

# Self-Evaluation and Outlook ACSC 2024–2025

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# Summary

Since its establishment in 2024, the Advisory Committee on Sensitive Collaborations (ACSC) has developed a methodology for providing advice, issued specific recommendations regarding collaboration partners, and served as a point of reference for faculties and staff. These first two years can primarily be viewed as a pioneering phase.

The self-evaluation has led to the following points of attention for the next phase of consolidation and further development:

1. While specific contexts change and may become more or less sensitive, the underlying need for responsible collaboration / responsible scientific practice has proven to be structural. The existing awareness within EUR of what constitutes sensitive collaborations and how to handle them is limited. Outside the sensitive contexts identified by the Executive Board, the question of whether and how a collaboration can be entered into responsibly is rarely asked. This situation is exacerbated by the increasing pressure to internationalize and to secure external funding for teaching and research activities. Therefore, the issue of sensitive collaborations needs to be solidly embedded within organizational processes and in the university's culture. Awareness in this area requires sustained attention and must be explicitly prioritized in faculties and departments.
2. To ensure a consistent approach in the assessment of collaborative relationships, an underlying policy on responsible collaboration - specifically relating to the prevention or limitation of negative impacts on human rights, sustainability and related issues – is an absolute prerequisite. Formulation of this policy should be a matter of priority.
3. For awareness, assessment, and risk management an overview of current and intended institutional collaborations is necessary, at least at the faculty level. This overview is currently largely lacking and will need to be established.
4. The coordination between the advisory committee on sensitive collaborations, ethics committees, and the knowledge security advisory body with respect to processes, alignment and information gathering requires improvement. A single accessible point of contact (physical and/or digital) must be established for policy staff, faculties, and researchers where they can, with the help of tools such as a decision tree, make initial assessments and submit requests for advice, which are then handled by the appropriate advisors / committees. In doing so, we should try to avoid additional bureaucracy and duplication of procedures through an integrated approach. This also includes advice in the areas of privacy and data management.
5. The committee plays a crucial role because it operates from an independent position and with substantive expertise, which ensures that its judgments are objective and not influenced by the interests involved in a collaboration, and because it operates on the basis of a general, context-neutral framework, which ensures consistency in assessments both across EUR and between different contexts. This prevents unequal treatment of similar cases. However, the advisory process could be improved and accelerated by organizing the front-office function in a more administrative manner and assigning the committee a more second-line role, focused on formulating substantive policy (regarding, for example, responsible collaboration, identifying, preventing, and mitigating negative impacts on human rights) and providing substantive advice on specific contexts and collaboration partners. This positioning will also have implications for the composition of the committee.
6. The collection of information regarding specific contexts should, where possible, be organized in collaboration with other universities to avoid duplication of effort. The

substantive evaluation of the collected information lends itself more to a university-specific approach.

7. When assessing cooperation partners, the operational management, supply chains, and legal entities affiliated with EUR must also be taken into account, because just as with academic partnerships, the societal impact and reputation of EUR are at stake.

# 1. Introduction

As an impact-driven, socially engaged university, Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) frequently collaborates with societal partners and is a party to agreements and contracts, both nationally and internationally. In some cases, these collaborations take place in the context of controversial societal debates, conflicts, or circumstances in which human rights are under pressure or ecological damage occurs. Collaborations with partners in such sensitive contexts may entail risks for third parties and/or for (employees of) EUR itself, for example in the areas of human rights, safety, ethics, sustainability, academic freedom, our fundamental values, and our reputation.

EUR's mission is to create positive societal impact through our scientifically independent role by means of education, research, and engagement with societal actors, developments, and issues.<sup>1</sup> Central to this is connection with the outside world: locally, nationally, and internationally. As part of its pursuit of positive societal impact, EUR has formulated the ambition to contribute to a more sustainable and just world, to increase inclusivity, and to reduce inequality. Furthermore, in 2021, EUR signed the Magna Charta Universitatum, in which academic freedom, ethical research, open and accountable science, and autonomy are described as core values of the international academic community.<sup>2</sup>

All of this requires us, as a university, to adopt an open and inclusive approach, in which we carry out our activities in consultation, coordination, and, where possible, collaboration with societal partners, and in which we strive for continuity in our collaborative relationships. At the same time, we view it as an important condition for achieving positive impact that the effects of our activities and collaborations are not limited to the interests of individual actors, but benefit the development of the broader systems of which they are a part. We believe it is important that our activities and collaborations do not cause negative effects, elsewhere or at a later time. We consciously strive to avoid cases of "grimimpact",<sup>3</sup> in which our academic activities lead to societal harm, abuse by stakeholders, or the reinforcement of harmful narratives. We ensure that what we do is in line with our academic and Erasmian values.<sup>4</sup>

A focused effort to prevent negative impacts resulting from our activities and collaborations is crucial in an era characterized by deliberate attempts by various societal actors to discredit the academic world and to deliberately ignore scientific knowledge and insights or portray them as untrustworthy when it serves their own interests. In a context of disinformation, half-truths, and distorted facts, growing competition among knowledge systems and networks of legitimacy, and the undermining of societal interests for profit, it is all the more important for us as a university to exercise our scientific and socially unifying role in a transparent and responsible manner. This requires not only openness and connection but also that, when entering into collaborations, we consciously consider who our intended partner is, what broader interests are at play, what the societal (side) effects of the collaboration might be, and how all of this relates to our own core values and social responsibility.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eur.nl/media/2023-09-36179societalimpactfurtherdefinitionnlonline1>

<sup>2</sup> [Magna Charta Universitatum – Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum; het 2020 charter.](#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2019/05/28/grimpact-time-to-acknowledge-the-dark-side-of-the-impact-agenda/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.eur.nl/media/2023-09-36179societalimpactfurtherdefinitionnlonline1>

With this in mind, the EUR Executive Board established the Advisory Committee on Sensitive Collaborations (hereinafter also referred to as: ACSC / the committee) in May 2024. The aim was for the committee to provide advice on existing and proposed collaborations in sensitive contexts and thereby develop a policy and an institutional mechanism for EUR through which the potential risks of our collaborations to human rights, security, ethics, academic freedom, and our Erasmian values can be identified and addressed. The term “sensitive contexts” refers to countries or regions, sectors or actors, or circumstances where there is an increased risk of serious negative consequences of our activities and/or those of our collaboration partners on people, animals, the natural environment, or the climate.

With its decision to establish the ACSC, the Executive Board is aligning itself with a broader trend among Dutch and Flemish universities toward raising awareness of and critically reflecting on the potential negative consequences of collaborations with external partners and establishing university committees to assess the risks of such consequences (see appendix). It also aligns with international developments in the field of “responsible internationalization”,<sup>5</sup> within the framework of which the aim is to adopt a strategic approach to collaboration in research and (higher) education, whereby international relationships are built with attention to ethical, legal, financial, and security aspects. The same applies to the ongoing focus among scientists, universities, governments, and international organizations on the topic of “responsible science” (also known as “responsible research and innovation” or RRI), which entails that science must be conducted in an ethical, reliable, and socially responsible manner, with respect for people, animals, the environment, and society.

