

## **WHITENESS AT THE EUI - a discussion paper**

### We need to talk about whiteness at the EUI

The EUI prides itself on being among the leading academic institutions in the EU and the world. When it comes to the diversity of its academic and non-academic community it should be equally ambitious and performant. However, the EUI community today is overwhelmingly white in all units and at all levels of hierarchy. The few people of colour working at the EUI are predominantly in the outsourced maintenance companies. The vast majority of researchers, professors, institutional leaders, administrative and supporting staff are white. The whiteness at the EUI sharply contrasts the general population of the EU, which is much more diverse. This is at odds with the EUI's 'European identity' and its self-understanding as a 'shared space with a truly European soul' (EUI Strategy 2019-2024, 3, 9) because Europe's identity and soul today are multicoloured. Moreover, there is a lack of critical awareness of the EUI's homogeneity and its implications. The overwhelmingly white demography of the EUI has important knock-on effects on its academic culture as well. Thus, the whiteness of the EUI's professoriate is reproduced in its syllabi and research themes.

This state of affairs at the EUI is problematic in a number of respects. First, if white people are overrepresented, then people of colour are under-represented. They are denied an equal opportunity to become EUI researchers, professors, administrators, and visitors. Clearly, there are no direct formal bars to access to the EUI. However, statistically, people of colour are less likely than white people to become members of the EUI community. Crucially, this unlikelihood is disproportionate to the proportion of non-white people in the general population and, perhaps most troubling, to the number of people of colour formally eligible to become members of the EUI (in terms especially of qualified undergraduates) due to their structural disadvantages in accessing education. Ethnic minorities, especially applicants with an immigration background and those without an EU citizenship, experience further structural disadvantages which may range from difficulties in 'reading' the culture of the institution to lacking adequate personal networks, sometimes aggravated by poverty. Moreover, their research interests and preferred approaches may differ from those considered mainstream.

All of these reasons lead to the current situation where candidates of colour are disproportionately more likely to be rejected as candidates or not even to apply (adverse self-selection). Secondly, as a result, the strong over-representation of white people within the EUI tends to normalise and naturalise the point of view and experience of white privilege, including the privileges of defining standards and indicators for academic merit. Conversely, racialised members of the EUI community are unduly perceived (including, in some cases, by themselves) as different. Thirdly, being an elite institution offering its researchers, professors and other staff unique opportunities and benefits, the EUI's legitimacy (and specifically its justification in spending taxpayers' money) crucially requires that this unique place be equally accessible and welcoming to all.

In addition to the core diversity problem of an unbalanced demography and the dominance of whiteness in research and teaching, there exists the problem of racist incidents. Just as in other academic institutions and in society at large, explicitly racist incidents of various types occur at the EUI. Given that reporting a professor or fellow researcher for racism is not an easy step to take, it can be safely assumed that more incidents have taken place than have been reported. A community committed to equal respect and concern for its members should

have – and be seen to have – zero tolerance towards any act of racism. This includes ensuring that easily accessible and fair institutional procedures are in place for reporting and assessing such incidents.

There is good reason to focus specifically on the question of racial and ethnic vectors of diversity instead of diversity more generally. While intersectionality is central to all work for greater diversity and inclusion, focusing attention on individual axes can be a useful tool to ensure that key areas of marginalization receive the attention they deserve. For instance, although there certainly remains important room for improvement, important work has been done to increase gender balance at the EUI and improve accessibility for people with disabilities. And while researchers have unilaterally attempted to catalyse a discussion on racial diversity through working group discussions, researcher led courses and by inviting speakers of colour, the EUI as an institution has not actively or cohesively addressed racial diversity. Given this background, it is time for all levels of the EUI to critically engage with conversations on whiteness, eurocentrism in the curricula and the need to decolonize the academy that are ongoing in other universities and disciplinary settings around the world.

### What is to be done?

The aim of this document is to start a bottom-up conversation about whiteness at the EUI that will lead to real change. In order to give that discussion concrete focus, it discusses a number of actions the EUI could take. Some are more urgent than others. Some can be implemented immediately while others will need more time; some will receive strong support immediately while others will be met with opposition. It is important to stress in this regard the need for space and mechanisms to foster community involvement in determining the next steps. For change to be driven from the bottom up it is unlikely to get off the ground without a strong commitment from the EUI governing body and its various institutions.

It should be emphasised that whiteness is always a combination of colour and a person's social, economic, and political position. Similarly, minority groups suffer from different layers of discrimination and difficulties. Factors useful in recognising the most vulnerable minorities include: whether a person does not have an EU citizenship while they are permanently resident there; whether the first language of a person permanently resident in the EU is not a European language; whether they are a first- or second-generation immigrant from the global south to Europe; whether their religion is not the dominant religion; whether their ethnicity is not the dominant ethnicity; and whether their appearance is different from the typical appearance of the country of residence. The more factors apply to a group or person, the further they are away from whiteness or being “white-passing”, and the more they are vulnerable.

