

Louvain-la-Neuve, 27 August 2025

Dear Members of CESAER General Assembly,

I am honored to be a candidate for the CESAER board of directors. This is a wonderful opportunity for me and UCLouvain to actively contribute to shaping research, education, and innovation in science and technology through the CESAER network.

UCLouvain has a 600-year history. Since about 50 years, the former University of Louvain has been divided into two universities within Belgium's French- and Flemish-speaking higher education systems: UCLouvain and KU Leuven, respectively. UCLouvain is a comprehensive university whose strong science and technology sector is deeply linked to both the social sciences and health sciences sectors. This connection is a key enabler of interdisciplinary research, and of science and technology-focused research with strong societal impact and relevance. UCLouvain has seven campuses in Belgium, three of which are located in Brussels near the heart of the European institutions.

In 2023, I was elected Vice-Rector of the Science and Technology Sector, after having been Dean of the School of Engineering and Head of the Information Technology research institute. My position as Vice-rector is in direct and daily contact with the Rector. Together with the new rector, Françoise Smets, who was elected in 2024, and her team, we would like UCLouvain to play a more active role in the CESAER journey. UCLouvain was a founding member of CESAER in the '90s. In 2025, we see CESAER as the ideal platform for addressing the primary challenges in science and technology research and education.

Three Belgian universities are members of CESAER and support my candidacy: UGent, KU Leuven and UCLouvain. If I have the privilege to be elected by the general assembly, all three universities would like to leverage our links and contacts on topics of shared interest for a better contribution to CESAER.

CESAER is "the strong and united voice of science and technology universities in Europe." In 2025, CESAER's advocacy role is more essential than ever, especially in an era of geopolitical changes and instability. There are concerns about sustainable funding for bottom-up science, the complementarity and sometimes difficult equilibrium between applied science answering urgent societal needs and fundamental research, shifts in the dual-use evaluation of risks in defense-related research, and the increased importance of developing responsible partnerships. Some of these issues are controversial, and geopolitical sensitivities may hinder consensus among all CESAER members. CESAER must find the middle ground to advocate for common policies at the European level while respecting possible sensitivities about partnerships and dual use. Needless to say, CESAER must be a strong voice in current discussions on the European Framework Program, safeguarding the budget for both bottom-up and low-TRL research, and ensuring independence from competitiveness issues while contributing effectively to societal and economic issues. Retaining talents both for fundamental research and for applied research and technology transfer must also remain a major objective through the Framework Program.

As a researcher in artificial intelligence (machine learning), I am interested in contributing to discussions about AI. AI is reshaping many aspects of society, including teaching and research. We must embrace these changes. Strong and urgent EU investments in AI are necessary to ensure a solid European position in AI research and enable Europe to have a strong voice not only on technical developments, but also on global issues, including ethics, transparency, and societal relevance. AI is also reshaping the worlds of research and teaching. AI facilitates access to and understanding of sources, makes education more accessible, and helps or shortens some research steps. AI also strongly impacts the peer evaluation system for scientific proposals and publications. Europe has a strong history of establishing sound, trustworthy, and manageable evaluation systems for scientific productions. This is key to maintaining high standards within the scientific community and fostering public trust in science. Considering COARA's guiding principles, the shift towards open science, and the possibilities and risks of AI in this domain, CESAER could help maintain a high level of professionalism in the global scientific evaluation system.

The success of debates and positions depends on the participation of CESAER members, especially in task forces. The current task forces are doing an excellent job, taking a long-term view, and making significant contributions to the development of positions and reports, which are central to CESAER's activities. As new topics of interest or concern in science and technology policies emerge, CESAER must consider addressing new issues, as outlined above. However, the number of task forces and their level of activity cannot grow indefinitely without risking insufficient member involvement and the necessary professional support from the CESAER secretariat. I support striking a balance between maintaining stable task forces to ensure continuity and establishing new task forces or creating new mandates for existing ones to address new issues in a rapidly evolving funding and geopolitical landscape. Beyond dual use, defense, competitiveness, partnerships, artificial intelligence, and other pressing concerns in science and technology higher education and research, Europe's technological sovereignty is a major topic that CESAER task forces should address and advocate for. During the final preparation of the 2026–27 work plan, the CESAER board should ensure that the mandates of existing and new task forces include these issues. In this context, I also fully support the new idea of agile groupings mentioned in Strategy 2030. Finally, connections with other university networks and alliances should be exploited as much as possible, at both the network and member levels, to maximize efficiency.

CESAER activities depend on effective member involvement at institutional and individual levels. While the immediate benefits of involvement, such as personal development through participation in task forces, are evident, the initial step of engagement can appear challenging. To encourage the active involvement of young colleagues and promote diversity among staff categories, genders, and ages, I propose creating a light yet effective onboarding program for new participants in CESAER activities. It is essential to ensure strong links between individuals involved in CESAER and their institutional management, recognizing that this is both a necessity and a motivator.

Should the General Assembly vote in favor of my candidacy, it would be a privilege for me and my university to share our experience, learn from peers, and serve the interests and activities of CESAER and its members.



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Vice-Rector of the Science and Technology Sector, UCLouvain

