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# What if? Exploring possible futures of transnational cooperation for Europe's universities

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Why should universities care about the future and about Europe?



A VUCA world, “Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous”



Transnational cooperation as a key feature of Europe’s university landscape.



EU level policies and regulation are becoming more important for universities.

Universities need to develop the ability to work with different possible futures to increase their agency in the present.

→ For forward looking **institutional development**

→ For **proactive advocacy** to make the case for enabling legal and funding frameworks at regional/national and European level



# Combining foresight with policy development



Foresight report with four forecasts and scenarios



Key policy messages for the next mandate of the EU institutions 2024-2029



What is  
future  
thinking?

- It is neither about looking into the crystal ball!



What is  
future  
thinking?

.... Nor about accurate predication!



## What is future thinking?

### It is about...

- caring and preparing for the future
- engaging with the future in a creative way
- developing evidence-informed pictures of possible futures
- *“bold assumptions lightly held!”* (Institute for the Future)
- What if?

**Purpose:** see what are possible and plausible future developments to take action in the present to shape the future according to your vision

**Go from “foresight to insight to action”** (→ increase agency!)

What developments in the external environment will influence universities?

Figure 1: Overview of drivers of change based on PESTLE analysis

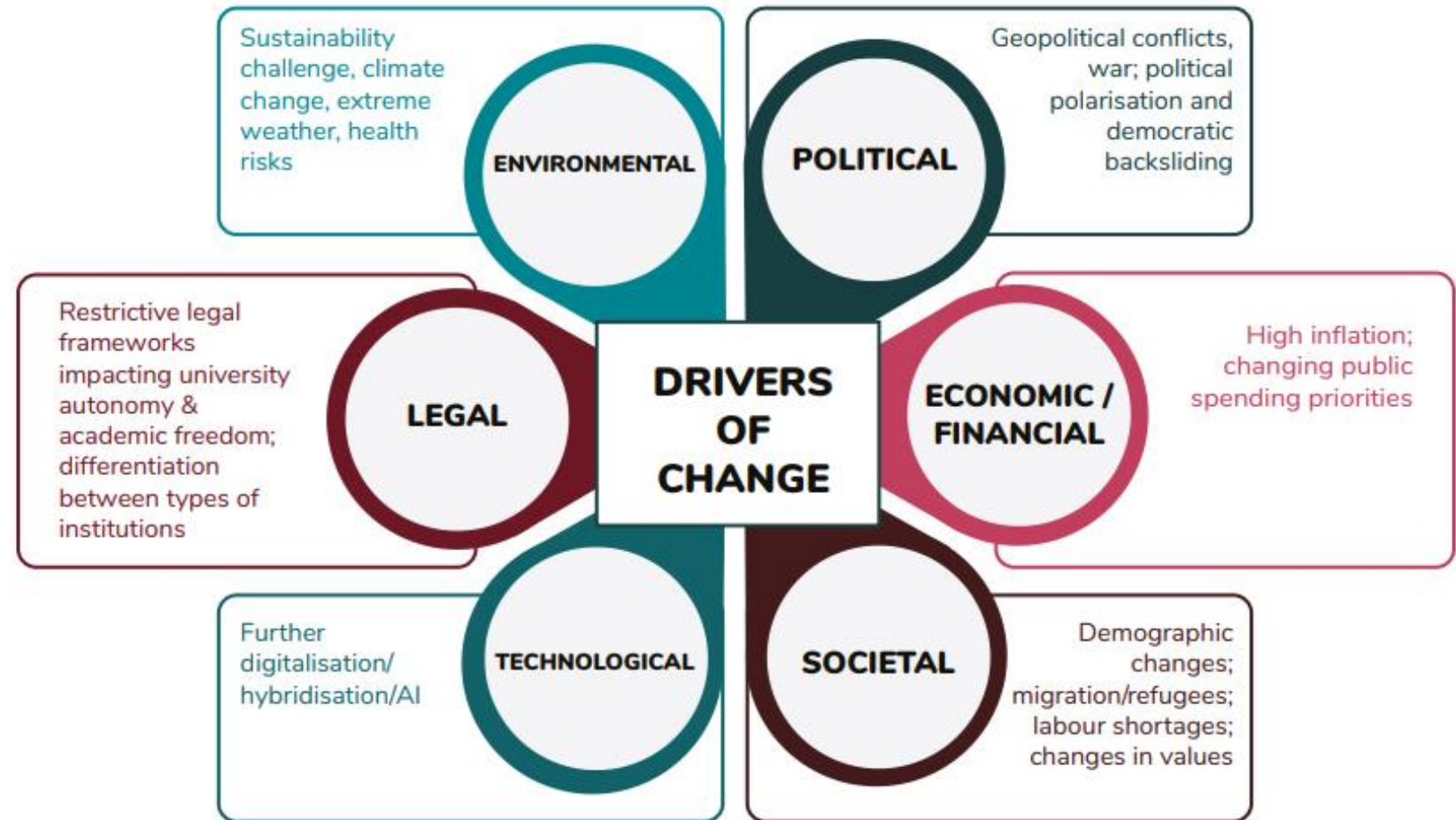
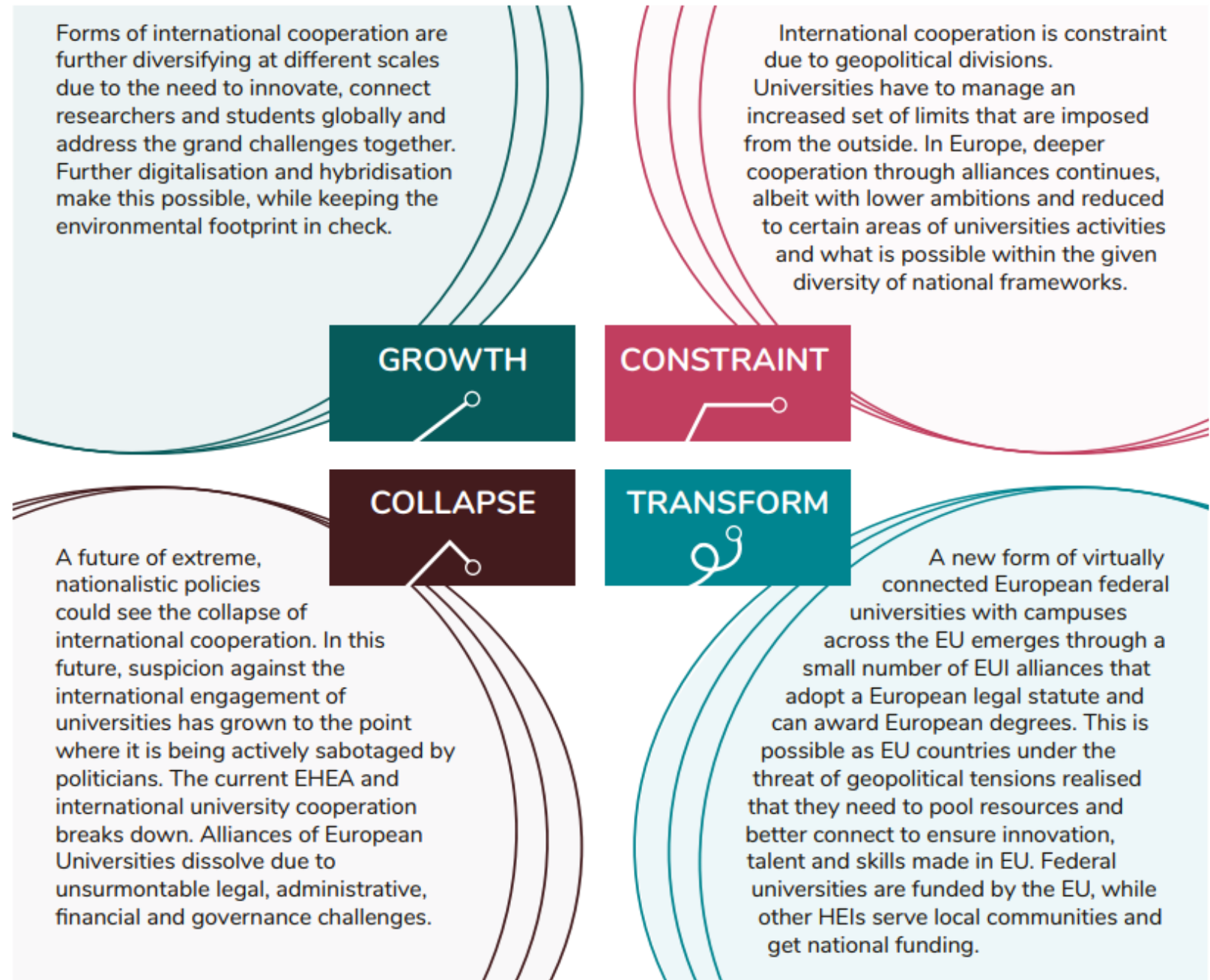