Note also that the recommendations below focus on researchers, academic staff and academic life at the EUI, which is the largest segment of our community by far. However, that does not mean that the need for change is any less urgent when it comes to non-academic staff. As said, the representation of people of colour must be increased in all departments, ranks and roles at the EUI. The mechanisms for doing so will differ and this will require further discussion. Meanwhile, many of the actions below can be taken also with regard to and in the interest of non-academic staff.

It is submitted that the EUI's effort to overcome whiteness focus in the first place on three main areas:

1. Changing the demography to reflect present-day European racial ethnography
2. Creating a more inclusive environment
3. Combating racism, including racism without a face

### Changing the demography

The ultimate objective for the EUI should be to become a more diverse, and in particular less white, community in all units and at all levels of seniority, corresponding to Europe's actual demographic mix. Concretely, this means that the EUI community should reflect as much as possible the ethnic and racial composition of the general population of the EU.

This objective is not easy to achieve; it is also not entirely in the EUI's own hands. Nonetheless, there are a number of specific actions that could be taken in this respect.

1. Setting targets in recruitment for the minimum number of candidates of colour or with an ethnic minority or immigrant background. These quantitative targets could be set for the percentages of candidates, shortlisted candidates, internal and external members of selection boards et cetera. This action point would cover all levels of academic admissions – PhD, postdoc, professorship, visitor positions – as well as non-academic staff hiring. Once targets are set, departments and units can actively monitor their intake and make realistic plans for how to increase the percentage of non-white students, staff, fellows and professors. A financial (budgetary) incentive structure could be considered.
2. Reaching more acceptable levels of racial and ethnic diversity among professors is particularly urgent, given their central role in the institution. An increase in the number of non-white professors will have important knock-on effects. We know that when admission boards feature more women, the admission of women is more likely. The same situation applies with people of colour. Even when people of colour file qualified applications for the EUI, they are likely not to receive the right attention due to the all-white admission boards. If the admission boards have more people of colour, the admission of students of colour will increase. The underrepresentation of professors of colour is reproduced in the admission of researchers and in other positions at the EUI. Therefore, numerical diversity targets for professorial hiring, as well as concerted efforts to recruit qualified candidates of colour, are most urgent.
3. Clearly any commitment to quantitative targets requires the availability of statistical data, not only for monitoring the level of success, but also for setting the targets in the first place. That may initially prove challenging because of different national traditions and sensitivities regarding the registration of racial and ethnic background. Still, changing the demography starts with facing the facts of the current demography; there is no other way. Therefore, the EUI will have to find a legitimate way to monitor the ethnic and racial background of its community members and of applicants.
4. Increasing the percentage of PhD researchers of colour will involve changes in the way the EUI recruits and publicizes itself to potential applicants. Advertising through a wider variety of universities, serving different communities throughout Europe, will increase the

availability of information about the opportunities presented by the EUI among a greater number of students of colour, in particular first- and second- generation immigrants.

5. Creating a mentorship program for researchers and potential researchers from various disadvantaged backgrounds would support researchers of colour arriving in the EUI community as well as those already here, while communicating to potential applicants that the EUI is a place that supports a diverse community.
6. Anonymizing application materials for researchers and staff, in order to reduce the effect of implicit bias among selection committees. Such an effort mirrors actions at peer institutions; it was reported in September 2020 that Oxford will begin a pilot scheme to anonymize applicants applying for postgraduate study while similar anonymization efforts have already been employed at the Wellcome Trust.<sup>1</sup>

### Creating a more inclusive environment

The problem of whiteness at the EUI is to a large extent one of silence: silence in the diversity of voice, colour, background, which is a stark contrast to the social and political reality of Europe. While demographic change is needed to overcome this silence, there is also a need to culturally take on this problem head on. Silencing diversity, which often happens unconsciously and passively, has to be contrasted with embracing what it brings by creating a culture of inclusion and understanding. The problem of diversity at the EUI requires sustained community efforts to build networks of solidarity, care and empathy to open up and radically diversify the present networks of whiteness across the campus.

