

**13TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF
INSTITUTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION (EURASHE)
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MAKING EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION A WORLDWIDE REFERENCE

ADDRESS BY RAF CHANTERIE

MEMBER OF VIVIANE REDING'S CABINET

[MRS REDING IS EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE]

Dear President,

Dear Professor Vermeesch, President of EURASHE

Representatives of the European Higher Education Sector,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be in Hungary to address you on behalf of Commissioner Viviane Reding on the occasion of the 13th Annual Conference of EURASHE. You may have read that the European Convention on the future European Constitution, wants Europe to continue with education and training cooperation. I am sure you will agree with them, as did the young people we met in October last year when we celebrated one million Erasmus students.

In Commission programmes and papers, we have the confusing or pleasant habit of calling all higher education providers *'universities'*. Please note that Mrs Reding and the European Commission like to look at European Higher education as a whole comprising a variety of higher education providers: the traditional university sector (institutions which award doctoral degrees) and the non- or 'extra'-university sector (professional oriented institutions which do not award doctoral degrees).

EURASHE members are a natural and important part of the European higher education landscape. They are active participants in Community programmes such as Socrates-Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci. EURASHE representatives play an active role in the Bologna Follow-up Group, where ministry officials of the Bologna signatory states meet with representatives of the traditional university sector (EUA), the students (ESIB), the Council of Europe and the European Commission. EURASHE is also involved in the current reflection on the future infrastructure of quality assurance in Europe: how to link the emerging national quality assurance systems into an overarching European framework.

In my presentation, I will first address the challenges higher education is faced with and then describe how Bologna can help to provide an answer through the construction of a 'European Qualifications Framework'. I will urge higher education institutions - your members - to take action themselves and I will explain what the Commission

expects from Ministers in Berlin. This means that I will try to share three important themes with you:

- ◆ The emergence of a European Qualifications Framework
- ◆ What higher education institutions can do to open to up to the wider world
- ◆ What the Commission expects from the Ministers in Berlin

Challenges

First the challenges faced by European higher Education. There is the challenge of globalisation (the co-existence of for profit- and non for profit education, allowed for by the General Agreement on trade in Services (GATS) in the WTO framework). Then we have the demographic challenge (ageing, immigration), the challenge to provide good quality teaching and research and - as a consequence - the challenge to modernise the system of higher education.

Governments and higher education institutions across Europe respond to these challenges in different ways. The Bologna process is an attempt to coordinate these responses through a package of structural reforms, notably the introduction of the two cycle system, credit transfer and quality assurance.

The Bologna Declaration adopted by the Higher Education Ministers in June 1999 has set in motion a series of reforms badly needed to make

European higher education more coherent, more competitive and more attractive for European citizens and for students and scholars from abroad. Reforms are needed because European Higher Education is lagging behind. Compared to the United States, Europe is lagging behind in public and private investment in higher education. It is also lagging behind in the number and level of incoming students from other continents.

The Bologna reforms are supported enthusiastically by the Commission. In fact, the Bologna agenda coincides with Commission policy in higher education, supported consistently over the years through programmes such as Socrates-Erasmus. In our Action Plan *'From Prague to Berlin, the EU Contribution'*, you will find a series of concrete measures to bring the Bologna process further, and to help modernise European higher education.

The Bologna process contributes to our overall ambition to make Europe the best performing knowledge economy in the world. This ambition was expressed, as you know, by our political leaders in Lisbon in March 2000 and has stimulated the Education Ministers of the Union to formulate a series of common objectives such as decreasing the number of education and training drop-outs and increasing participation in lifelong learning.

These are the main challenges. Let's see what answers Bologna provides through the emergence a '*European Qualifications Framework*'.

The emergence of a European Qualifications Framework

What we are aiming at with the introduction of the two cycle system, facilitating mobility and recognition across Europe, is in fact the creation of a 'Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area'. Within some single countries (Ireland, Scotland, Denmark) such a framework exists already. In such countries, qualifications are well-known to everybody and clearly described in terms of level and expected learning outcomes. Learners know what they will be trained for, what competences, knowledge and skills they will acquire. It is possible to move from one level to another under certain well-specified conditions. Non-formal and informal learning, like self-study or work experience is not lost, but validated and can be used, if so desired, as building blocks for a formal qualification later in life.

