

UNICA IRO MEETING 2025

30 YEARS OF THE UNICA IRO GROUP!

Tallinn, 10 – 12 December 2025

“Strategic Internationalisation: Navigating Diplomacy, Partnerships, and Intercultural Competence in a Changing World”

Hosted by Tallinn University

Introduction

In an era of increasing global complexity, the role of International Relations Officers (IROs) extends beyond traditional mobility and programme management. It is becoming a strategic and diplomatic function, crucial for institutional growth and reputation. This theme builds on the foundations of the [2024 UNICA IRO meeting's](#) focus on "Building the Ideal International Relations Office," moving the conversation forward to the "why" and "who" of international cooperation. The theme will allow participants to explore how UNICA members can leverage strategic partnerships to achieve institutional goals, while also fostering a deeper understanding of the diplomatic and cultural nuances involved.

Key Discussion Areas:

- 1. The Strategic Imperative:** Why institutions choose to cooperate with specific partners.
 - Identifying institutional priorities and aligning internationalisation efforts.
 - Developing a strategic roadmap for global engagement.
 - Case studies on successful university-to-university delegations and network-building.
- 2. The Diplomatic Dimension: The IRO as a diplomatic actor.**
 - Understanding the role of higher education in public and cultural diplomacy.
 - Negotiating and maintaining complex international agreements.
 - Navigating geopolitical factors in international partnerships.
- 3. Workshop:** interactive session focused on “Improving Intercultural Communication and Inclusivity in Professional Settings”
 - Recognising and managing cultural differences in a professional context.
 - Improving cross-cultural communication in meetings and negotiations.
 - Addressing potential misunderstandings and fostering a more inclusive environment.

PROGRAMME

Venues:

10 December (Welcome reception): Nova building, 27 Narva Rd., Tallinn

11 December: Mare building, [5 Uus-Sadama St.](#), Tallinn

12 December: Astra Building, [29 Narva Rd.](#), Tallinn

Day 0 | Wednesday, 10 December

Venue: Nova building cafeteria, 27 Narva Rd (enter via university courtyard)

18:30-20:00

Welcome reception

Overall Chair: Elena AVGOUSTIDOU-KYRIACOU, Director of the International Relations Service, University of Cyprus and Coordinator of the UNICA IRO Group

Day 1 | Thursday, 11 December

Venue: Room M-134, Mare building, [5 Uus-Sadama St.](#), Tallinn

8:30-9:00

Registration of participants and welcome coffee

9:00-10:00

Celebrating 30 years of the UNICA IRO Group

9:00-9:15

Chair: Luciano SASO, UNICA Secretary General

Welcome words

- **Sorin COSTREIE**, UNICA President (online)
- **Anete ELKEN**, Senior Specialist of International Cooperation, Strategy Office, Tallinn University
- **Elena AVGOUSTIDOU-KYRIACOU**, Director of the International Relations Service, University of Cyprus and Coordinator of the UNICA IRO Group

9:15 – 9:30

Introducing the new members of the **IRO Core Group & Tour de Table**

9:30-9:45

Presentation of Tallinn University | **Anete ELKEN**, Senior Specialist of International Cooperation, Strategy Office, Tallinn University

9:45-10:00

UNICA IRO Group: 30 years of activities & community building

10:00-10:45

Opening talk: “Strategic Internationalisation” | **Mikk KASESALK**, Strategy Manager, Tallinn University (30')

Q&A (15')

10:45-11:15

Coffee break

11:15-12:45	Session 1 - The Strategic Imperative: Why institutions choose to cooperate with specific partners
	Chair: Anete ELKEN, Senior Specialist of International Cooperation, Strategy Office, Tallinn University Presentations (15' each) • “Higher education international cooperation in the current geopolitical climate” Åsa PETRI, Head of Unit of the International Office and Deputy Head of Student Services, Stockholm University • “The ASE Partnership Matrix: A Roadmap for Global Engagement” Catalin PLOAE, Senior International Relations Expert, Bucharest University of Economic Studies • “Depth over Transaction: How Institutional Self-Reflection Leads to Purposeful Partnerships” Martin POVAŽAN, Head of International Relations, Comenius University in Bratislava Panel discussion with interactive participation of the audience
12:45 – 14:00	Group picture & lunch Venue: Oasis cafeteria (Terra building)
14:00-17:00	Session 2 - The Diplomatic Dimension: The IRO as a diplomatic actor
	Chair: Elena AVGOUSTIDOU-KYRIACOU, Director of the International Relations Service, University of Cyprus, Coordinator of the UNICA IRO Group
14:00 – 14:15	Opening talk: “The IRO as soft diplomat: Partnering with the government and EU in Africa Collaboration” Anete ELKEN , Senior Specialist of International Cooperation, Strategy Office, Tallinn University
14:15-15:45	Break-out Groups 1. Understanding the role of Higher Education in public and cultural diplomacy Facilitator: Anete ELKEN (Tallinn University) 2. Negotiating and maintaining complex international agreements Facilitator: Helena DERŠEK ŠTUHEC (University of Ljubljana) 3. Navigating geopolitical factors in international partnerships Facilitator: Catherine CONVERY (University College Dublin)
15:45 – 16:15	Comfort break and ordering ideas for the next step
16:15-17:00	Reporting from the breakout groups, discussion and wrap-up
17:00-19:00	Social programme: guided tour of the old city
19:00	 30th UNICA IROs anniversary dinner Venue: Restaurant Kaerajaan , 17 Raekoja plats, Tallinn

Day 2 | Friday, 12 December

Venue: Room A-046 Astra Building, 29 Narva Rd., Tallinn

8:30 – 9:00	Welcome coffee
9:00 – 11:00	Workshop “Improving Intercultural Communication and Inclusivity in Professional Settings”
	Led by Anastassia ZABRODSKAJA, Professor of Intercultural Communication, Tallinn University • Lecture on the principles of intercultural communication and its importance • Group work/discussions
11:00 – 11:30	Coffee break
11:20 – 12:00	Workshop Wrap up - Sharing the results of the discussions/group work, reflections and conclusions
12:00 – 12:45	Erasmus + corner – updates and developments
	Chair: Elena AVGOUSTIDOU-KYRIACOU, Director of the International Relations Service, University of Cyprus, Coordinator of the UNICA IRO Group Presentation by Stefan ZOTTI (online), Deputy Head of Unit, Higher Education Unit, DG EAC, European Commission (30') Q&A
12:45-13:15	Time for UNICA IROs' business
	• UNICA IRO Meeting 2025 evaluation survey • Open discussion on future UNICA IRO meetings and plans • Members' corner: open announcements on anything they wish • UNICA announcements
13:15-14:15	Farewell lunch Venue: Oasis cafeteria (Terra building)

Information and contacts

Regular updates and registration form available at the [event webpage](#)

For any questions, please contact the UNICA Secretariat:

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