Concrete steps to be taken include:

1. Making a public EUI commitment to increasing racial diversity at all levels and in all units and creating a strategic plan to monitor and improve representation of people of colour in all areas of the EUI, as has been done with some success for the question of gender balance. Part of this task could include changing the EUI charter to include anti-racist and diversity commitments.
2. Having all departments and units within the EUI review their range of research and teaching with a critical eye: how much do these reflect an awareness of diversity? Do they privilege a Eurocentric perspective (which by no means has to be endemic even to EU studies)? A meaningful discussion on such questions will lead to concrete efforts to decolonise research, teaching and other academic events in the department. Departments may need to prioritise different topics in the recruitment of professors, fellows and researchers; may need to offer new courses; may need to diversify syllabi of existing courses with regards to content and the identities of the scholars examined. Other actions may also emerge from the review. Involving researchers and professors in this self-assessment, drawing on discussions on these questions that have occurred in all disciplines in recent years, will help to ensure that the EUI remains a pre-eminent institution.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/oxford-consider-socioeconomic-data-phd-applications>

3. Providing support to start or strengthen existing activities, such as working groups, event series, etc, that engage with traditionally underrepresented research themes and subjects. These activities can benefit from highly relevant academic expertise available at the EUI on inequality, racism, post-colonialism, among other topics, as well as that of appropriate external speakers. These efforts would happen in tandem with the diversification of teaching and research writ large, discussed in point two above.
4. Ensuring that EUI units invite speakers with different ethnic identities, in line with our intention to reflect the diversity of the European and academic communities. This would require departments and units to review their current practices, as has been done with regard to gender balance, and to take steps to increase the percentage of presenters of colour, including in the most prestigious platforms at the EUI.
5. Reviewing the existing Harassment Guidelines with an eye to improving their effectiveness in tackling racial bias. Making efforts to increase awareness of these guidelines, the Harassment committee and the reporting mechanism among all members of the community.
6. Reviewing and improving current diversity training. A presentation of one hour or ninety minutes at the start of researchers' 1<sup>st</sup> year is not enough. Provide training to all members of the community – including professors, fellows and staff – that is ongoing and repeated. Updating training to be more comprehensive and interactive, aiming to generate spaces for open and honest discussions that allow for self-reflection and changes in actions. “The Great Unlearn” by Rachel Cargle provides a good model for this type of anti-racist education.
7. Requiring applicants for positions at professor and senior administrative levels to demonstrate how they have and will work to further racial diversity in their research, teaching and practice. This would include thoroughly considering and evaluating this aspect of candidates' academic credentials as part of the selection process. Adding the same requirement to existing promotional processes.

### Strengthening mechanisms for addressing racist incidents and racism without face

With regard to addressing explicitly racist incidents, concrete action is possible in the short term. There are experiences and best practices in other institutions that the EUI can benefit and borrow from (e.g. The Bystander programme). The objective here should be to strengthen institutional arrangements in place to prevent and properly respond to instances of racism.

These should include at least the following:

1. The EUI harassment policy is available to all of the EUI |community and the harassment committee provides an easily accessible, fair and effective procedure for reporting incidents of racism and for ensuring an appropriate institutional response in each case (sanctions, reversal of decisions, or other). However, the EUI community would benefit from further training on how to identify and manage incidents of harassment, racist micro-aggressions and racist episodes that includes an explanation of the harassment committee procedure.

2. A Diversity Officer, who, established with sufficient independence and authority, investigates, either spontaneously or in response to complaints, problems of non-diversity, including racism, at the EUI, and proposes concrete institutional responses.
3. The phrase ‘Racism without face’ is used by scholars of racial studies to describe racist actions which are conducted by people who do not understand themselves as racist and may even be open-minded. However, being open-minded is not enough to ensure an environment which is not based on racist premises. This concept, of racism without face, should also be adopted and built into the EUI’s Diversity and anti-racism programme.

### An inclusive EUI-wide discussion with a view to change

This discussion document was born out of the idea to have an EUI Town Hall Meeting on Diversity in 2020, as a bottom-up event with the support of the EUI leadership. The impetus for such a meeting appeared as greater attention to the Black Lives Matter movement rippled through the world. As the pandemic made such an event impossible to hold in person, the group who had volunteered to participate in organising this meeting met anyway and reflected on different aspects of diversity within the EUI. It was rapidly concluded that while many aspects of diversity require attention, such as queerness, class and disability, the pressing issue of race had rarely been discussed officially within the EUI.

The aim of this document is to start a conversation on the problem of whiteness at the EUI and on how to achieve change. It is to be hoped that a town hall meeting can still be held some time in 2021. Meanwhile, however, the discussion on whiteness should start in all of the various units and institutions at the EUI. Real progress requires the involvement and commitment of the entire EUI community. It goes without saying that the discussions must be respectful, must be inclusive and must give especially strong voice to the experiences of people of colour at the EUI.

This discussion paper can provide a basis for these discussions. Its aim is to open a debate not only on the nature and the extent of the problem of whiteness at the EUI, but also on concrete action points. The authors deliberately chose the form of a short, pointed discussion paper rather than a fully documented report. It does not claim to have all the right answers, but offers some food for thought, reflection and discussion. Naturally, these discussions will have to be followed up by institutional steps and measures towards change, and with reports and surveys which will document the state of affairs at any time and the progress made.

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December 2020