



LEG-UNIGR: BLUEPRINT FOR A LEGAL ENTITY FOR CROSS-BORDER UNIVERSITY ALLIANCES

UniGR foundations



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1. Executive summary

The institutionalisation of cooperation between the territories of the Greater Region 25 years ago has been the fundamental pillar of its development, both economically and in terms of civil society. Since 1995, all the representatives of the executive powers in office of the partner regions of the Greater Region have been meeting regularly in the form of the Greater Region Summit. The Summit thus defines an overall strategy and formulates the main guidelines for the policies and initiatives to be jointly implemented. It is illustrated by the implementation of concrete projects, the drawing up of joint agreements, the organisation of technical symposia or events aimed at the public, likewise in the fields of education and training, integration of the cross-border labour market and competitiveness, mobility and territorial development, health and integration, culture and tourism, the environment and sustainability, and most importantly higher education and research¹.

The higher education institutions in the Greater Region propose more than 30 integrated cross-border study programmes, making it a very unique higher education offer in Europe. The founding members of the University of the Greater Region (UniGR: Technische Universität Kaiserslautern, University of Liège, Université de Lorraine, University of Luxembourg, Saarland University, Trier University) developed 18 of these study programmes.

Our objective was to delineate UniGR's legacy in the context of its creation under the Interreg programme and its development, fully supported by the political authorities of Belgium, France, Germany, and Luxembourg. The following output refers to the first specific objective of the Leg-UniGR project with the aim to document and share the prior knowledge and experience of the University of the Greater Region (UniGR) in finding an appropriate legal structure to operate in a transregional framework of Higher Education institutions (HEIs). UniGR has a sustainable legal structure as a Luxembourgish association since 2015. The preceding introductory document *D2.1 UniGR foundations - preliminary outputs* already gave a first overview of the legal legacy of UniGR. This document now further elaborates the emergence of the first legal structure, its significance for the sustainability of the university network, and why a European legal status is currently being discussed again.

Governance discussion and the participation of national, regional, and local authorities will be covered, including the aspects which drove the inquiring for a change of legal status.

¹https://www.granderegion.net/content/download/5764/file/Higher%20Education%20and%20Research%20in%20the%20Greater%20Region_EN.pdf



2. Origin of cross-border higher education in the Greater Region

The higher education landscape in the Greater Region (GR) is characterised by four national or regional education systems and higher education traditions: it is therefore rather heterogeneous in organisation and operations.

At the end of the last century, there were already several approaches to cross-border cooperation between higher education institutions in the GR, which enabled a lively exchange due to their geographical proximity. It eventually led to seven higher education institutions signing an agreement entitled "Charter of Higher Education Cooperation Saar-Lor-Lux"² in 1984 and which would ultimately comprise 13 partners. Although many further cross-border cooperation in education and research were established in the subsequent years, often through European fundings, there was a general scarcity of structure and management, thus preventing a sustainable continuation of the projects.

It became clear that a long-term, sustainable networking of the universities in the GR can only succeed if the management level of all institutions is involved in the conception, the design, the control, and the evaluation of a project. The project "University of the Greater Region", funded by the programme Interreg IV A Greater Region (Interreg IV A GR), was therefore intended as a strategic project to implement the first steps on the way to a coordinated grouping of the universities of the GR and to the creation of an integrated higher education area in the GR. In this context, the objective of the Bologna Declaration "to create a common European higher education area (EHEA) by the year 2010" should be also realised as a model in the GR.

The Interreg IV A GR project named "Université de la Grande Région - UGR" was approved in September 2008, started on 15 October 2008, and ran until 14 April 2013. The participating partners were Saarland University (lead partner), University of Liège, University of Luxembourg, Université Paul Verlaine-Metz and Université Henri-Poincaré (after 31.12.2011 merged to Université de Lorraine), Trier University (strategic partner 15.10.2008 - 31.07.2010) and the Technische Universität Kaiserslautern (strategic partner 15.10.2008 - 31.07.2010). In addition to co-funding from the European Union, the project was supported by five partner universities (University of Luxembourg, Université de Lorraine, Saarland University, Trier University and TU Kaiserslautern), as well as by the regions of Saarland, Wallonia, Lorraine, and Rhineland-Palatinate.

