

**1**

Dear members and friends of ELIT,

Since our Early Stage Researchers' conference will primarily focus on research, I would like to talk to you about ELIT from the perspective of the coordinating team. To start, I would like to use the slide I used in the kick-off meeting on March 23, 2020, an evocative date that coincided with the beginning of the pandemic.

**2**

That kick-off meeting, which had been scheduled as an in-person event, was moved to Zoom. This change anticipated many other changes to our professional and personal lives during the following months.

In addition to the difficulties caused by the pandemic, we had to face other problems, such as: defection of partners and ESRs, health problems, changes of tutors, and administrative problems. Often I thought about how differently this network would have worked in the absence of a pandemic. The conclusion I have come to is that, although the pandemic affected all aspects of academic life over the past few years, it did not hinder the goal I had in mind when I wrote the proposal: to put the empirical and interdisciplinary study of literature on the map of the European Academy. In fact, my main aim was (and I quote from my submitted proposal):

**3**

*The Empirical Study of Literature Innovative Training Network (ELIT) is an EU network whose mission is to provide a Joint/Double Doctorate level training programme on literary reading in the digital age.*

Since the main aim of ELIT was to 'institutionalise' empirical research in the field of literature within European universities, the task of the coordinating team was also well defined.

The main aim of the coordinating team was to implement the grant agreement signed by all beneficiaries that forms the basis of our ESRs' doctoral programme.

**4**

Our coordination task was not easy because, as you know, ELIT consisted of 10 beneficiaries (now 8) and 13 partners. But our interlocutors were not only the partners but also the PhD students and the European community through the project officers.

The greatest difficulty was to mediate between all these people and institutions with different perspectives, needs and problems.

## 5

The grant agreement, signed by the 10 beneficiary universities of ELIT, committed institutions and tutors to several obligations, including:

- offering a teaching and training programme;
- paying the salaries and research of the ESRs;
- supervising their thesis work;
- and contributing to the network's institutional and dissemination activities.

As our reports show, all the commitments made have been fulfilled.

## 6

From the many teaching and networking activities organised by ELIT, I'd like to highlight the following:

- 3 Training schools;
- 3 Seminars;
- 6 Workshops (+ additional training and workshop activities);
- and 4 General Assembly + Supervisory Board.

The activities open to the public were also attended by many young researchers who are not members of ELIT, demonstrating a growing interest in our research. As previously stated, the activities planned by the network included academic and non-academic partners and doctoral students.

## 7

The PhD students who entered the network were also subject to its regulations. By joining ELIT, each ESR has committed her/himself to:

- following educational and training activities;
- participating in institutional and dissemination activities;
- spending 12 months in the foreign partner institution (all our PhDs are co-tutelle/joint agreements);
- participating in a 2-month internship with a non-academic partner;
- and writing the doctoral thesis.

As you can see, the commitments made concerned both the network as a whole and the relationships between the institutions, mentors, and ESRs, as well as the obligations towards the European community that funded this network.

## 8

Let me say a few words about the institutions that created ELIT, which are expressions of the European university system. Not far from here is the University of Bologna, active since the 11th century and considered by many to be the oldest university in the world still in operation today. To mention another historical fact, the university also produced the world's first female graduate.

The university has always been a place of dialogue, production, and exchange of knowledge. Universities have produced many social and scientific innovations of our society. At key points in our history, even at dramatic moments, it has played a fundamental political role. This is why we should be proud that we can participate in this institution and that ELIT is a product of this system.

Working at a university is not just about doing research. It means, first and foremost, participating in an institution where many people with different abilities and conditions work and live. It means acknowledging these diversities and their different roles. Working at a European university also means being aware of its enormous cultural richness and history, and seeing diversity as an asset in order to deal with it with the necessary flexibility. These premises and conditions have created a unique place of freedom that enriches our society and that the whole world envies.

## 9

For everyone participating in this noble institution, there is the need to adjust her or his behavior to its written and often unwritten regulations. For example communication plays a major role in academia, and it is necessary to be familiar with its oral and written media, from the writing of a paper or an email to a lecture in class or a talk at a conference or in front of a general audience.

As science takes place mainly at universities and institutions, scientific reputation is equivalent to academic reputation. One of the first rules to construct it is: "Do not ignore people." Scientific reputation is not just about the quality of research, but also about the ability to live in this specific environment by respecting its other members, its agreements, and fulfilling one's duties towards the community.

As I have before me the young researchers of ELIT for the last time, I would like to wish them well in their careers. I wish them not only high-profile research, as I am sure they will be able to do, but a placement in an institution where they can make their own contribution, which they can enrich with both their research and their broad participation.

## 10

Before concluding, let me make two personal notes, one about the past and the other about the future. First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to those who contributed to ELIT, especially those who helped to write the project and supported it even after it was initially rejected. I am thinking foremost about Zuzana Petrová, Anne Mangel, Alessio Lorenzi, and Paul Sopcak. Without them, we would not be here now. I would also like to thank Simone Rebori and Anja Meyer, who made it possible to implement the ELIT actions of the coordinating team I've just described.

## 11

As for my future, I'm moving from the coordination of ELIT to the coordination of a project in my department named "Inclusive Humanities: Development Perspectives in Research and Teaching of Foreign Languages and Literatures" (2023–2027). In this new project, I'll have the opportunity to cultivate those values of the European university, such as inclusion, diversity, and meritocracy I've just mentioned.

Massimo Salgaro

Coordinator of ELIT

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' followed by a long horizontal stroke that curves upwards at the end.