

Prof. Orla Feely
President
CESAER
Leuven, Belgium

25th August 2025

RE: Motivation Letter

Dear Prof. Feely,

It is an honor to submit my candidacy for the CESAER Board of Directors, offering an opportunity to share not only my professional milestones, but also my steadfast commitment to advancing science, innovation, and societal impact through collaborative leadership in Europe.

As the Rector of Istanbul Technical University (ITU), an engaged and long-standing member of CESAER, it is a meaningful opportunity for me to connect with you at this critical juncture for European science and higher education. Throughout my career, including my tenure as former President of TÜBİTAK, Vice President of the Council of Higher Education in Türkiye, I have continued to serve as, as a member of the United Nations Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries (UNTB) Council, and in my second term as Chair of the Board of WAITRO. I have had the privilege of serving at the intersection of research, policy, and education in divergent domains. Each of these roles has sharpened my capacity to build bridges across institutions, disciplines, and nations, in pursuit of sustainable, inclusive, and science-driven transformation.

I am deeply committed to the opportunity to serve on the CESAER Board of Directors, contributing to a shared European mission that fully aligns with my vision for empowering universities of science and technology to act as catalysts for resilience, sustainability, and excellence. From strengthening research ecosystems across Europe to amplifying the influence of universities in shaping global policies, I am dedicated to advancing the bold ambitions set out in the CESAER 2030 Strategy.

Building Synergies Between My Experience and the CESAER Vision

My academic and administrative path has always been guided by the conviction that science must serve society and that universities must lead this transformation. This belief has shaped my leadership roles in Türkiye and on international platforms, enabling me to translate scientific excellence into systemic change.

During my term as President of TÜBİTAK, I spearheaded national R&D transformation by integrating mission-oriented approaches, fostering open innovation ecosystems, and aligning scientific funding with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through cross-sector collaborations, we achieved unprecedented participation of early-career researchers and SMEs, while launching Türkiye's first challenge-driven research programs, principles that resonate deeply with CESAER's ambition to empower science and technology universities for societal resilience.

At WAITRO, as the first elected President from a European country, I coordinated over 160 research and technology organizations (RTOs) worldwide, building bridges between knowledge producers and technology-needy regions. The emphasis on equity, multilateralism, and co-creation aligns closely with CESAER's commitment to inclusive excellence and global impact.

In earlier roles, including Vice President of the Council of Higher Education and Vice Rector of Sabancı University, I led reforms in graduate education and interdisciplinary research strategies, fostering environments where science, policy, and entrepreneurship interact fluidly. These experiences have not only refined my strategic governance capabilities, but also my belief in universities as living labs for innovation and social progress.

From academic diplomacy to science-based policy design, from fostering cross-border alliances to elevating young talent, I bring a deeply integrated perspective that matches the **scale, urgency, and inspiration of CESAER 2030**. I am eager to bring this experience into action in collaboration with member institutions to shape a future where European universities stand as beacons of excellence, sustainability, and transformation.

Shared Values and Vision for Europe's Future

I have closely followed CESAER's recent efforts, including its leadership in consolidating 58 science and technology universities across 28 countries and the launch of the "Shape Knowledge Societies in Europe and beyond for a sustainable future" campaign. These initiatives illustrate a proactive and visionary governance approach, demonstrating that CESAER is not only setting ambitious goals but actively moving toward their realization. I was particularly impressed by CESAER's active role in aligning university infrastructure initiatives with the European Green Deal, as highlighted in recent Board policy papers on hydrogen and circular economy, demonstrating a concrete transition from strategy to sustainable implementation. These actions show both foresight and courage that are qualities inspiring me to contribute. Europe's future depends on how boldly we invest in knowledge, how inclusively we collaborate, and how fearlessly we reimagine the role of science in society. These are not abstract ideals, rather, they are shared commitments I have long upheld in both national and international roles.

My work has always centered around promoting scientific freedom, fostering inclusive participation, and aligning research with societal needs. Whether designing open-access innovation platforms or leading national science policy, I have advocated the values at the heart of Europe's research mission, which are collaboration across borders, excellence without elitism, and knowledge in service of people.

As the rector of ITU, a deeply rooted institution with a history of over 250 years, I bring a perspective rooted in interregional dialogue, global south engagement, and the strategic integration of education, research infrastructure, and innovation ecosystems. These elements are vital for extending Europe's leadership far beyond its borders.

As a founding member of the EELISA European University Alliance (European Engineering Learning Innovation and Science Alliance), Istanbul Technical University (ITU) plays a key role in reimagining the future of higher education in Europe. Building on its long-standing academic excellence and societal engagement, ITU advances transnational collaboration in higher education through developing innovative formats such as joint degrees, micro-credentials, and challenge-based learning. By co-leading actions on the development of an innovative learning ecosystem, ITU contributes to shaping models that bridge education, research, and society to address global challenges, including the twin green and digital transitions, while nurturing the talent Europe needs for a sustainable and competitive future.

