

**Introductory statement at the ministerial meeting of the Bologna Process,  
Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, April 28 – 29, 2009**

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Ministers, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen,

In the classical French tragedy, the best of all fates was to be loved but it was far better to be hated than to be ignored. As we prepare to proclaim the European Higher Education Area in a year's time, I believe we can agree that – at least by the measures of Racine and Corneille – the Bologna Process has been a success. Many in the education community are enthusiastic about the reforms, some are dead set against them but few are indifferent. The Bologna Process has also received the most genuine form of praise – interest and emulation from other parts of the world.

The interest in the Bologna Process transcends the higher education community. The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly will consider a report, prepared by Lord McIntosh, on the Council's contribution to the Bologna Process. Among other things, the report will raise the question of whether the current structures of the Bologna Process are sufficient to ensure its viability in the long run.

The Assembly report underscores the Council of Europe's long standing support for and contribution to the Bologna Process. In 2007y, Ministers entrusted us with a particular responsibility for coordinating the sharing of experience in the development of national qualifications frameworks, and we are particularly pleased that we have been able, with the European Commission, to build very close cooperation between the "Bologna framework" and the EQF. In my view, one of the most important achievements since London is that we can now say with confidence: it is perfectly possible to develop a national framework compatible with both the EHEA framework and the EQF. I would like to pay tribute to my colleagues in the Commission who have made this cooperation possible.

The Council of Europe is also strongly engaged in the BFUG; in working with the most recent Bologna members; as a contributor to the reflections on "Bologna beyond 2010" and the global dimension of the Bologna Process; and not least in the area of recognition. Here, it may be worth pointing out that the recent analysis of the national action plans submitted in 2007 makes it abundantly clear that much remains to be done to make the legal texts a reality. That is a challenge; not least in each individual "Bologna country".

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In 10 years, students, staff, higher education institutions and public authorities have changed the face of European higher education. That is no small feat but it does not dispense us from the need not only to look back but also to look forward.

The Bologna Process has changed degree structures and instituted guidelines for quality assurance, and it is developing qualifications frameworks. It has changed structures and it has changed laws.

That is important. It is also the relatively easy part. What we face now, on the threshold of the European Higher Education Area, is the challenge of making structures come alive, of making legal regulation actual practice and of making things like learning outcomes a description of reality and not virtuous fiction. Great ideas can move mankind but great ideas can also be perverted and reduced to details of bureaucratic regulation. Reforms that start with enthusiasm can peter out in indifference unless a *vision* can be sustained above and beyond measures and regulations.

The first decade of the Bologna Process has rightly focused on structural reform. Like our medieval fortresses, however, structures only make sense if they fulfil a purpose. As our societies change, so must higher education. Qualifications frameworks make sense not because they are attractive theoretical structures but because they help learners find diverse pathways to the kind of competences our societies need.

I believe four elements are particularly important to how the European Higher Education Area will develop over the next decade.

Firstly, from our public debate, we could easily be lead to believe that the competences we need are those that help the economy in the short term. That is not wrong – but it is also not exactly right.

We need that, but we need so much more. We need the competences that make our societies sustainable economically but also those that make societies sustainable politically, culturally, socially and environmentally. That society is unlikely to be a devoid of material well being, but it is equally unlikely to be devoid of engaged citizens and of people who care about each other; devoid of intellectual curiosity and the pleasure of discovery or devoid of the ability to conduct intercultural dialogue.

Our societies are increasingly complex, and they cannot function unless as citizens we have broad and advanced competences. We cannot fulfil our roles as citizens unless we are able to put our specialist knowledge into a broader context, unless we are able to think across the boundaries of disciplines as well as of countries, unless as citizens we are able to analyze complex phenomena, often on the basis of incomplete information; and unless we get our values right. Knowledge is crucial but we cannot be good citizens unless we complement knowledge by understanding and an ability to act. These are learning outcomes in the true sense of the word. We need specialists and we need intellectuals – people who can see the broader context, weigh short term and long term benefits and dangers and do not only what is technically feasible but also what is ethically defensible.

Secondly, our societies are increasingly complex also in terms of actors. Public authorities cannot act in the same way today as they did a generation ago and obtain the

same results. If we believe there is a public responsibility for higher education, we must examine the role and responsibilities of public authorities. The Council of Europe made an important contribution through its 2007 Recommendation on the public responsibility for higher education and research, and we are about to examine the role of public authorities in ensuring university autonomy, in close cooperation with the Magna Charta Observatory. The role of public authorities is a key issue that must be high on the agenda of “Bologna beyond 2010”.

Thirdly, the complexity of our societies also implies that our policies must address the full range of missions of higher education. We need first class research institutions, but we also need institutions that excel in teaching and learning, in community service and in applying knowledge and understanding. At individual level, we need excellent teachers as well as researchers and academics who work with their communities. Sometimes these institutions and persons are one and the same, but not always. Our policies and reward systems, at institutional as well as individual level, must encourage all the missions of higher education. In all of these, we need excellence.

Fourthly, membership of the Bologna Process is conditioned on a state being Party to the European Cultural Convention as well as commitment to reforms, and it is difficult to see a workable alternative framework for the European Higher Education Area. We welcome the interest in the Bologna Process from other parts of the world and we fully support the organization of Bologna Policy Fora both end-on with ministerial conferences as here in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve and separately on specific topics, such as the conference the Council of Europe coorganized in Kazakhstan in February of this year. The strong interest in the Bologna Process in other parts of the world must be met through concrete cooperation on substance: on structural reform as well as on issues like university autonomy and student participation and through practical measures like the appointment of “Bologna contacts” in interested countries.

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As it heads towards its second decade, the European Higher Education Area will not only continue to live in interesting times. It will make the times in which we live interesting.

Since I started by referring to the literary heritage of the country that hosted the Sorbonne meeting in 1998, let me end by a quotation that originates on the shores of the Pacific. In his book *El sueño chileno* – the Chilean dream - the sociologist Eugenio Tironi says: the answer to the question “what kind of education do we need?” lies in the answer to another question: “What kind of society do we want?”

That, ladies and gentlemen, summarizes the challenge of the Bologna Process in the years to come. It is a challenge that will keep us busy, and it is also one to which we will rise only if we continue to work together as Europeans and as citizens of the world.