During the project period, the consortium was based on two legal documents: a consortium agreement with the Interreg authorities signed by Saarland University as project coordinator and a cooperation agreement defining missions, roles and decision procedures within the consortium signed by all partner universities.

In the project, one module was dedicated to the topic of governance, which addressed strategic measures and ensuring sustainability, among other things. One important objective was to draw up a multi-level strategy and a development plan for improved cooperation between the universities (in the Module 1: UGR-Governance). In this context, it was planned to examine various legal options, including whether, how, and to what extent the then new instrument of a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) could facilitate and optimise this cooperation.

As a first step, the cooperation in the consortium and the tasks of each partner in the consortium needed to be defined, to prepare the consortium for a sustainable cross-border university legal entity. The analysis of the organisational, legal, regulatory, and financial framework conditions was key to ascertain a structure suitable for the university grouping. For this purpose, expert committees were formed that brought together specialists

² <https://docplayer.org/87215500-Charta-universitaerer-zusammenarbeit-saar-lor-lux-vom-25-oktober-uebersetzt-vom-institut-fuer-rechtswissenschaften-im-juli-1987.html>



from central areas and services of the partner universities to get to know each other and jointly find solutions to the many complications of cross-border cooperation.

In consultation with the legal departments of each partner university and in close cooperation with external experts, various legal forms of cross-border cooperation were scrutinized between partner universities for their suitability in fulfilling the objective of the project. Different models for the emerging university alliance were proposed: from a cooperation agreement to the establishment of an EGTC, which at first sight seemed to be the most integrated structure. The aim here was to be able to evaluate the challenges, advantages, and limitations of these different legal forms.

Although the creation of an EGTC was desirable at that time to ensure better international visibility, it also became evident during the project period that this would require too many decisions by the university network and the political and regulatory authorities in a short time. Further to this, an auto-evaluation report for the European University Association (EUA) in 2011 and an external evaluation by experts from the EUA in 2012 was conducted during the project period which represented a valuable contribution and a solid basis for the strategic considerations and the final definition of the structure and tasks.

Following the contact with experts on cross-border legal forms, it was advised against the establishment of an EGTC before the content had been fully determined. The foundation of a legal entity for the UniGR collaboration was therefore postponed until after the project.

At the end of the Interreg IV A GR project, a key point to address was the continuation of the cross-border collaboration and to identify a sustainable vision after the project end:

- What would be the purpose, the broad objective, and the main contents of UniGR?
- What will be the organisation or, structure, which could home the activities of UniGR if it is preserved?



3. Post Interreg project period and first steps for a grouping

In view of the post-project period, the project partners signed in December 2012 a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to ensure a smooth transition until the foundation of a legal entity. Regarding the promising results of the Interreg project, they declared to continue the cooperation started and to transform it into a sustainable university grouping with the goal to become a model cross-border European university network.

This agreement was intended to regulate the functioning of the university grouping until the creation of the cross-border legal form. The partner universities pointed out the importance for the grouping to have the necessary autonomy to successfully carry out the common tasks, and therefore agreed to establish a central structure with its own legal personality for the university network to achieve the agreed-on joint objectives.

The universities decided on the following two minimal structures:

- **Central structure:**
 - Strategic level: Council: Rectors and presidents of the UniGR partner universities with a rotating presidency of 2 years.
 - Operational level: Central Office: Director and at least one coordinator, who are responsible for the implementation of the strategy adopted by the Council and assist the President-in-Office of the Council. The seat of the Secretariat will be in Luxembourg (L) or Saarbrücken (D).
- **Decentralised structure:**
 - Representative of the university management, responsible for the UniGR.
 - UniGR Officers as contact persons at each partner university as interface, who ensures the anchoring of the network and the implementation of the activities at the universities.

At least once a year, the Council would meet with representatives of the political authorities of the GR countries/regions and with student representatives to discuss the strategic role of UniGR for the regional development of higher education and research in the GR. Students should continue to have the opportunity to work together in the framework of a Student Advisory Council.

The MoU also underlined the partners' commitment to pursue their cooperation and create a sustainable cross-border structure in education and research in the Greater Region. It had already become apparent during the project phase that the option of a simple cooperation agreement would not be sufficient to monitor the network's activities in education, training, and research. The creation of a legal entity was thus crucial for the following reasons:

- The University of the Greater Region can only obtain funding independently if it has its own legal personality.
- To increase regional, European, and international visibility.
- The positions of UniGR Director and UniGR Coordinator were at that time attached to Saarland University and needed to become independent.
- The creation of an independent structure allowed the management of a common budget and the hiring of common staff.
- The universities felt the need to entrust the management of common activities to a structure that is neutral in relation to the members.



