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**Convergence, Diversity and Innovation in European Higher  
Education**

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President of Eurashe,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear friends,

- **honoured and privileged** to address you today, with the **first speech** given at this conference
- glad to see many **friends and familiar** faces again
- also **apprehensive** because of this: some will notice a **repetition** or two of an earlier position. I apologise, but also plead with you to see this not as a deficiency, but a **sign of mental health**: otherwise I would be **schizophrenic**.

## I. **Introductory**

### 1. **On ACA**

- **normally short introduction** what the Academic Cooperation Association is about. Too little time today
- suffice it to say: association composed of such **national organisations for support of mobility and cooperation**, such as BC, NUFFIC, DAAD
- aim: to be an **advocate of innovation** in education and training and an **analyser of it (publications, surveys, studies)**

### 2. **Elements of My Speech**

- **internationalisation**: I will comment on the change of a concept over time
- **convergence and diversity**: the Bologna Process, which is linked to that
- wider issues of **competition**, i.e. the issues related to the GATS

## II. IN MEDIAS RES

### 1. Internationalisation

- **WE HAVE COME A LONG WAY (in Europe, that is)**
- PHASE I:  
an extremely **marginal phenomenon, small in volume**, focused on the **individual**, with the **mobility of persons as the equivalent of internationalisation** (a word we did not know then).  
= Late 70s/early 80s.
- PHASE II:  
an **increase in volume** (beginning of **de-marginalisation**), a **new formula** (**systematic** cooperation in **networks**), introduction of a **multilateral element**, first go at **curricular internationalisation**, development of **recognition instruments** (ECTS).  
= first wave of EU Programmes. Emergence of **EU as a major actor in educational collaboration**. Mid 80s to Mid 90s.
- PHASE III:  
1) an attempt at **institutionalisation of Europeanisation/internationalisation**, mainly **via IC** (but was in the air, viz. reigning "managerialism" of the day, "strategic management of everything");  
  
2) an attempt at **larger-scale internationalisation** of curricula.  
Again initiated by the EU, via ERASMUS.  
  
**Both attempts not a roaring success inside the programme (IC remained a mainly technical reform), CD measures were not picked up by HEIs.**  
  
But: the **principle was absorbed**, see: Internationalisation-at-Home initiative and the success of national-level programmes (in curricular renewal)  
= second half 1990s
- PHASE IV:  
Internationalisation is:
  - introduction of **new degrees** (bachelor/master)
  - introduction of **credit point accumulation systems** (where they did not exist yet)
  - introduction of **quality assurance and accreditation**
  - teaching in **English**
  - online teaching and other forms of **transitional education** (move the learning, not the learner)
  - **recruitment of foreign professors, young scientists and students** and **marketing of HE** products, institutions, and systems.

- CONCLUSION:  
We have moved from
  - a focus on the **individual**
  - via a focus on **networks**
    - to an **institutional** focus
    - and now, finally, to the **systems level**.
    - we have progressively moved **up the ladder**.
    - At the **beginning**, internationalisation meant: **moving people from one system to another**.
    - Now it means: **move systems closer to one another**, and make them **merge** (single area of HE), or at least **converge**.
- With this **state of development (systemic or structural internationalisation)**, we have **arrived at Bologna**, and the **related question** of world-wide **competition**, and GATS.
- I welcome Bologna.
- The **educational fragmentation** of Europe must be **overcome**.
- It is **provincial**: we have **much closer European integration or harmonisation in other areas**: monetary affairs (Euro), free movement of labour.
- But I would **not agree** with those who say: the **earlier forms of cooperation** were simply an **excuse**, a **substitute measure for systemic internationalisation**, since the member states of the Union were not willing to agree on system convergence.
- **Homework in "traditional internationalisation" not yet done. Not by far.** Aim of **10% mobility** not achieved. Some areas, like **quality assurance in classical internationalisation** not even tackled. Point out **IQR**.
- We need both: **integrate systems**, and **cooperate** at same time.

## 2. Bologna

- NEXT THEME: BOLOGNA
- I **will not spell out** the **steps and stages** of the Sorbonne-Bologna-Prague-Berlin, which you all know by now.
- Just one thing: Bologna marks a **remarkable paradigm change** of member states (and other national governments)
- From the **praise of diversity** (an excuse for lack of reform), which to want to abolish they had suspected the European Commission, to a **love of convergence and harmonisation**.
- We are by the way **not yet there. Rien n'est jamais acquis**.
- The **systems are in motion**. But **if change** will always **result in more convergence** can only be seen at the **end of the day. Be that 2010**, or whatever date in the foreseeable future.

- There will be **many temptations** still on the MS side to **change direction**. **Educational policies** traditionally have a deep rooting in the **nation state**, and its **domestic** (sometimes: **nationalist**) **agendas**.
  
