

*Ladies and Gentlemen*

*Some time ago - 7-8 May 1999 - I attended and spoke at a Conference in Bonn, organized by ACA (Acad. Cooperation Association) about Internationalisation in the New Higher Education Institutions, usually called the Non-University Sector. I would like to make some remarks.*

*I was really struck that so many speakers expressed so much appreciation about a sector which is so terribly complicated. There was a unanimous positive approach. There was a general agreement not to use the term Non-University Education any longer (very negative and does not reveal anything).*

*Secondly I noticed a fairly positive appreciation from university associations like the Confederation of Rectors, etc.*

*But still the term "university" has some magic radiation and finally speaker from that side stick to the privilege of that name.*

*It is evident that the distinction university - non-university certainly in the last ten years has become blurred and that internationally speaking there is not a well accepted clear definition. On the contrary there is a lot of confusion about it - in the first place due - to the tremendous variety in courses and disciplines or to put it in a more technical way - to its wide differentiation and diversification.*

*The reason is that the terminology about Higher Education is a nationally autonomous concept and generally a product of historical tradition and background. The rapidly changing landscape of society and inevitably of Higher Education - articulated in a real massification of Higher Education - caused a fundamental rethinking of Higher Education. So its very logic that the fundamental changes which took place in society got along with parallel changes in the world of education.*

*This evolution was determined by factors such as:*

- 1 the merging operation in many countries (Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Finland) implied a substantial e.g. upgrading in quality*
- 2 the growing importance and interest for research and specially*
- 3 the internationalization of Higher Education constituted the key factors in a remarkable reevaluation and reshaping of the outside university context.*

*So the sector of colleges polytechnics etc. has made enormous progress. It has some big trump cards for:*

- flexibility in curriculum (adaptations)*
- good link with industry and business life*
- cost-effective studies*
- high appreciation from labour market etc.*

*The fact that UNESCO & OECD prefer to use the term tertiary education is a striking example of the will to avoid any confusion in terminology which is not in the first place determined by specific characteristics and quality. The use of terminology such as: universities of professional education and universities of applied science.*

*Another example of the declining relevance of typologies (nice expression used by researcher, specialist U. Teichler) lies in the academic drift of many institutions of Higher Education going together with the vocational or professional drift of some universities more and more interested in applied research e.g. So differences are fading away step by step.*

*As far as the academic drift of the non-university sector is concerned, it is for a variety of reasons my personal opinion that they better keep their specific identity than being absorbed and lost in a anonymous generality. But sometimes status can be a dominant seducing factor stronger than all others. To emphasize the complexity of the distinction some disciplines and courses with a non-university label are established under the umbrella of universities (Italy, Spain). It proves that the field in Higher Education is sometimes more complex in reality than in theory.*

*A good example is Belgium with its short type (one cycle) and long type (2 cycles).*

- architecture: univ. + non-univ.*
- interpreters and translators: generally at univ. but in Belgium non-univ.*
- Nursing: - academic*
  - non-academic*
- secondary (prof) education (depend of the country)*

*But the factor that influences the rigid or strict distinction between university and non-university is the phenomenon of Internationalization which becomes undoubtedly a growing challenge for Higher Education structures or patterns. Particularly above the frontiers of university and non-university.*

*Finally, do not forget that according to a decision of the European Council in 1988 many programmes shorter than 3 years were upgraded (to 3 years) or 3 years study periods were extended to 4 years which means a de facto devaluation of the distinction between the different types of Higher Education. So internationalization became a very strong impetus for convergence.*

*Generally we can say that the growing convergence between the two patterns of Higher Education marks a positive evolution. But we may not forget that between the two sectors there are differences which will always exist. Variety means richness and convergence does not mean uniformisation. This does not interfere with the intentions of the Sorbonne declaration which is only an attempt to bring some order in the (more is less) chaotic situation in Higher Education. But the non-university sector must be aware that all kinds of genuine Higher Education are involved in the Sorbonne concept and which is of utmost importance for the future of the new Higher Education Institutions.*

*The Bologna Conference in June 1999, will prepare or work out important probably decisive steppingstones for Higher Education structure in the next decades and can be the start of a new classification in Higher Education.*

*Let us keep in mind that the task or mission of Higher Education policy is to identify emerging demands and to implement relevant structures to them.*

*Edward Dhondt  
Secretary-General*