

SPEECH TO THE BOLOGNA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

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Chair, Ministers, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you today on behalf of the Council of Europe. Our role here demonstrates that the Bologna Process is leading to a *European* Higher Education Area in the true sense of the word, encompassing all parts of our continent. Examples of good practice are found in every part of Europe, including in our newer members. We are pleased that Montenegro has become the 46th member of the Bologna Process, a week after it became the 47th member state of the Council of Europe. I would also like to take this opportunity to underline the vital contribution of the consultative members.

The Council of Europe is fully committed to the Bologna Process

- through the Follow Up Group and Board
- by assisting the newer members of the Process
- by providing, with UNESCO, the only binding text of the Process: the Lisbon Recognition Convention
- and by addressing a range of key policy issues.

Yet, my purpose here is not to talk about what the Council of Europe has done, but rather to suggest some actions we should all undertake together to make the European Higher Education Area a reality by 2010.

The reforms of the Bologna Process are far reaching, and they are important. Carrying them out has not been easy, it has sometimes required political courage and it has taken an effort to build agreement around key policies and goals in each country. Goals reached give cause for satisfaction, but they are also the stuff of which new challenges are made.

As we look *toward* 2010, we must also look *beyond* 2010.

The attractiveness of Europe will increasingly depend on the quality and relevance of our teaching, learning and research. These are conditions *sine qua non*: we cannot build a successful higher education area on anything less than top quality education and research. Quality development is and should be a key concern of every teacher, student, administrator and policy maker. Quality development is the prerequisite for quality assurance, and it is not a spectator sport.

Nevertheless, our greatest challenge is perhaps to articulate a clearer vision of why higher education is crucial to our future. Preparation for the labour market *is* important, but let us *also* talk about higher education in preparation for democratic citizenship, personal development and the development of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

Not least, let us consider these four major purposes of higher education as *complementary* rather than as *contradictory*. Our graduates must be able to tackle the big issues as well as the bottom line. European higher education will be admired not only for its value *added* but also for the values *embedded* in it and *transmitted* through it. Our higher education will be admired for the subject specific skills it provides as well as for the generic competences that enable higher education graduates to solve problems and put issues into context. Our graduates, whatever their field, must be able to challenge preconceived assumptions with a critical mind – critical *and* constructive. They must be able to communicate with people from other backgrounds, linguistically and culturally. Higher education is successful only where knowledge is accompanied by understanding, creativity and the ability to act. It is a paradox that while we have more highly trained specialists than ever before, we seem to have fewer intellectuals.

We would like the European Higher Education Area to inspire our students and staff to do their best, yet we find it easier to speak about our structures than about our values. It was only in 2006 that the values on which we build were explicitly addressed at a Bologna conference organized by the Holy See in cooperation with UNESCO/CEPES and the Council of Europe. Our values as well as our cultural heritage are an important part of what makes us attractive. They are at the core of higher education as well as of the European construction. Can we imagine the European Higher Education Area without these basic values? Institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public responsibility are basic concepts of the Bologna Process and we should adhere to a common understanding and practice of them. Can we claim that we have already achieved this? Can we claim that institutional autonomy and academic freedom have now been adequately established, once and for all?

We want to be attractive to others, yet our voices sometimes bear the noise of cacophony rather than the music of symphony. Since we are likely to have two similar but not identical qualifications frameworks, it is important that we minimize discrepancies between them. The framework adopted by Ministers in Bergen should be the basis for explaining European higher education qualifications to the rest of the world. The Council of Europe is pleased to take responsibility for coordinating the sharing of experience in the development of national qualifications frameworks compatible with this truly European framework, and we will seek to work with the European Commission so that experience with implementing the European higher education framework will also be of help in implementing the EQF.

We would like the European Higher Education Area to inspire not only our own students and staff but also those of other continents. We have an opportunity here in London, as Ministers will be able to adopt a strategy for the Bologna Process in a global context. We

would like others to understand our reforms and to be inspired by them. This also means we need an agreed description of the European Higher Education Area - its principles and structures – for an articulate dialogue with our partners.

We would like to be attractive to others, yet we do not seem to wish to be so attractive that others will want to live with us and not just visit. This paradox points to the interaction between higher education policies and other areas of public policy. We cannot proclaim academic mobility to be one of our priorities if we do not at the same time look at current obstacles to mobility. Governments must make it easier for students and scholars to obtain visas, work permits and social security for the European Higher Education Area to become a reality. The initiative taken by the European Commission to ease visa regulations for academic exchanges is an important step in the right direction.

It has been said that money is not everything except to those who have none. Higher education is certainly not in that unfortunate situation. Many higher education institutions are making very substantial efforts to implement the reforms of the Bologna Process within their current budgets, or as the euphemism would have it, “with zero growth”. Yet, ambitious goals *do* require great financial resources. This is a triple challenge to governments. Firstly, in finding the means to increase public funding for higher education and thus demonstrate its importance. Secondly, in establishing frameworks that will encourage funding of higher education from other sources. Thirdly, in resisting the temptation to use funding from other sources as an excuse to cut public funding. Public authorities set public priorities, and there is no more potent instrument to set public priorities than public budgets. Our responsibility to tax payers cannot be reduced to turning SOS – save our souls – into SOM – save our money.

The public responsibility for higher education is – as Ministers have underlined twice – a cornerstone of the European Higher Education Area. For this to be a reality, we must look at how this is exercised in modern societies. We must look at the public responsibility for laying down the framework within which all higher education, public and private, will be provided. We must look at the public responsibility for ensuring equal opportunity to higher education. We must look at the public responsibility for financing higher education as well as for actual provision. The Council of Europe has undertaken important work in this field and our Committee of Ministers adopted a Recommendation on the Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research on May 16. This is a significant recommendation, but the public responsibility for higher education must remain a key topic of the European Higher Education Area beyond 2010..

Higher education and research should play a key role in developing the kind of society we would like to leave to future generations – societies that are sustainable environmentally and politically, socially and ethically, economically and culturally. The European Higher Education Area must meet the test of workable structures, as it must meet the test of a workable and inspiring vision of the contribution of higher education to a society based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law and proficient in intercultural dialogue; a Europe coherent enough to be strong and diverse enough to be interesting; a Europe unafraid to engage with the broader world.

Ultimately, higher education must inspire and prepare us to do *well*, but also to do *good*.