In 2013, a roadmap was designed with the following action points:

1. Define the operational parameters of the future organisation.
2. Choose the legal form and location of the head office.
3. Draw up the articles of association for the new organisation.
4. Draw up the first budget and work programme.
5. Set up the cooperation body.

The Central Office of UniGR was tasked to:

1. Oversee and coordinate the collaborative work of universities in the target areas.
2. Lead the networks that have been already set up.
3. Look for financial support.
4. Provide financial support for high-potential projects.
5. Lobby the regional authorities.
6. Share communication and university representation.
7. Promote language learning and the acquisition of intercultural skills among the university communities.
8. Support for collaboration and project implementation (financial and logistical support for translation services, and expertise in cross-border cooperation issues).
9. Continue, update, and evaluate joint activities launched during the Interreg project (website, expert committees, databases, student status, doctoral student label).

Following a first analysis of possible cross-border legal forms during the project period that could be considered for the grouping as well as the recommendation of the *Mission opérationnelle transfrontalière (MOT)*, it became evident that the EGTC as a legal entity with cross-border orientation would indeed be the most suitable form.

In November 2013, the UniGR Council decided that the implementation and feasibility of an EGTC should therefore be examined by all legal departments of the partner universities and confirmed or overturned in early 2014.



4. First discussion on the creation of a legal status for the grouping

In February 2014, a first meeting was set between the legal departments of the partner universities and representatives of UniGR to evaluate the option of a legal status for the grouping, especially to discuss whether the EGTC was indeed a suitable option for all partners and what limitations might be encountered, if any.

The basis for discussion was prepared by Saarland University, who had conducted an analysis in advance. Based on the definition of the operational parameters in the MoU, the following legal instruments of cross-border cooperation could not be considered:

- **Cooperation agreement:** As a cooperation agreement is not a legal personality of its own, it does not correspond to the requirement set in the MoU and the need for a legal personality.
- **Local Cross-border Cooperation grouping (GÖZ/GLCT):** This transnational legal entity was established in the framework of the Karlsruhe agreement.³ Only members from Germany, France, Luxembourg, and Switzerland could form this grouping. Since Belgium is not included, this form was already ruled out. In addition, members must be local authorities, which universities are not.
- **Euroregional Cooperation Grouping (ECG):** This legal instrument established 2009 by the Council of Europe was inspired by the EGTC.⁴ However, in this case, too, the members must be local authorities, which universities are not.
- **European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG):** The EEIG is a legal entity of European corporate law created in 1985.⁵ The missions of the higher education institutions are centralised on research, teaching, study, and further education, and only parts of the tasks of the central structure are economic (e.g., fundraising/lobbying). Consequently, as universities focus are per se in the non-economic area, this form did not appear to be appropriate.

Finally, based on the definition of the operational parameters, the **European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)** was considered as the only appropriate legal instrument for cross-border cooperation which corresponds to the missions of UniGR.

European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation⁶ were set up to facilitate cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation between Member States or their regional and local authorities. EGTCs enable these partners to implement joint projects, share expertise and improve coordination of their activities.

The EGTC scheme proposes a single framework for the legal structuring of territorial cooperation activities throughout the EU. It is often defined as a European cooperation structure by nature since:

- It is structured by a European Regulation (EC No 1082/2006 amended by EC No 1302/2013).

³https://www.euroinstitut.org/fileadmin/user_upload/02_Ueber_Uns/Struktur/Accord_Karlsruhe_Karlsruher_Ub_ereinkommen.pdf

⁴<https://rm.coe.int/1680084827>

⁵<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/european-economic-interest-grouping.html>

⁶<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:02006R1082-20140622&from=EN>



- It must include members from at least two-member states of the EU (and possibly also partner countries).

The objectives and tasks of EGTCs are very diverse and may include the implementation of territorial cooperation programmes which may comprise INTERREG, regional projects or even territorial strategies.