On 17–19 November 2025, EELISA's grand meetings, including the Governing Board meeting, will convene in Istanbul. On this occasion, I will assume the chairmanship of the Governing Board for a six-month term. This presidency signals ITU's strong commitment to steering EELISA's collective ambition and to reinforcing the transformative role of European universities as drivers of talent development, sustainability, resilience, and global competitiveness.

Looking ahead, the realization of the CESAER 2030 goals will depend on how swiftly and collaboratively we translate shared ambitions into action. This means systematically embedding open science practices, such as FAIR data, transparent publishing, and curriculum integration, in line with the EU's revised Charter for Access to Research Infrastructures. It means strengthening the sustainability and resilience of research facilities, by adopting long-term investment planning models like those spearheaded by UKRI for 2030. And it requires ensuring equitable access to innovation, through blended public-private financing, SME partnerships, and scaling early-career researcher support programs. On top of that, universities must improve financial governance and crisis preparedness, deploying diversified income streams and robust budgeting frameworks.

CESAER is not just a network, it is a platform to shape a shared future. I am ready to contribute with the urgency, clarity, and collaborative drive this mission demands. From co-developing sustainability strategies, to modernizing financial frameworks, to mentoring the next generation, I stand prepared not merely as a representative of my country or institution but as a dedicated partner in realizing CESAER's bold 2030 ambitions.

ITU's Strategic Contribution to CESAER's Mission

As a leading research university of science and technology, ITU is fully aligned with CESAER's Strategy 2030 priorities, advancing science and technology for societal benefit, fostering institutional autonomy, and reinforcing collective capacity. ITU's governance model, research leadership, and international partnerships have consistently demonstrated our ability to deliver tangible impact in these areas.

ITU's strong track record in Erasmus+ (with the highest programme budget in Türkiye, 340+ inter-institutional agreements, and over 800 annual participants) positions us to help CESAER realize its vision for the next generation of mobility as a driver of research–education–innovation integration. Similarly, our Horizon Europe leadership in high-impact fields such as quantum energy systems, wearable robotics, carbon capture, and marine pollution aligns closely with CESAER's commitment to frontier science, digital transformation, and sustainability. We bring both scale and strategic relevance to collaborative projects, ensuring that outcomes directly support Europe's competitiveness and societal resilience.

With initiatives such as large-scale EU-funded clean energy and environmental innovation projects, ITU actively contributes to the green transition. Our strengths in cyber resilience, dual-use innovation, and secure data infrastructures directly support CESAER's ambitions in the digital domain and Europe's strategic autonomy. By fostering cross-sector partnerships and anchoring our initiatives in societal impact, we aim to help CESAER not only close the innovation gap but also to reinforce its position as a leading voice in the European Research Area.

ITU also brings a powerful contribution, a rich technology ecosystem exemplified by the 300+ tech firms and performance-driven startup infrastructure of ITU ARI Teknokent. ITU's cutting-edge cybersecurity and aeronautics labs paired with its national TR-CERT partnership provide concrete models for secure, sustainable, and globally integrated research infrastructure. Meanwhile, Türkiye's rapidly expanding R&D landscape (now ranked 37th in the Global Innovation Index) with over 80 techno parks and 6,000 R&D firms, positions us to facilitate south-north and east-west engagement, bringing emerging economies into the heart of innovation consortia. These strengths can directly support CESAER's goals, namely open science adoption, sustainability in infrastructure, innovation access, and financial resilience.

A Future We Can Shape Together

If selected as a member of the CESAER Board of Directors, this will not be just a title, but a mission: to help position Europe's universities of science and technology as engines of inclusive growth, radical innovation, and global sustainability. This is a moment not just to reflect, but to build a future where universities are not only knowledge producers but solution architects, innovation incubators, and living laboratories for a better society.

With deep respect for the progress already made and full commitment to the road ahead, I am eager to bring my experience, energy, and collaborative mindset to serve this shared vision. Together, we can empower universities to become more accessible in R&D, more agile in innovation, more productive in international collaboration, and more committed than ever to the next generation.

I am ready to stand beside my peers as a representative of Türkiye and ITU as well as a partner in shaping a Europe where knowledge has no boundaries, science serves people, and every student, researcher, and institution has the tools to thrive.



I hope my experience is not only aligned with CESAER's strategic direction but also uniquely positions me to contribute effectively to the Board's role in shaping transformative agendas across member institutions. Thank you for considering this application. I look forward to the opportunity to contribute actively and meaningfully to CESAER's mission and future.

Best regards,



Prof. Dr. Hasan Mandal
Rector