Although the fundamental attitude of academics toward collaboration with academic and societal partners is positive, it is a matter of responsible scientific research to evaluate our partnerships when they are sensitive in this way. See, for example, the Statutes of the International Science Council, which refer to “the recognition of the benefits and potential drawbacks” of scientific research. The same responsibility naturally applies—and perhaps, given the university’s educational role, even more strongly—to collaborations within the framework of educational activities at EUR. This responsibility applies not only to EUR as an institution but to the entire EUR community, regardless of whether its members are engaged in research, education, policy, or operations. This calls for broad awareness and shared responsibilities.

The committee’s mandate is to advise the Executive Board (CvB) and deans on proposed and ongoing collaborations in sensitive contexts that may entail serious risks. The guiding principle here is “collaborate, unless...”. This means that, as a university, we want to encourage and facilitate connections with academic institutions and societal actors as much as possible in line with our mission to be a socially relevant, engaged, and accessible university that promotes co-creation, connection, and open-mindedness and enables transformative change.

For this reason, the committee’s primary role is to determine how specific (proposed) collaborations in sensitive contexts relate to a “moral baseline” to be specified for each sensitive context—that is, whether it is reasonably possible to enter into or continue the collaboration without creating a serious risk to human rights, safety, ethics, sustainability, academic freedom, our Erasmian values, or our reputation. Second, the committee’s role is aimed at developing conditions for collaborations in sensitive contexts that fall below the

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<sup>5</sup> Zie bijvoorbeeld [Shih, T., Gaunt, A. & Östlund, S. \(2020\). Responsible internationalisation: Guidelines for reflection on international academic collaboration. Stockholm: STINT, 2020;](#) of [Gamble, D & Wilkinson E. \(22-01-2025\) Rethinking the value of internationalisation in higher education. \(blog HEPI\);](#) [Kapfudzaruwa, F. Internationalization of Higher Education and Emerging National Rationales: Comparative Analysis of the Global North and South. High Educ Policy 38, 493–522 \(2025\). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-024-00358-z>.](#)

moral threshold, aimed at preventing negative consequences and limiting their severity and scope should they occur despite the precautions taken.

This principle requires the committee to maintain an open mind and a willingness to re-evaluate existing practices, prevailing views, and our own convictions when assessing collaborations, particularly when these collaborations take place in contexts where beliefs, practices, or norms differ significantly from what is customary within the context of our own university. In addition, it requires the committee to base our assessments on an overarching, context-independent, and normatively recognizable framework for the EUR community to ensure that our judgments are objective and consistent. In other words: that comparable cases in different contexts are treated in the same manner. It also requires us to operate as transparently as possible and to maintain dialogue with, on the one hand, the parties involved in the (proposed) collaboration and, on the other hand, the EUR community.

In this document, the Advisory Committee on Sensitive Collaborations looks back on its activities since June 2024. It then evaluates—in light of its mandate—what is going well and what could be improved. The committee then looks ahead to the specific and anticipated activities that will fall under its purview in 2026 and beyond within the framework of this mandate. Finally, it reflects on what is needed to enable it to carry out these activities properly.

# 2. Retrospective

## 2.1 Mandate and working method of the ACSC

### 2.1.1 Establishment and mandate

The Executive Board established the ACSC with the aim of developing an institutional mechanism and policy for EUR to identify and address risks to third parties and/or to EUR (staff) associated with collaborations in sensitive contexts. These include risks in the areas of human rights, security, ethics, sustainability, academic freedom and fundamental values, which are related to the collaborations and/or collaboration partners in question. In this way, the Executive Board seeks to ensure that EUR activities are carried out, as far as reasonably possible, in a manner that respects the human rights of third parties and is in line with the Erasmian values and EUR's vision and strategy. The committee's task is to advise the Executive Board and deans on entering into, continuing – whether or not subject to conditions – or terminating collaborations that may entail serious risks.

The ACSC has been established as an autonomous and independent body and currently consists of four EUR staff members with relevant expertise in the field of sensitive collaborations. It assesses intended and existing institutional collaborations in contexts designated as sensitive by the Executive Board. In addition, the committee may, on its own initiative and after consultation with the Executive Board, decide to review collaborations that it considers to be sensitive. The committee is an advisory body; decisions on entering into, continuing or terminating collaborations are taken by the Executive Board or the relevant dean. The committee commenced its work on 1 June 2024 and has so far been presented with two sensitive contexts by the Executive Board: collaborations with partners in Israel/Palestine and collaborations with partners in China, including specifically the China Scholarship Council.

### 2.1.2 Working method of the ACSC

The ACSC's assessments focus on institutional collaborations: any form of collaboration with an external organisation in which a person acts on behalf of the university or one of its organisational units (e.g. faculty, institute, research group). The collaboration does not necessarily have to be contractual or long-term. In the domains of education, policy and operations, collaborations are, by the nature of the activities involved, in principle always institutional. In the domain of research, collaborations quickly take on an institutional character, unless they concern purely individual collaborations such as co-authoring an article by two or more scholars. In the latter case, they in principle fall under the individual academic freedom and responsibility of EUR staff and therefore outside the ACSC's remit. Nevertheless, the frameworks and advice developed by the ACSC may in such cases serve as guidance for exercising this individual responsibility.

The basis for the ACSC's work is the qualitative assessment model for sensitive collaborations that it developed in December 2024.<sup>6</sup> This is a generic model intended to be applied to

<sup>6</sup> [2024-07-framework-acsc-2024-06-11](#)

various sensitive contexts, both for existing and intended collaborations. In addition, the ACSC prepares a context assessment for each specific sensitive context, in which the committee identifies the main risks associated with collaborations with academic and societal partners in that context. Together, these two documents form the basis for the ACSC's assessments of specific existing or intended collaborations.

The ACSC's assessments focus on intended or ongoing collaborations with specific partners in a sensitive context. A collaboration is considered to take place in a sensitive context when it involves collaboration in countries or regions, with sectors or actors, or under circumstances where there is an elevated risk of serious negative consequences of our activities and/or those of our collaboration partners for people, animals, the natural environment or the climate. Examples include projects with partners in countries or regions affected by armed conflict or where human rights are under severe pressure, collaboration on topics that are the subject of serious societal controversy and/or collaborations or projects that jeopardise the Erasmian values (societal engagement, global citizenship, connectivity, entrepreneurship, open-mindedness) or otherwise directly or indirectly have negative consequences for people, animals, the climate or the natural environment.

A separate assessment is prepared for each partner; within the ACSC's working method there is therefore never a generic exclusion of all partners within a particular context, although this may – depending on the circumstances – be the outcome of a series of individual assessments. This is only different where there are internationally imposed sanctions or embargoes with regard to a specific context; in such cases, the Executive Board may decide to terminate all collaborations in that context. The guiding principle in the committee's assessments is "collaboration, unless...", meaning that the committee will only advise against entering into or will recommend terminating an (intended) collaboration if it judges that the consequences of that collaboration create a serious risk to human rights, security, ethics, sustainability, academic freedom or our Erasmian values. In all other cases, the committee's advice will be aimed at formulating conditions under which the collaboration can proceed. Such conditions will relate to measures that must be taken by the EUR parties involved in the collaboration in order to prevent negative consequences and/or limit their severity and extent.