Figure 11: Overview of the four forecasts

# Imagining alternative futures – four forecasts for transnational cooperation of European universities





# GROWTH FORECAST

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**What if**, in the future, diverse forms of international cooperation continue to grow and further diversify as Europe and its universities need to address global challenges and attract international talent?

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# CONSTRAINT FORECAST



**What if**, in the future, international university cooperation beyond the EU is further constrained due to geopolitical conflicts and foreign interference?

# COLLAPSE FORECAST

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**What if**, in the future, the current system of European and international university cooperation as we know it collapses due to natural disasters and nationalist policies?

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# TRANSFORMATION FORECAST



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**What if**, in the future, a two-tier system emerges with a small number of big European federal universities and a larger number of smaller local higher education institutions?

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What needs to  
be done at  
European level:  
A renewed  
social contract  
for Europe and  
its universities

1. Strengthen the multilateral framework for cooperation
2. Enhance the effectiveness of European multilevel governance
3. Introduce a 'university check' prior to developing EU legislation
4. Budget for ambitious higher education, research and innovation
5. Promote universities' global role as responsible bridge-builders and knowledge brokers
6. Uphold the core values of institutional autonomy and academic freedom
7. Develop physical and virtual infrastructure
8. Establish dedicated funding for university leadership development

# Thank you for your attention

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