The EGTC is a permanent and autonomous structure, with legal personality under public or private law. It has the capacity to conclude contracts, employ staff, manage a budget, participate in tenders, acquire, and dispose of movable and immovable assets property.⁷

Concerning UniGR future, the foundation of EGTCs do not initially provide for limitation of liability. After closer examination by the partner universities, this lack of limitation of liability would have prevented Trier University and TU Kaiserslautern (Rhineland-Palatine) from joining an EGTC. § Section 104 (4) of the Rhineland-Palatinate Higher Education Act stipulates that the "liability of the higher education institution must be limited to a specific contribution appropriate to its capacity".

Possible solutions were discussed amongst the legal departments, as for example to create an association which would include the universities of Rhineland-Palatinate, and which could join the EGTC. However, this workaround solution was quickly ruled out as the universities should directly become members of a common legal form without detours and too much complication. Further, the possibility of using a national legal form was also considered. However, a European legal form has been favoured to better reflect the cross-border nature of the network. As a third option, the universities proposed to check with the relevant authorities if an exemption of the application of the regional HE law could be envisaged for TU Kaiserslautern and Trier University.

After an enquiry with the competent authorities, it became clear that the Rhineland-Palatinate Ministry of Higher Education would not agree to the membership of universities of Rhineland-Palatinate in an EGTC. It was explicitly pointed out that neither an amendment of the Rhineland-Palatinate Higher Education Act nor an accession of the federal state itself on behalf of its universities to an EGTC was conceivable.

In view of the difficulties encountered by the universities of Rhineland-Palatinate, the members of the Council therefore decided to abandon the idea of establishing an EGTC for the time being, which, according to research by the legal department of Saarland University, was the only European legal form that would most closely match the motivation and objectives of the UniGR. It was thus decided to concentrate on the creation of a legal form under national law corresponding to the UniGR missions and the legal criteria of the various members of the grouping. The legal departments were reappointed to discuss different options and prepare an analysis.

During a second meeting with the legal departments of the partner universities in September 2014, the following three legal forms were proposed, considering that the legal entity must be able to apply for funds and that the liability of the members must be limited:

- **gGmbH (Germany)⁸:** The non-profit limited liability company (gemeinnützige GmbH) is a special form of the GmbH (company with limited liability) that exclusively and directly pursues non-profit purposes with limited liability. It is a company that is exempt from corporation and trade tax. The activities planned for this purpose correspond to those of UniGR and the gGmbH is eligible for funding. The foundation process takes place in two steps: With a share capital of 25,000 € and articles of association, the company can be

⁷ At the end of 2019, most of the 75 EGTCs were active in cross-border regions (80%) and registered by the [Committee of the Regions](#); 25 were in the process of being established. EUCOR - The European Campus, formerly "Universities of the Upper Rhine" created in 1989, represents the first EGTC active in the field of Higher Education and Research and was founded in 2016 ([EGTC Monitoring Report 2018-2019](#)).

⁸ <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gmbhg/>



registered in the commercial register. The second step is to apply to the tax office for recognition as a non-profit organisation. Further, gGmbHs already exist at German universities. In contrast to German associations (e.V.), gGmbHs are conceived as more professional. Although there is currently no precedent, the foundation of a gGmbH is legally possible for all participants, but there are concerns from the non-German university representatives about the duration of the formation and a possible rejection by local authorities.

- **Association sans but lucratif, a.s.b.l. (Luxembourg)⁹:** The Luxembourgish association was presented as the Central Office is intended to be in Germany or Luxembourg. Association law is very similar and mutually recognised throughout Europe. At least 3 members must be involved in the founding process. The a.s.b.l. is registered with the Chambre of Commerce after the articles of association have been established and confirmed by notaries. The foundation process is done quickly. In Luxembourg, as in France and Belgium, associations do not have the "leisure club image" as in Germany. Further, a German association would require at least seven founding members. The accession of the other universities is legally possible. Here too, the activities envisaged correspond to those of UniGR. The a.s.b.l. is eligible for funding and is not profit-oriented.
- **Association internationale sans but lucratif, a.i.s.b.l. (Belgium)¹⁰:** The a.i.s.b.l. is a Belgian special form of the association, which is very similar to the a.s.b.l. but carries out explicitly international activities. The foundation takes place very similarly. The explicitly international character of the a.i.s.b.l. was particularly interesting.