The ACSC bases its assessments on information from various public sources, each of which is evaluated for quality, reliability and objectivity.<sup>7</sup> This scoring determines how the information from each source is weighed. In addition, the committee gathers information and insights through discussions with stakeholders and experts. Where possible, the committee seeks to discuss the preliminary results of its assessments with the relevant collaboration partners, as we assume that they, too, are committed to responsible collaboration and to preventing or limiting negative societal impact. When preparing context assessments, the ACSC consults societal and academic experts on the specific context. The ACSC also regularly organises open consultation sessions for EUR staff and students to obtain feedback on its advice and activities.

The ACSC works as transparently as possible. The starting point is that all advice it issues is made public, unless there are compelling reasons in a specific case not to do so, in consultation with the Executive Board. An overview of the frameworks developed by the ACSC and completed assessments and advice can be found on the ACSC website.<sup>8</sup> In addition to its formal advice, the committee addresses questions from within the EUR community that do

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<sup>7</sup> Hierbij wordt gebruik gemaakt van een [assessment model](#) aan de hand waarvan informatie wordt verzameld en de risico's in kaart worden gebracht.

<sup>8</sup> [Adviescommissie Gevoelige Samenwerkingsverbanden \(ACGS\) | Erasmus University Rotterdam](#)

not necessarily require a formal advice. In such cases, the focus is more on offering practical support and guidance in identifying project-specific courses of action.

## 2.2 Composition

### 2.2.1 Members

The members of the ACSC have been appointed on the basis of their individual expertise and complementarity. Committee members participate in a personal capacity, based on their expertise. Although the committee was established by the Executive Board and participation takes place within working hours, the members are independent in their judgment and do not represent any constituency, such as specific interest groups, faculties or institutes.

When the ACSC was established, the intention was that three members would take a permanent seat on the committee, supplemented by two additional members with specific expertise related to the sensitive context submitted to the ACSC. The permanent members of the ACSC are:

- Prof. Dr Ruard Ganzevoort (chair) – Rector of the International Institute of Social Studies, Professor of Lived Religion and Development
- Prof. Dr Liesbeth Enneking – Professor of Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability at the Erasmus School of Law
- Prof. Dr Michal Onderco – Professor of International Relations at the Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences

When the ACSC was established in 2024, the committee had two additional members: Dr Ward Vloeberghs (Senior Lecturer in Political Science at Erasmus University College) and Dr Siobhán Airey (Assistant Professor of Innovation of Public Law at Erasmus School of Law). Early in 2025, the latter was succeeded by Prof. Dr Sanne Taekema (Professor of Theory and Methodology at Erasmus School of Law). At present, Ward Vloeberghs is the only additional member of the committee. In practice, his role within the committee is no different from that of the permanent members.

### 2.2.2 File coordinators and support

Currently, the ACSC is supported by three student assistants (previously four) from Academic Affairs (AZ) and an information specialist from the EUR Library.

Two student assistants and the information specialist primarily work on compiling the files that are created for each context and for each specific collaboration reviewed by the ACSC. They each work an average of eight hours per week and use a template based on the assessment model developed by the ACSC to organise and make the collected sources and information accessible to committee members. Where relevant, they attend ACSC meetings to present their findings and to answer the committee's questions. The third student assistant provides practical and substantive support to the committee more generally, including organising meetings and taking minutes, organising walk-in sessions and other events hosted by or on behalf of the ACSC, and making preparations in the process of publishing the committee's advice and other documents.

In addition, the ACSC is supported by a secretary working at the Strategy and Academic Affairs (AZ) department. The secretary, in consultation with the chair, prepares the agenda for committee meetings, oversees the correct wording of the minutes, supports the chair in

meetings with various bodies, actively participates in a national consultation with other universities and supervises the file coordinators in conducting research for the various files.

## 2.3 Overview of activities 2024–2025

### 2.3.1 Committee meetings

During 2024–2025, the ACSC met every two weeks for a meeting of approximately two and a half hours to discuss agenda items, files, advice and progress. Considerable time was also spent outside the regular meetings on preparing, discussing and drafting the assessment framework, the first context assessment and the advice on specific collaborations.

The chair, sometimes together with the secretary, also held ad hoc meetings with the Executive Board, the deans, staff from various faculties, the Committee of Experts on relations with the fossil fuel industry (Committee of Experts) and the Knowledge Security unit within the central administrative department. Meetings with faculties generally concerned clarification of requests for advice and draft recommendations. Meetings with the Committee of Experts and the Knowledge Security unit primarily served to coordinate and clarify processes.

### 2.3.2 Walk-in sessions

In 2024–2025, the ACSC organised four walk-in sessions in which interested members of the EUR community discussed the ACSC's working method and recommendations. The dialogue in these sessions was based on published documents and/or news items by or about the committee.

### 2.3.3 Published documents

Between June 2024 and December 2024, the committee developed an assessment framework, including an accompanying template for assessing files and handling requests for advice. In 2025, it prepared a context assessment of the first sensitive context submitted to it by the Executive Board: collaboration with partners in Israel/Palestine. In relation to that context, the committee also issued an interim recommendation (in 2024) and, in 2025, several recommendations on intended or existing collaborations with specific partners, most of which have now been published on the EUR website. In addition, it has informally responded to numerous questions about the assessment of concrete collaborations.

In line with the ACSC's aim of being as transparent as possible, the following documents are currently available on the EUR website:

- Framework ACSC 2024-06-11
- Context section – Collaborations with Academic Institutions in Israel and Palestine 01-04-2025
- Implementation guidance (operational framework) 2025-06-06
- Qualitative Assessment Model Sensitive Collaborations
- Recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Sensitive Collaborations, including full assessment per institution, 2025-05-26 (Bar-Ilan University, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and University of Haifa)

To date, the committee has prepared six partner assessments for the Executive Board or one of the deans. In addition, approximately twenty questions have been dealt with, usually

resulting in a short written or oral recommendation. Part of the advice has been incorporated into a practical guidance note by the committee on the collaborations submitted to it.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.3.4 Unpublished advice

As indicated, the ACSC has also issued several informal recommendations in response to incoming requests for advice. In many cases, these concerned advice on whether a particular collaboration should be regarded as institutional or not, or advice on collaborations that, for other reasons, did not fall within the ACSC's mandate. In addition, in several cases faculties decided, after consulting the ACSC, not to proceed with an intended collaboration, as a result of which there was no need anymore for (further) assessment by the ACSC. Finally, the committee has issued one formal advice that, for compelling reasons, has not been published on the website.

### 2.3.5 Other activities

In addition to the activities already mentioned, the ACSC undertook a variety of other activities in 2024–2025. Examples include a "stress test" of the draft assessment framework with critical thinkers from the EUR community, participation in an international workshop at Ghent University for members of similar committees at other Dutch and Flemish universities, presentations on the work of the committee at faculties and sister institutions, and the handling of two Freedom of Information (WOO) requests submitted in 2024 and 2025 following the ACSC's first (interim) recommendations on collaboration with partners in Israel/Palestine.

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<sup>9</sup> [2025-06-implementation-guidance-advisory-committee-sensitive-collaborations-v20](#)

# 3. Evaluation

## 3.1 Activities and support

### 3.1.1 Functioning of the Committee

In the first one and a half years of its existence, the ACSC has focused on concretising its role and mandate, in consultation with the Executive Board and the EUR community. Relevant activities in this respect included, among other things:

- developing an assessment framework
- deciding to focus on institutional collaborations
- developing a method and working procedure for collecting and assessing sources
- deciding to prepare a context assessment for each sensitive context as the basis for recommendations on specific collaborations in that context
- developing a fixed and logical structure for the recommendations
- developing a working method for communicating with the collaboration partners involved and with the EUR community about the recommendations

In 2025, the committee issued substantiated advice on collaborations with a number of specific partners, which were taken into account in decision-making by the Executive Board regarding these collaborations.