- The **core of Bologna** for me **is, in that order**
  - the introduction of a **two-tier** degree architecture, bachelors and masters, of an identical or very similar sort across Europe
  - the introduction of **credit accumulation and transfer** systems
  - the introduction of **quality assurance and accreditation systems** (compatible at least).
  - Last one a bit **overrated**: we live in an "**audit society**", have an almost **religious belief** in the ability to assure quality. Sometimes we are dreaming. Attempt to **avoid the worst**, under the conditions of constant rise of workload with less and less means.
  - You will note: **all three points** I mention **are structural (formal)**, they do not relate to content.
  
- In these structural areas, **we need convergence**.
- For two reasons:
  - to **complete** the single **space of education** (like the Euro) = **educational integration of Europe. Make mobility easy.**
  - **to create institutions able to compete**, on a global scale, on the world-wide market, but also nationally, and even locally.
  
- Does that mean we do not need **diversity**?
- You know me as a preacher of harmonisation, and you might think: he will say "no".
- You are wrong. **We desperately need diversity**: in **content**, i e in our educational products, and their delivery.
- **Structural harmonisation** makes it possible to **compare institutions**, and it is a **basis for competition**.
- **Content diversity** makes it possible for institutions **to differ**, to **be unique**.
  
- I am **not sure** at all we are moving **the right way** as regards **diversity**.
- There are now **attempts to define a common European core curriculum**. I am referring to the **TUNING** project.
- I **remain sceptical**. I remember days, and systems in these **days**, where the **curriculum in a given subject at any HEI in a given country was the same**.
- The HEIs concerned did not exactly feel autonomous.
- There was **no room to develop a profile of their own**. They were in a **straightjacket**.
- They had **no potential to compete**. Competition is about being different (in substance).
- But perhaps **I missed a point** on **TUNING**. Peter van der Hijden will certainly put me right in this case.

### 3. Competition and GATS

- That brings me to my last point: **competition and the GATS**.
- By the way: **this point is linked to Bologna**, in many ways. Bologna is meant to **increase the competitiveness** of European HE.
- It is also linked in another sense: in **Prague**, the Ministers of Education added to the Bologna agenda a few dimensions, among them: the demand that HE should remain a "**public good**".
- Some remarks on competition as such:
  - some of us (HEIs) seem to **believe there was a choice**. That we **could decide whether we want competition or not**.
  - This is **not my world picture**: I agree with David Coyne, who told Europe's rectors in Salamanca last spring: **competition is there already**. If you ignore it, you will **suffer** later.
  - **Competition over scientist**, in some subject areas more than in others. **Over students**. On the **domestic market**, but more so: **on a global scale**.
- For me, the **question is not if we have to react to it**, the **question is how**.
  - Should we **regard education as a "public good"**, and try to **keep it outside the commercial realm**? If we can at all?
  - That means probably: **heavily subsidise it**. And, I should add: with subsidies normally comes regulation of all sort.
  - Or should we **regard universities like any other service provider**? Who must **compete on the market**, and sometimes a global one. Who can also get into dire straits, and perhaps sink, i.e. have to give up business.
- Our **European tradition clearly favours the first approach. Education is a public good**.
- This is our **spontaneous reaction, almost coming from the heart**. Mine too.
- But I have a few doubts.
  - First, we know that **intentions and results** are not always the same. The "public good" ethos is linked to social-democratic ideals of equality of opportunity, access for many, and ultimately also quality. But is it so **that the publicly funded and regulated institutions really always achieve this better than the private ones?** When you read such classics as John Rawls (A THEORY OF JUSTICE), you develop some doubts.
  - Second: the **terms "public" and "private"** are **not as unambiguous** as they sound. In fact, many **"public"** universities are today engaged in **for-profit operations** in part of their work. And **many "private"** institutions do
    - a) **receive public subsidies** and

**b) operate as not-for-profits**

- Third: This becomes even more difficult when **an institution operates outside of its own country.**  
**While it might be "public" there, it is often regarded as "private" abroad, by sheer virtue of being foreign.**
  
  - Fourth: with regard to the **GATS issue**, it is at least understandable that American or Australian educational providers regard the European model as a case of **unfair competition**. We **compete over the same international students**, often in the same for a (education fairs) in the same countries, but we do not compete on an equal competitive ground.
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- It is only a slight overstatement to say that **European HEIs** increasingly act like public institutions with a private income. And:
  
  - The "**public good**" **argument**, however important and genuine it is in public policy terms, **increasingly masks commercial interests of European institutions** themselves.  
(both van Damme)
  
  - In conclusion: there **is some European protectionism at work.**
  
  - **Do not get me wrong**: I do **not** see it as **an alternative** to open the floodgates to a wild sort of **global educational capitalism**. Least of all, I would not want to see all sorts of **fraudulent providers**, and diploma mills to start operate here.
  
  - But **protectionism** has so far always been very **counterproductive.**
  
  - I have no **easy answers to** a theme as complex as **GATS**. Few in Europe seem to understand it fully, and I am not among them. But one thing appears to be clear: **an all-out "no" on the part of Europe will be neither enough nor adequate.**

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for your patient attention.