After a comparison and evaluation of the three possible legal forms, especially concerning the tax and labour law situation and limitation of liability, the universities agreed that in principle, all three legal forms were possible for the University of the Greater Region. In a next step, it was important to assess the acceptance of the individual legal forms:

- **The gGmbH** would signify a high cost of an audit, which would amount to more than 10,000 EUR, regardless of the turnover of the company. Further a gGmbH is obliged to prepare accounts and is rather commercial and less educational.
- **The form of the a.s.b.l.** is analogous in France, Luxembourg, and Belgium. The choice of national law would have been more of a political decision. The principle of territoriality applies, i.e., the applicable law is determined by the country in which the activity is carried out. There were two possibilities: Domicile in Luxembourg and activities (of the employees) in Luxembourg, in which case no further considerations would be necessary, or domicile in Luxembourg and place of work in Germany. In the latter case, German labour law and Luxembourg tax law (for the association) would apply.
- **The form of association under Belgian law** is comparable to the Luxembourg a.s.b.l. However, the a.i.s.b.l. explicitly unites international members. The international dimension in the name of the legal form would be a more psychological aspect, but the legal entity remains dependent from one member state's rules and regulations, missing the European character.

⁹ <https://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/loi/2023/08/07/a592/jo>

¹⁰ <http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/eli/loi/1921/06/27/1921062701/justel>



It became clear that there were some arguments opposing the gGmbH. At the UniGR Council in November 2014, the presidents and rectors therefore excluded the gGmbH from further consideration of the legal form of UniGR and focused on the association forms **a.s.b.l.** or **a.i.s.b.l.**

Further, the UniGR Council agreed that the Villa Europa (Saarbrücken, Germany), which is situated in a neutral place, would be an appropriate location for the Central Office of UniGR and that it would also be beneficial if it could remain where it is currently located.

It became apparent that the Luxembourgish form of association seemed to be the most suitable. In June 2015, the members of the UniGR Council unanimously decided to establish a Luxembourgish a.s.b.l. Together with a Luxembourgish legal expert, the Central Office drafted the association's statutes and rules¹¹ of procedure as well as the application for non-profit status.

On 24 November 2015, the presidents and rectors signed the statutes, officially founding “UniGR a.s.b.l.”, marking the next milestone on the way to become a model cross-border university in Europe (Figure 1). The first general assembly of “UniGR a.s.b.l.” took place in June 2016.

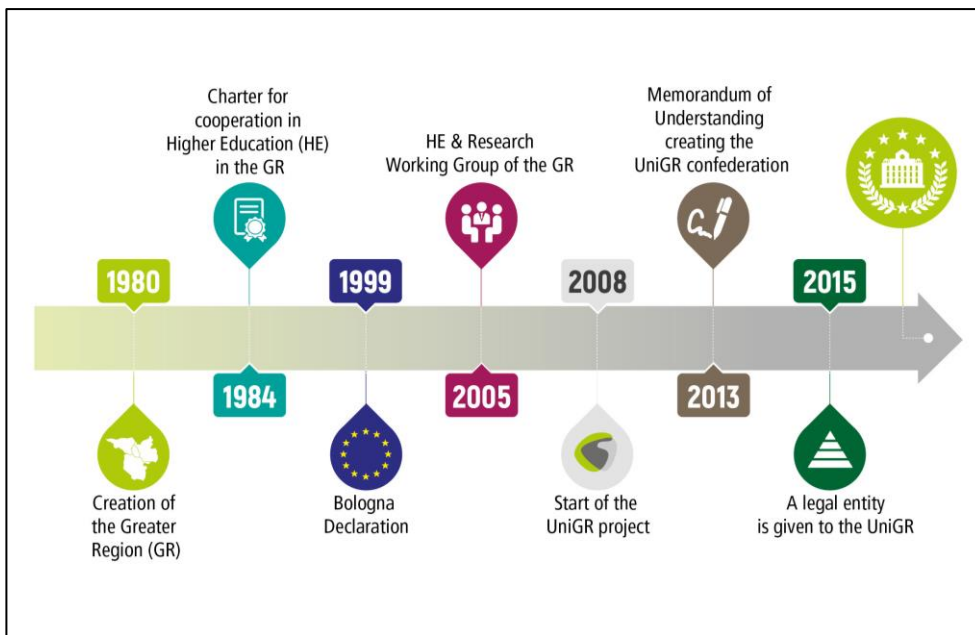


Figure 1: Evolution of UniGR until 2015 (Source: UniGR a.s.b.l.)