The committee is characterised by an open and constructive deliberation culture, in which different disciplinary and institutional perspectives are explicitly considered. Decision-making is based on consensus following careful preparation and weighing of relevant interests and viewpoints. The care with which the committee arrives at its assessments and advice benefits their substantive quality and increases their legitimacy and thus their support base. The downside is that this working method may sometimes lead to longer processing times when a full recommendation on a specific collaboration (or partner) is required. In general, drafting a context assessment is considerably more time consuming than issuing a concrete partner-level recommendation, which can usually be prepared within two weeks. Outside this, an initial informal assessment via, for example, email can often be provided quickly. For this reason, the committee aims to handle questions about collaborations that do not strictly require a formal assessment as informally as possible and to prioritise those collaborations that do require a formal assessment, taking into account the urgency and severity of potential risks. This underlines the importance of timely communication to the committee about intended collaborations, as this working method becomes difficult to sustain once all questions submitted are urgent.

Over the past one and a half years, the ACSC has also streamlined its internal working procedures, for example through clear agenda setting and task allocation between the committee and the chair. The latter is responsible, in addition to his substantive contribution within the committee, for internal communication with faculties and coordination with the Executive Board. The availability of administrative support makes an important contribution to the continuity and procedural entrenchment of the work. That said, the time required from committee members is relatively substantial: in addition to a biweekly two-and-a-half-hour meeting, time must be invested in drafting and aligning documents, consulting experts, responding to additional requests or alignment questions from within the organisation, and

maintaining an open dialogue with the EUR community. As most committee members are not compensated in working hours for their ACSC duties, this creates a high workload in addition to their regular responsibilities.

With a view to its external visibility and support for its recommendations, over the past one and a half years the committee has invested actively in building relationships with relevant stakeholders and in seeking ways to involve and inform the EUR community about its work. At the same time, the visibility of the committee's work beyond the administrative circuit requires continuous attention. Awareness of sensitive collaborations within EUR is still very limited. It has increased over the past one and a half years but has not yet reached the desired level. Outside the sensitive context(s) indicated by the Executive Board, the question whether a collaboration can responsibly be entered into is not asked as a matter of course. In addition, EUR staff often lack the tools and knowledge to make a fully informed assessment as to whether or not to enter into collaborations with partners in a sensitive context, and under what conditions. On top of this, scholars experience increasing pressure (and have ambitions) to internationalise and to acquire external funding for educational and research activities, which poses the risk that insufficient attention is paid to potential negative consequences of entering into collaborations for third parties and/or for EUR.

### 3.1.2 Support from Strategy and Academic Affairs

#### *Secretary*

Strategy and Academic Affairs (AZ) has made a secretary available to support the committee; the activities are listed in section 2.2.2. On average, the time spent amounts to 0.2 FTE (one day per week).

The secretary regards working for the ACSC as relevant and important because of the connection with (international) collaboration and partnership policy. The activities – and in particular the national-level coordination and exchanges with other universities (including Flemish partners) – are both instructive and challenging, given their political and societal impact and sensitivities. The international attention for “responsible and critical internationalisation” and “responsible science” underlines the necessity of having a committee such as the ACSC and of the work it performs. This aligns with the secretary's other responsibilities as senior policy adviser on internationalisation.

The committee and its support staff form a strong and expert team. However, cooperation with adjacent policy areas and the structural and sustainable embedding in the EUR organisation require attention to ensure a smooth and future-proof continuation.

#### *File coordinators*

The file coordinators experience their work for the ACSC as useful and interesting. They are positive about the guidance they receive, the opportunity to ask questions and the fact that they themselves learn a great deal from their work for the ACSC. They do, however, stress that it is highly desirable, wherever possible, to maintain continuity in the deployment of people on files relating to specific sensitive contexts. By working with the same people on a file over a longer period, previously acquired knowledge is retained, which benefits not only the quality of the work but also its efficiency. Considerable time is needed to familiarise new file coordinators with both the content of the files and the underlying assessment framework.

In addition, the file coordinators sometimes find it frustrating to read coverage on social media and in the press concerning (advice by the ACSC on) subjects they are working on or have worked on, particularly when that information is incomplete or biased. At the same time, they value the fact that they can discuss this among themselves and with committee members

when needed. They experience this low-threshold opportunity for reflection and support as important.

As regards the working environment, the file coordinators consider the Teams structure to function well. Documents are easy to find and much relevant information is stored centrally, which supports the development and maintenance of files. The joint meetings with the ACSC are also perceived as instructive and meaningful. These sessions provide insight into how the information collected by the coordinators is interpreted and weighed by the committee and contribute to a better understanding of the decision-making process and, consequently, the role played by the information they have compiled.

Finally, the file coordinators suggest organising the walk-in sessions as open dialogue sessions, in order to create a more accessible atmosphere. Abolishing the requirement to register in advance could, in their view, lower the threshold for participation and thereby increase engagement within the EUR community.

### 3.2 ACSC advisory procedure

The ACSC advisory procedure has already been discussed in part in this document. In addition, it can be noted that, now that the committee has further clarified its role and mandate, it is looking for ways to optimise its processes and working methods, also in light of the expectation that the number of sensitive collaborations on which it must advise will increase (see the outlook in Chapter 4). Concrete topics the committee is considering in this context include improving engagement and interaction with the EUR community around the ACSC's advisory role and shaping a process of hearing ("hoor en wederhoor") with the collaboration partners on whom the ACSC issues a recommendation.

A specific point of attention for the committee is reducing processing times. At the start of the ACSC's work, the lead time for partner assessments was several months. This was unsatisfactory but was related to the fact that the committee had to define, test and refine its assessment framework and working methods in the course of the first advisory procedures. In more recent assessments, the committee has attempted to shorten processing times by, among other things, clustering assessments, issuing interim recommendations, providing practical guidance instead of formal advice and, where possible and appropriate, issuing informal recommendations. For most advisory questions on which an informal recommendation or practical guidance can be provided, the processing time is limited to a few days.

The ACSC is also exploring the possibility of placing more emphasis in its recommendations on conditions under which collaboration can take place, in addition to or instead of issuing unqualified advice on whether or not to collaborate. The latter is particularly relevant to the second sensitive context submitted to the ACSC by the Executive Board (collaborations with partners in China, in particular the CSC), where the Executive Board has explicitly asked whether the ACSC can formulate conditions under which collaboration would be possible.

Furthermore, during the walk-in sessions it emerged that staff sometimes find it unclear whether, and if so which, formal steps must be taken following a decision by the Executive Board not to collaborate with a certain partner. This lack of clarity appears to stem in part from insufficient communication between deans and staff within faculties. In response, when publishing its most recent advice on collaboration with a number of specific partners, an attempt has been made by the ACSC to address this issue by providing an additional implementation guide alongside the Executive Board's decisions on (non-)collaboration with

these partners that were based on ACSC advice. The ACSC is exploring options for systematically including such implementation guidance also in its future assessments and advice.

