countries was discussed, such as Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). **Farizal** contacted UBD, however, the international coordinator was on leave at the time. The Letter of Joining Request is still pending, and **Farizal** will proactively approach UBD again.

**Tjoa** had a conversation with the Austrian Ambassador in Jakarta who was planning to go to East Timor and shared the network's invitation for joining with the President of East Timor. Membership of East Timor in ASEA-UNINET is to be supported in the view of the Ambassador. **Tjoa** asks **Djawad** if there are contacts to institutions in East Timor; **Djawad** confirms and proposes to activate his contact at the National University of East Timor (UNTL). As a least developed country, it would be important to include institutions such as UNTL in the network and initiating projects with them.

**All participants agree with the proposals made for UBD and UNTL.**

**Obenaus** discusses a question on why Pakistan as a member within the network is distinguished as an "associate member". **Tjoa** explains that, historically, they were included due to a reciprocal relationship with Pakistan that provided many scholarships at the time. **Ranzi** shares that the University of Brescia could benefit from cooperation with the HEC; however, under which criteria should new members be added going forward and should the focus perhaps be on Southeast Asia instead of further associate members? **Tjoa** notes it is important to consider that Austria has over 500 PhD graduates from Pakistan, and it may be important to expand beyond just one member. **Farizal** suggests that membership should be focused on Southeast Asian members rather than further associate member countries due to the namesake of the network. **Sungsanit** shares that within the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and ASEAN Plus Three (APT), incorporation of non-Southeast Asian countries is possible. **Kotsis** suggests broadening linkages between members; e.g. Pakistan is mainly Austria-Pakistan, however, it would be ideal to have further intra-member country cooperations. As such, it would be desirable to deepen existing partnerships, including in existing associate member countries, but not in new associate member countries.

**All participants agree on the possibility of including further members from Pakistan.** **Tjoa** will follow up with an enquiry made by the National University of Science & Technology (NUST). He will also get in contact with Pakistan to clarify what wishes and expectations they have from the network. Further considerations may be discussed in the next NC Meeting.

vi. **Nomination of University Coordinators (Kotsis)**

With regard to the role of university coordinators, **Kotsis** describes the role as two-fold: University coordinators are active on a strategic level while also being involved with operational tasks. Due to the duality of this role, **Kotsis** ask NCs for their support in nominating university coordinators who preferably are engaged in both aspects – if needed, with administrative support who may be included as Cc contacts. This will enable proactive contributions to the network on both a strategic and operational level. If there is a change in coordinator, the member institution is asked to complete the virtual [Change of Contact form](#) so that the ASEA-UNINET homepage as well as the network's internal records may be updated.

**All participants agree with the proposal made for the continued nomination of university coordinators.**

## 5. Further Agenda Topics and Meeting Closure

### i. Membership Report 2023 (Kotsis)

**Kotsis** reports that she is in the process of finalising the membership status of institutions for 2023 with only two outstanding memberships needing to be paid. Iran has not paid since 2018; despite technical issues with bank transfers out of Iran, this would be a long-term concern to observe further. As food for thought for future NC Meetings, **Kotsis** proposes the idea to switch to two-year membership cycles, as it is time consuming from an administrative perspective.

**Kotsis asks for NCs to speak with their university coordinators for feedback regarding the two-year membership proposal before discussing this further at a future meeting. All participants agree to this course of action.**

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 newly proposed team 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



Courtesy of **Farizal**.

### **APPENDIX:**

[NC Meeting Agenda](#)

[Finalised Programme of the Plenary Meeting 2024](#)

[Change of Contact form](#)