¹¹ https://www.uni-gr.eu/sites/tst-uni-gr.univ-lorraine.fr/files/users/divers/unigr_asbl_statuts_20161124_fr.pdf



5. Resumption of discussions for a European legal status

Since, UniGR has been operating under the status of a not-for-profit association registered in Esch-sur-Alzette (Luxembourg). The Central Office, which ensures the general management of UniGR, is located in Saarbrücken (Germany), and UniGR Officers are distributed within the respective partner universities. As such, UniGR operates as a full cross-border and European structure fully dedicated to cross-border collaboration in higher education, research, and innovation within the GR.

Different steps were reached during the last 10 years. In a first phase, UniGR has developed a general basis of cooperation by creating the legal structure, defined its role in the ecosystem of the 6 universities and its role in European cross-border projects. There, UniGR has successfully contributed as project leader (examples: [Interreg VA GR "UniGR-Center for Border Studies"](#), [Erasmus+ "EurIdentity Certificate"](#)) and as well as partner representing the UniGR network in the project consortium (example: [Erasmus+ "European Cross Border Skills"](#)). Various cross-border activities created during the Interreg project, were continued, and even further developed (examples: [UniGR Student](#), [UniGR Mobility Fund](#)).

In the context of the discussions to apply for the European Universities initiative, the grouping decided in May 2018 to resume the discussion of the possibility to change the legal status to an EGTC. It also became apparent that the Rhineland-Palatinate Higher Education Act was foreseen to be amended soon, making it possible for universities to join an EGTC.

By changing the legal status to a European one, the members intended to gain more visibility in the Greater Region and in Europe. In addition, they sought to strengthen the governance and the infrastructure of the UniGR.

Although not classified as a priority, the presidents and rectors unambiguously thus decided that the development into an EGTC was desirable in the long term. The transformation of UniGR a.s.b.l. into an EGTC was to be integrated into the actions of the planned project of the European Universities initiative and serve to share their experiences to initiate the establishment of further cross-border associations. As of today, having four HEIs within UniGR being members of Erasmus+ 'European Universities' was catalytic in considering a legal update of UniGR in view of benefiting from European Universities regional outputs.

In the same year, another stage of UniGR integration was achieved. The Council approved the status of an associated UniGR partner and initiated the procedure for the inclusion of the University of Applied Sciences in Saarbrücken ([htw saar](#)), as it has a highly developed cross-border strategy and therefore aligns very well with the UniGR strategy. The partnership agreement with htw saar was signed on 10 June 2020.

The application for the European University initiative was submitted on 28 February 2019.¹² Although not approved, the mission statement signed in this context is considered a fundamental part of UniGR's strategy, which underlines the importance of UniGR as a model European university and the wish to strengthen this alliance.

In view of the development of the UniGR and the inclusion of htw saar as associated partner, a limited added value of the "Charter of Higher Education Cooperation Saar-Lor-Lux" was identified, as well as the need to revise its organisation. It was therefore decided in 2020 that the Charter would be dissolved and replaced by the organisation of an Annual "Conference on Higher Education and Research in the Greater Region" which

¹² <https://www.uni-gr.eu/fr/node/2930>



should take place with each member in rotation. This organisational move was decided based on a more efficient usage of cross-regional resources in education and research, and to federate interest from all partners within the GR.

When the legal form of the UniGR was originally discussed in 2013, a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) was the preferred option. However, the Rhineland-Palatinate Higher Education and Research Act prevented the subordinated universities from participating in EGTCs for liability reasons. Since an amendment to the law came into force in September 2020¹³, this obstacle was now removed. Consequently, the question of transforming the UniGR a.s.b.l. association into an EGTC arose more specifically.

The legal form of the EGTC would be accompanied by a gain in recognition and visibility, as well as a strengthening of the position of the UniGR in the Greater Region and in Europe. The change would offer the following decisive advantages in particular:

- Additional funds / financial support (European, regional, and national).
- Flexibility of the applicable law: the current organisation of UniGR can be maintained (official seat in Luxembourg, operational seat in Saarbrücken), demonstrating a fully cross-border operational scheme.
- Greater structural and financial credibility.
- Simplified governance: the UniGR a.s.b.l. required the creation of a general assembly and a board of directors, the EGTC will be able to have a single decision-making body.