This discussion touches on a broader question: how concrete should advice by ACSC be? Should it function as a detailed blueprint for the steps to be taken, or should there be room for faculty-level judgment and context-specific interpretation? In this respect, the committee considers it valuable to systematically engage in dialogue with the faculties requesting advice or to which the advice pertains. This can help to better understand the context and the interests at stake and to draw up recommendations that are more closely tailored to the specific situation.

In all this, it remains paramount that the ACSC operates as an independent committee and that it weighs relevant interests and formulates recommendations on the basis of its own assessment framework, including its context assessment and assessment model. The independent position of the committee, combined with the substantive expertise of its members, makes it possible to reach objective judgments on contexts and collaborations, without its assessments being influenced by interests at stake in a given collaboration. In cases where collaborations submitted to the ACSC do affect – directly or indirectly – the interests of a committee member, that member does not participate in the deliberations and assessment of the collaboration concerned.

The ACSC also attaches great importance to applying comparable standards to collaborations of different faculties with different partners in different contexts, in order to prevent arbitrariness. For this reason, the committee has developed its general, context-neutral assessment framework that forms the basis for all its recommendations: the Assessment Framework Sensitive Collaborations. In this way, consistency in ACSC assessments is ensured across EUR, including between different sensitive contexts and/or between different collaboration projects within the same context.

In the following sections, two of the topics mentioned here are discussed in more detail: information provision and communication (section 3.3) and institutional embedding (section 3.4).

## 3.3 Information gathering and communication

### 3.3.1 Registration and overview of collaborations

An important point of attention for the ACSC is obtaining a complete and up to date overview of all EUR collaboration partners.

One of the bottlenecks in the ACSC's work is the availability and timely provision of information on existing or forthcoming collaborations by the faculties. Drawing up a list of partners that need to be examined more closely by the ACSC is an important first step when investigating a new sensitive context. Collaborations requiring assessment come to the committee's attention in three ways: (1) as a result of information gathering within faculties by the committee's supporting policy staff; (2) through ad hoc requests from faculties; and (3) via signals from within the organisation. In practice, however, the internal information supply is not always complete or up to date, which limits the effectiveness of the assessment process.

Because faculties do not maintain a central overview of intended and ongoing collaborations entered into or initiated by staff members, some collaborations may not come into view and therefore remain unassessed. This fosters arbitrariness and hampers the development and consistent implementation of university-wide policy on responsible collaboration, as well as effective central risk management and allocation of responsibilities in this regard. It also impairs the effectiveness and processing times of the ACSC and places an unnecessary burden on support staff, who could spend their time more effectively on collecting information on sensitive contexts and compiling files for specific requests for advice.

To structurally improve the overview of collaborations at both faculty and central level, it is recommended to invest in data flows and information management concerning external partners. This concerns not only collaborations with national or international educational and research institutions in the context of education, research or engagement, but also collaborations with other societal partners such as governments and companies. In addition, supply chain partners outside the collaboration context, such as suppliers with potentially high-risk profiles, should also be considered. Alongside procurement and operations, the activities of EUR's affiliated legal entities should also be included, because EUR's core values, responsibilities, societal impact and reputation are at stake there just as much as in academic partnerships.

The committee regards mapping the full value chain of EUR, in combination with an analysis of where in that chain the most serious risks linked to EUR's activities and those of its value chain partners are located, as an important precondition for assuming societal responsibility and achieving a net positive societal impact by EUR.

In the most recent walk-in session on 26 June 2025, the question also arose whether the EUR community can exert influence on which partners are reviewed. This can certainly be considered, although the scope for doing so will likely be limited, given the need to prevent arbitrariness and the importance of preserving the ACSC's independent position and assessments.

### 3.3.2 Obtaining additional expertise

Because it is neither practically feasible nor, from the perspective of continuity, desirable for the committee to appoint two new members with specific expertise for each new sensitive context submitted to it, the committee has decided instead to draw on additional expertise when preparing a context assessment. In connection with the most recent sensitive context (collaborations with partners in China, in particular the CSC), two expert sessions were organised. These sessions demonstrated that this is a good alternative to the original plan of appointing additional committee members for each new context.

At the same time, structural availability of additional support for gathering information on sensitive contexts submitted to the ACSC and for compiling files for specific requests for advice remains of crucial importance.

### 3.3.3 Communication to internal parties

The ACSC attaches great importance to organising walk-in sessions in order to promote respectful dialogue within the EUR community about collaborations in sensitive contexts. Participants experience these walk-in sessions as highly useful and as a safe space for respectful, content-driven and interest-based discussion of sensitive issues. However, the ACSC has also found that internal communication about these sessions is often sub-optimal,

with the result that not everyone who might be interested is informed in time about upcoming sessions.

To improve communication around walk-in sessions, the ACSC will create its own mailing list(s) (per theme). Closer cooperation with EUR's internal communication departments is desirable in this respect. The subscription option for the mailing list will be added to the ACSC webpage on the EUR site.

### 3.3.4 Communication to external parties

As regards communication to external parties, it is the explicit choice of the ACSC, in light of the importance of transparency and accountability, to publish the assessment framework and all recommendations on the ACSC webpage, except in cases where there are compelling reasons not to do so. The ACSC's intention to play a more proactive role in communication with (intended) collaboration partners (including in the context of hearing and response) was already discussed in section 3.2. In this respect, the ACSC is still exploring how best to structure the dialogue with (intended) collaboration partners: by whom (Executive Board, ACSC chair or someone else), at what stage (early in the advisory process, when a draft recommendation is available, or only afterwards), and what precisely should be discussed (additional information or viewpoints, the extent to which the partner itself assumes responsibility for addressing identified risks, the feasibility of potential conditions for collaboration, etc.). It is important to arrive at a consistent working method that is applied in the same way for all (intended) collaboration partners in each sensitive context.

## 3.4 Embedding

### 3.4.1 Coordination with other bodies within EUR

#### *The Executive Board and the deans*

The chair of the ACSC is responsible for coordination with the Executive Board. This takes place structurally when the Executive Board submits a new sensitive context to the committee, and around the issuance of advice. In addition, ad hoc coordination sometimes takes place, for example in response to media coverage of EUR collaborations in sensitive contexts or during student protests on campus. From the ACSC's perspective, coordination with the Executive Board is satisfactory.

There is also coordination between the chair and the deans. This does not take the form of a structural consultation but involves ad hoc discussions concerning sensitive collaborations submitted (or not submitted) by the relevant faculties. From the ACSC's perspective, this coordination also functions satisfactorily.

#### *Knowledge Security Office*

At present, there is no structural or formal coordination between the ACSC and the Knowledge Security Office. However, at policy level there is occasional ad hoc consultation between the ACSC secretary and the knowledge security policy officer. From the ACSC's perspective, improved coordination with Knowledge Security is desirable, as the mandates of the ACSC and Knowledge Security overlap to some extent. Work is underway to address this (see the outlook in Chapter 4).

#### *Integral Safety Department*

There is ad hoc coordination between the ACSC and the Integral Safety Department, for example in relation to events organised by the committee, such as walk-in sessions. In addition, the Integral Safety Department keeps a watchful eye in the background for any online or other threats directed at committee members. At the start of the committee's work, the online profiles of committee members were reviewed for this purpose. Although committee members are sometimes (very) critically addressed by colleagues regarding ACSC recommendations, there have been no threats directed at committee members in the past period that required the intervention of the Integral Safety Department. From the ACSC's perspective, coordination with the Integral Safety Department functions satisfactorily.

#### ***Legal Affairs Department***

When necessary, the ACSC consults the Legal Affairs Department, for example to obtain information on the FLAT check and the extent to which its criteria overlap with those in the ACSC assessment framework. To promote more consistent, EUR wide implementation of decisionmaking frameworks related to responsible collaboration and, more broadly, responsible science, and also in light of risk management and reputation management, it seems sensible for the committee, together with Legal Affairs, to explore possibilities for incorporating, for example, a human rights clause or other conditions relating to responsible science into collaboration contracts and/or FLAT checks.

#### ***Marketing and Communications Department***

There is coordination between the ACSC and the Marketing and Communications Department regarding the website and regarding events organised by the committee. Coordination on the website functions well, but there is room for improvement in relation to coordination on the walk-in sessions. Communication about these sessions is not optimal, which means that interested parties are often not informed in a timely manner (or at all) that a session has been scheduled (see also 3.3).

#### ***Committee of Experts on Fossil Fuels***

While both committees were operating in parallel, there were periodic high level consultations between the chair of the ACSC and the chair of the Committee of Experts. In addition, when it submitted its assessment framework to the Executive Board, the Committee of Experts recommended that the framework should be evaluated after two years and indicated that it intended a role for the ACSC in this evaluation.

From the ACSC's perspective, coordination between the committees functioned satisfactorily. The ACSC is indeed prepared to play a role in the evaluation and/or implementation of the assessment framework for collaboration with the fossil fuel industry, as such collaborations also fall under the heading of "sensitive collaborations" and thus within the ACSC's mandate. The ACSC will further specify its potential contribution in this respect in early 2027 (see the outlook in Chapter 4).

#### ***Ethics committees***

At present, there is no coordination with faculty level ethics committees. This is, however, something to consider for the future because, depending on the specific assessment frameworks used by each faculty, there will likely be areas of overlap in mandates, for example concerning the question whether certain research is harmful to people, animals, the environment or the climate.

### **3.4.2 Broader integration in EUR policy and operations**

As already noted earlier in this evaluation, there is room for improvement, in the ACSC's view, regarding the policy integration of the ACSC, the issue of sensitive collaborations and the

assessment framework developed by the ACSC. The same holds true more generally for awareness within EUR of the concept of responsible collaboration and the considerations this requires when making concrete decisions on entering into collaborations.

As regards policy integration, one can, for example, look at EUR's mission/vision, which places strong emphasis on positive impact and engagement. In addition (or partly as a result), there is a lack of an overarching vision within EUR on the responsibility of the university and its staff (and possibly students) for the (actual or potential) negative impacts that collaborations with external partners may have on third parties. Furthermore, awareness within the EUR community that certain activities or collaborations may entail risks of involvement in human rights abuses or damage to the environment or climate – and that this sits uneasily with societal expectations that EUR acts responsibly when it comes to entering into collaborations in sensitive contexts, practices and promotes responsible science and prevents negative impact – appears to be limited.

Among those who are aware of this, there is often uncertainty as to what precisely this responsibility entails, for example concerning decisions on whether or not to enter into specific collaborations, or on setting conditions to prevent certain risks from materialising.

The operational embedding is also suboptimal, both centrally and at faculty level. There is often limited awareness that collaborations may entail risks beyond the sphere of knowledge security and should therefore prompt questions – and that such questions can (or, in the case of sensitive contexts designated as such by the Executive Board, must) be submitted to the ACSC.

To enhance awareness and communication about the ACSC advisory process, the committee intends to maintain active contact with research and education policy officers within faculties. In this way, it can be verified in good time whether the possibility or obligation to seek advice, as well as the content and implications of ACSC recommendations, are sufficiently clear, and any questions or misunderstandings can be addressed at an early stage. It is also considered desirable that faculties involved in an advisory procedure, even before a recommendation is formally completed, establish contact at administrative level with their counterparts at the relevant external partner to initiate a dialogue on the importance EUR attaches to responsible collaboration. This not only contributes to transparency but also provides an opportunity to obtain additional information through existing relationships about the nature of the collaboration, potential risks and the possibilities for risk mitigating measures.

As noted above, there may also (potentially) be limited overlap between the ACSC's remit and that of faculty ethics committees, EUR's knowledge security policy, frameworks concerning doctoral research (PhD projects) and the (now dissolved) Committee of Experts on collaboration with the fossil fuel industry. As already discussed, it is desirable – also in the interest of policy coherence and clarity for the EUR community (including policy staff at different faculties) – to clarify how the various issues, committees and assessment criteria interrelate. Finally, as previously mentioned, there are regular calls for greater guidance on the practical implementation of ACSC recommendations – what exactly people should do.

There is also a need for instruments that help individual (policy) staff to understand what decisions they must take themselves and when they should seek advice from one or more of the above-mentioned committees. In this context, the ACSC is working on a decision tree that should provide clarity on these issues. The ACSC believes it would be desirable for this decision tree eventually to be developed into an online tool that informs EUR (policy) staff about what responsible collaboration entails and enables them to make basic assessments in this regard themselves.

### 3.4.3 Coordination with other universities

At administrative level, periodic national consultations are held; these are attended by representatives of the relevant committees of all universities, as well as a representative of Universities of the Netherlands (UNL). In these meetings, developments, case studies, publications and board decisions are shared and discussed (under strict Chatham House Rules). As a result, universities are well informed about what is happening at other institutions and what recommendations are being developed. Annex I provides an overview of approaches to sensitive collaborations at different Dutch universities. This overview shows that several Dutch universities (including Maastricht, Leiden, Tilburg, the University of Amsterdam and VU Amsterdam) have adopted an approach similar to EUR's, with frameworks, guidelines, assessments and committees focused on the broader context of sensitive collaborations and risks in the areas of human rights and the environment in different contexts.

Over the past year, there have also been two exchanges with participants from Flemish universities and VLIR (the Flemish counterpart to UNL). In these exchanges, case-based discussions were held on the development and communication in relation to assessments by the different committees. At the end of November, a workshop took place in which representatives of committees comparable to the ACSC from all Dutch and several Belgian universities came together to explain, compare and, where possible, streamline their approaches, with a view to developing a draft human rights policy for universities.

These meetings are regarded as valuable, and universities draw heavily on each other's experiences and insights based on concrete examples. The exchanges provide support and clarification in relation to the complex processes (organisational, operational and communication-related) that the various committees face, both internally and externally. The intention is to organise such an exchange twice a year (with a broad focus on, inter alia, human rights, knowledge security, sensitive collaborations and defence), each time supported by UNL and VLIR.

# 4. Outlook

## 4.1 ACSC Activity plan for 2026 and beyond

### 4.1.1. Existing Sensitive Contexts

There are various activities related to the existing sensitive contexts that the ACSC will continue to address in 2026.