Considering the added value of the transformation, the UniGR Council mandated the Central Office in June 2021 to draw up the convention and statutes of the future EGTC, in cooperation with the Luxembourg Ministry of Energy and Spatial Development as they already have proven experience in establishing these cross-border structures (EGTC Summit Secretariat of the Greater Region, EGTC Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat Interreg V A Grande Région, ESPON EGTC, for example).

The preliminary work carried out in the summer of 2021 confirmed the possibility of transforming the organisational functioning of UniGR a.s.b.l. into an EGTC under Luxembourg law. Several observations and issues were also identified, which in some cases require a political decision by the UniGR bodies. This concerned specifically:

- The future EGTC UniGR shall have a single decision-making body for reasons of efficiency (lean governance): a general assembly.
- The founding documents will appoint the current secretary general of UniGR as Director of the EGTC UniGR.

In May 2022, the association received official written confirmation from the state of Rhineland-Palatinate that the Rhineland-Palatinate universities can now be part of an EGTC and that the corresponding legal hurdles no longer exist.

In the same year, the [Interregional Parliamentary Council](#) (consultative parliamentary assembly of the Greater Region) expressed its support for the transformation of UniGR into a European legal entity in a public recommendation paper.¹⁴

¹³ <https://landesrecht.rlp.de/bsrp/document/jlr-HSchulGRP2020rahmen>

¹⁴ https://cpi-ipr.eu/IMG/pdf/ipr_empfehlung_uber_die_universitaet_der_grossregion.pdf



When the European Commission launched the call for pilot projects to test a “legal status” for European University alliances in June 2022, it made sense to participate and receive additional funding, to advance that way more efficiently in the process. It was further an opportunity to showcase best practice and demonstrate UniGR's longstanding experience.

Convinced of the value of developing a new framework for UniGR to meet the challenges of cross-border and European higher education, the political authorities of the Member States of the Greater Region showed their support by signing a joint letter of support.¹⁵

¹⁵ <https://www.granderegion.net/content/download/6276/101160>



6. Conclusion

The association under Luxembourgish law provided the UniGR grouping with a stable structure which was able to anchor a well-developed network between the partner universities. The first activities that emerged during the Interreg phase could be further elaborated and are a demonstration of sustainability. UniGR a.s.b.l. has been involved as lead partner in several EU-funded projects and as well as an associate partner. It has been able to establish itself in the universities and with the partners within the Greater Region. Over the last 15 years, the university grouping has therefore achieved a certain stability and visibility in the Greater Region. The association's structure has moreover proven its effectiveness.

At the same time, however, certain limits were reached. Especially at the European level, the cross-border grouping appeared to lack visibility and the funding opportunities remain very limited. In addition, the partner universities expressed their wish to facilitate a simpler governance structure for the grouping. The main purpose of the change in legal form is to achieve a better adaptation of the cross-border network, increase its efficiency and support further development if other HEIs wanting to join.

Further, it must be stressed that similar moves have been observed in Europe to structure cross-border cooperation from an academic, scientific, or even innovative perspective. Eventually, two EGTCs have been deployed recently in this context:

- The [EGTC European Campus of Studies and Research](#) in 2020: it homes the Deggendorf Institute of Technology (DIT). The founding members were European Campus Rottal-Inn (ECRI) from DIT, the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria, and the Salzburg-based Alma Mater Europea¹⁶.
- From a more scientific perspective, the [Lake Constance Arts & Sciences Association](#) is also organized in the form of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)¹⁷. The mission of the legal entity is to focus on the exploitation of tangible results developed in and for the Four-country region (Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland).

7. Epilogue

The recent decision to reopen discussions on the EGTC is motivated by the fact that a certain level of operation has already been achieved with the association and that changes are now needed to move forward. At the same time, the German Land of Rhineland-Palatinate has amended the law authorising its universities to join the EGTC. Finally, the option of creating an EGTC was discussed by the partners from the start of the cooperation and currently remains the only instrument best suited to cross-border structures. All these factors led to the decision to begin the process of changing UniGR's legal status towards a fully European structure, validated by national and local authorities.

¹⁶ <https://www.th-deg.de/en/Presseartikel?id=23723>

¹⁷ <https://www.wissenschaftsverbund.org/englisch>