- The existing sensitive contexts regarding Israel/Palestine and China will continue to require attention, with requests for advice on new collaborations and possibly also on existing collaborations that were not yet on the radar.
- In addition, existing contexts and recommendations must be periodically evaluated to determine whether the risks remain the same and whether a reassessment is necessary.
- To date, in sensitive contexts, the focus has been exclusively on collaborations with academic partners; it is unclear whether EUR is also affiliated with non-academic partners, such as companies, within these contexts through collaborations or in other ways. Such non-academic collaborations and commercial ties, for example through procurement relationships, will also need to be identified, as the same responsibility applies to EUR with respect to these types of collaborations and connections as with regard to collaborations with academic institutions.
- In addition, the ACSC has so far primarily focused on collaborations and connections of the EUR as a public legal entity, while there are also closely affiliated legal entities such as RSM BV, the Erasmus Trust Fund, Erasmus MC, EUR Holding, Erasmus Enterprise, and various EUR foundations. These affiliated legal entities must also be included in the assessment, whereby it is important to note that clear international standards apply specifically to private-law legal entities in the area of value chain responsibility in the form of the UN Guiding Principles and the OECD Guidelines.

### 4.1.2 New sensitive contexts

There are various activities related to other or new (potentially) sensitive contexts that the ACSC will also need to examine in 2026 or thereafter, either at the request of the Executive Board, at the request of deans or research groups, or on its own initiative. This underscores the importance of obtaining a more complete picture of all collaborations that may entail relevant risks in the areas of human rights, safety, ethics, sustainability, academic freedom, our fundamental values, and our reputation beyond the sensitive contexts identified as such by the Executive Board.

- It will be necessary to examine whether, in addition to the current ones, there are other sensitive contexts on which the EUR should focus, partly also from the perspective of non-discrimination. To this end, a systematic inventory is needed of (potential) negative impacts within the EUR's value chain, in which the various risks are identified, assessed for severity and probability, and prioritized. This will then also make it possible to pursue a more preventive policy focused on avoiding (involvement in) risks, rather than reacting after the fact when negative effects and/or reputational damage have already occurred. Where potentially serious risks are identified, an assessment must be conducted based on the existing assessment framework for sensitive collaborations, whether or not based on a prior context assessment, and measures to prevent or mitigate risks. Other policy

frameworks, such as the assessment framework for collaboration with the fossil fuel industry, may also play a role in this. Where these frameworks fall short as a basis for assessing new sensitive contexts, they will need to be adapted or expanded.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Practical Implementation

In addition, in 2026 the ACSC will devote more attention to the practical implementation of its recommendations.

- This could include further clarifying concepts such as “institutional collaboration” and “sensitive context,” and updating the Assessment Framework for Sensitive Collaborations based on evolving insights.
- Additionally, this could involve further elaboration of potential conditions and risk mitigation measures for collaborations in (potentially) high-risk contexts, whereby the range of possible actions under consideration includes but is not limited to the prior inclusion of contractual conditions. In addition to this, it will be necessary to elaborate on how conditions or other measures can be monitored for effectiveness, and when and how to escalate to more stringent measures.
- Furthermore, we will examine how the previously mentioned decision tree for sensitive collaborations can be made as comprehensive as possible and, if necessary, further developed into a web-based tool. It remains important that EUR staff members, in the event of questions, doubts, or a negative outcome from the decision tree, can easily reach out to the ACSC and do so in a timely manner, so that the ACSC has time to provide guidance. The general mindset within the EUR community should be: ‘when in doubt, reach out’.
- In addition, sufficient attention must continue to be paid to internal communication regarding sensitive collaborations. This also includes (continuing) to involve the EUR community in identifying sensitive contexts and reflecting on the ACSC’s advice. The ACSC is currently compiling a mailing list to keep the EUR community informed about the drop-in sessions.
- Finally, it is important to consider how the ACSC’s assessment and advice, as well as broader concepts such as responsible collaboration, responsible science, and the prevention of negative impacts, can be better integrated into policy and existing EUR processes, including (but not limited to) the FLAT check.

## 4.2 Improvement Actions by the Committee

In this phase, the improvement actions are primarily aimed at optimizing the ACSC’s advisory procedure; in 2027, the focus of the improvement actions will shift more toward areas for improvement related to content and other matters.

Based on the insights from Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.1, it is proposed that the ACSC’s advisory procedure be more explicitly structured into a number of fixed steps, thereby ensuring consistency and transparency toward the faculties and the broader EUR community:

1. Request for advice from the Executive Board or a faculty, or an initiative-based advisory opinion from the ACSC;
2. Meeting with the requester to obtain further information about the collaboration to be assessed;

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<sup>10</sup> [Aanbiedingsbrief en annex.pdf](#)

3. Collection of information from external sources by the case preparers;
4. Preparation of a context assessment if one does not yet exist, including the solicitation of additional expertise regarding the most significant risks;
5. Preparation and sharing of the initial draft recommendation with the Executive Board or the relevant faculty, during which it is discussed whether and how the draft recommendation can be shared with the external collaboration partner;
6. Refining the draft recommendation based on received input;
7. Drafting and sharing the final recommendation with the Executive Board;
8. Publication of the final recommendation on the ACSC website;
9. Publication of the Executive Board's decision based on the ACSC recommendation;
10. Drafting and distributing an implementation guide by the ACSC in relation to the Executive Board's decision.

An important focus in this process is the connection with the university community. The extent to which recommendations and decisions are understood, supported, and implemented within faculties and departments is essential to the effectiveness of the ACSC's work.

## 4.3 Necessary Prerequisites

Based on the evaluation in Chapter 3 and the outlook and improvement actions in sections 4.1 and 4.2, the ACSC has formulated several recommendations for the future regarding continuity, further development, and tools. These are outlined below.

### 4.3.1 Continuity

#### ***Structural embedding of the ACSC***

Carefully reviewing EUR's existing partnerships takes time. In addition, published recommendations will need to be reassessed, and it is expected that new requests for advice will be added. This makes the structural embedding of the ACSC an important focus in the current phase of the committee's work within EUR. This touches on multiple aspects.

#### ***Time compensation for committee members***

A general point of consideration regarding the structural integration of the ACSC concerns the recognition and appreciation of the work performed by the committee members. The importance of having the committee and the work it does is evident and is generally recognized, both by the board and management as well as by the EUR community. However, for the continuity of the committee, it is crucial to take a realistic view of the considerable workload associated with (1) file creation, in-depth review, and analysis; (2) the preparation, discussion, drafting, and, where relevant, monitoring and updating of assessment frameworks, context assessments, formal and informal recommendations, decision trees, etc.; (3) the periodic consultations on ongoing matters and the associated preparations, and (4) the other activities aimed at raising awareness, fostering dialogue, and implementing responsible collaboration within the EUR community. Currently, for one of the members of the committee, the relevant faculty recognizes a time commitment of 0.1 FTE within their duties. Full compensation for the time commitment that committee members devote to their work for the ACSC is a point of attention and must be coordinated between the Executive Board and the faculties. This is also important in the context of recognizing and valuing tasks and activities that are essential to the organization as a whole.

#### ***Revised Committee Structure***

In addition, questions have been raised regarding the committee's current composition. Until early September 2025, the committee consisted of a chair, two permanent members, two additional members, and a secretary. Now that one of the additional members has indicated that she can no longer fulfil her role due to a lack of time in combination with her other responsibilities, the question arises as to whether the composition of the committee should be revised. The ACSC proposes, partly in view of the time commitment of the members to the committee's work, to appoint the current additional member as a permanent member. In addition, it is proposed to seek case-specific expertise within and, where relevant, outside the EUR community.

#### ***Continued support from case file compilers***

Drafting context assessments and draft recommendations and discussing them in committee meetings takes the most time, and this requires carefully compiled case files based on the established assessment framework. In this regard, the support provided by the student assistants and the EUR Library information specialist has proven essential in recent months. They assist with dossier compilation and analysis and ensure that the ACSC can focus on drafting the recommendations based on the gathered information. Ensuring their role is structurally embedded within the ACSC's work process is of great importance for the continuity of the ACSC's work.

#### **4.3.2 Development of a broader policy framework**

EUR currently lacks a broader policy framework that could serve as the basis for raising awareness and fostering the implementation within the EUR community of respect for human rights, responsible collaboration, responsible science, and the prevention and mitigation of negative impacts / the achievement of a net positive impact. However, the risk of EUR's involvement in human rights violations by collaboration partners and/or other types of (potential) negative consequences of collaborations constitutes an important component of the assessment framework developed by the ACSC. Developing a human rights or high-risk policy that applies to all EUR collaborations with partners at home and abroad, regardless of whether it concerns a "sensitive context" designated as such by the Executive Board, would be of added value to the EUR. The main reasons for this are: 1) that it reflects the importance EUR attaches to "Erasmian values," including social engagement and global citizenship; 2) that it prevents reputational damage to EUR due to involvement in human rights violations or other negative impacts through partners or projects; and 3) that it creates a "level playing field" (in the sense of uniform standards/criteria) for collaborations between various EUR faculties and with partners in different countries.

Several other universities have already developed a university-wide human rights framework, policy, or guidelines regarding sensitive or international collaboration, or are in the process of doing so. This applies, among others, to Maastricht, Leiden, Tilburg, the UvA, and the VU, as well as the Flemish universities that have joined forces in this regard through the VLIR (see the overview of comparable initiatives in the appendix).<sup>11 12 13</sup>

In line with this, the ACSC underscores the importance of mapping out the entire value chain of the EUR in combination with an analysis of where in that chain the most serious risks lie that are associated with the activities of the EUR and its value chain partners. This concerns

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<sup>11</sup> [Mensenrechtenbeleid – Universiteit Gent](#)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/sites/default/files/download/Mensrechtelijk%20Afwegingkader%20Nederlands.pdf>; [Assessment Frameworks for Sensitive Partnerships - Assessment Frameworks for Sensitive Partnerships - Maastricht University](#)

<sup>13</sup> [https://vlir.be/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/20191023\\_Rapport-ad-hoc-werkgroep-Mensenrechten\\_DEF.pdf](https://vlir.be/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/20191023_Rapport-ad-hoc-werkgroep-Mensenrechten_DEF.pdf)

both the negative impacts resulting from activities carried out by the EUR or its staff themselves, as well as the negative impacts associated with the activities of collaboration partners and other EUR supply chain partners (including, for example, through procurement). In this context, the activities of public and private legal entities affiliated with EUR must also be taken into account because, just as with academic activities and partnerships, the core values, responsibility, societal impact, and reputation of EUR are at stake. Such a risk assessment forms the basis for the EUR's commitment to social responsibility / responsible science. Furthermore, it enables the implementation of a proactive policy aimed at preventing (involvement in) negative impacts and achieving a (demonstrable) net positive societal impact.

#### 4.3.3 Tools

Finally, the ACSC advocates investing in the development of practical tools, such as web-based tools, that can be used to clarify for individual (policy) staff members what responsible collaboration entails and that enable them to make basic assessments in this regard on their own and, in the case of more complex assessments, to determine where they can turn for support.

## Annex 1 Comparison with other universities

University	Relevant frameworks, guidelines or policy	Independent advisory committee	Scope
University of Amsterdam (UvA)	UvA has had an ethical assessment framework for several years, which is gradually being expanded. See the UvA website for the guideline, questionnaires and decision tree.	Advisory Committee on Collaboration with Third Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• risks of contributing to armed conflict or human rights abuses</li> <li>• risks relating to knowledge security or misuse of knowledge for undesirable military or terrorist purposes</li> <li>• risks of contributing to irreversible harmful impacts on the environment, biodiversity, human health, cultural heritage or animal welfare</li> </ul>
Utrecht University (UU)	Knowledge Security Assessment Framework Assessment Framework Fossil Industry Integral Assessment Framework for Research	UU is establishing a committee to develop a country-neutral assessment framework for collaborations with organisations in countries involved in armed conflict, human rights abuses or violations of international law.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• risks relating to knowledge security</li> <li>• risks of contributing to climate change</li> <li>• risks of contributing to human rights abuses, armed conflicts or violations of international law</li> </ul>
Tilburg University	Human Rights Assessment Framework Guidance on Suspected Human Rights Abuses in Collaborations Planned: Assessment Framework for Collaborations	Advisory Committee on Collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collaborations</li> <li>• knowledge security</li> <li>• sustainability</li> <li>• human rights</li> </ul>
University of Groningen (RUG)	At least a knowledge security checklist (linked to the Knowledge Security Advisory Team), which is not accessible externally. <sup>14</sup> Little public information is available on RUG's assessment framework.	Advisory Team Knowledge Security and Committee on Sensitive Partnerships	-

<sup>14</sup> Update over deelname REACT-project | Nieuws | Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

University	Relevant frameworks, guidelines or policy	Independent advisory committee	Scope
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU)	Assessment Framework on Human Rights and Armed Conflicts	Advisory Committee on International Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>risks relating to human rights abuses</li> <li>risks relating to contributions to armed conflicts</li> </ul>
Radboud University (RU)	Assessment Framework of the Advisory Committee on Collaborations	Advisory Committee on Collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>serious and systematic human rights abuses</li> <li>research integrity</li> </ul>
Maastricht University	Human Rights Due Diligence Assessment Framework Assessment Framework for International Collaboration and Knowledge Security Transition to a Fossil-Free Society	Human Rights Due Diligence Assessment Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>human rights</li> <li>knowledge security</li> <li>dual-use</li> <li>fossil fuel industry</li> </ul>
Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e)	Since July 2025, TU/e has been working on establishing an expert committee on Sensitive Collaborations, chaired by Prof. Dr Niek Lopes Cardozo. This committee is expected to be in place by the end of 2025 and will develop an assessment framework.	Advisory Committee on Sensitive Collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>international sanctions</li> <li>systematic and serious human rights abuses</li> <li>violations of TU/e's fundamental values</li> </ul>
University of Twente (UT)	Since 2024, a temporary working group established by the Executive Board has been working on an assessment framework for ethical and moral issues. <sup>15</sup> This working group will become a permanent committee around the end of 2025. <sup>16</sup> It is unclear whether the framework has not yet been completed or is completed but not publicly available online.	Strategic Committee on Institutional Collaboration, Ethics and Moral Dilemmas (SC EMD) Advisory Committee Moral Dilemmas (ACMD)	–
Delft University of Technology (TU Delft)	Moral Deliberation Room Fossil Industry Moral Deliberation Room Knowledge Security	Moral deliberation room on various issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fossil fuel industry</li> <li>knowledge security</li> </ul>

<sup>15</sup> UT start in conflictgebieden alleen nog samenwerkingen die bijdragen aan vrede en bescherming mensenrechten

<sup>16</sup> UT en Israël: hoe zit het met de banden? - U-Today