I believe that we should build on these positive national experiences and work towards a '*European Qualifications Framework*'. We have the right ingredients for this: a system of two or three cycles, transparency instruments, a common language of competences and quality assurance. Let us take a closer look at all of these four ingredients.

A system of two or three cycles

In almost all signatory states, laws have been passed that allow for the introduction of the two-cycle system. Countries that have not yet done so should hurry if they want to be part of the European Higher Education Area by 2010. Legal permission, however, is not enough. In some countries, legal permission leads to a semi-permanent co-existence of old and new degree structures, creating more confusion instead of less. I urge these countries to review their policies. Bologna cannot be implemented à la carte, it has to be done across the board and wholeheartedly. If not, the process will leave European higher education even less united than before.

This also implies that we need more coherence at European level as regards the length and function of the two cycles. Too often, bachelor and master degrees are seen as one and inseparable and not recognised as valid degrees in their own right. The Bologna seminars on bachelor and master degrees in Helsinki marked steps in the right direction but more needs to be done.

National and regional governments should set the conditions, legal, financial and otherwise. Real reforms, however, can only take place when these reforms are accepted and supported by the academic community, the institutional leadership, students and staff.

I have read with great interest the Commission supported 'TRENDS III Report' which covers a variety of universities and other higher education institutions. The draft report describes, in all honesty, the level of awareness or lack of awareness of Bologna reforms and the degree of their implementation. It shows that Bologna is gaining ground and that some countries and institutions have made remarkable progress. In too many cases, however, reforms are so far only plans or promises, without real steps to implement them. In a number of cases the necessary university autonomy is hampered by national legal constraints, blocking for example the award of double or joint degrees.

Funding is obviously an issue for Governments and institutions alike to consider. In the long run, however, I believe that the price of not implementing the Bologna reforms would be higher for the institutions and for society as a whole.

While introducing the two-cycle system, we should not forget the short sub-cycle programmes (below the bachelor level) which play an important role in tertiary education in a number of countries. This is clearly demonstrated by the EURASHE study to be presented at this conference which is supported by the Commission through the Socrates programme.

We must also not forget the doctoral level. Both are part of the continuum of lifelong learning. I welcome suggestions made to integrate both levels in the Bologna process. Together with my

Colleague Commissioner Philippe Busquin, I will examine how to promote European cooperation at doctoral level, helping young researchers at the crossroads of education and research.

Transparency instruments

The second ingredient of a European Qualifications Framework would consist of transparency instruments. You are all familiar, I hope, with the transparency instruments ECTS and Diploma Supplement. The European Credit Transfer System ECTS helps to describe programmes of study, to define student workload and to transfer credits for mobile students. More than one thousand higher education institutions have introduced ECTS in one or more departments, with Commission Socrates-Erasmus support.

Our ambition is now to give ECTS a system-wide effect, to make sure that all students from all departments get credits, not only the mobile happy few. The Ministers in Bologna have signed up to this ambition. The Rectors gathered by the EUA in Zurich last year acknowledged the role of ECTS for transparency, recognition and curriculum innovation.

This year, the Commission is introducing an 'ECTS label' for universities and other higher education institutions that use ECTS in all first and second cycle degree programmes. Next year the Commission will start with a pilot project to test a new 'ECTS for Lifelong Learning', which will help institutions to award credits – at the appropriate level – to non-traditional learners, learners they decide to

admit to their degree programmes. In addition, the Commission supports 30 country teams of ECTS Counsellors, which are standby to assist institutions introducing ECTS and ECTS for lifelong learning.

Similar action is undertaken support the wider use of the Diploma Supplement. The Commission is also exploring how to integrate transparency instruments developed for vocational training (like Europass, European Portfolio and the European CV) with ECTS and the Diploma Supplement, developed originally for higher education. Integrating transparency instruments would make sense to the European citizens and employers.

It would also provide a concrete example of synergies between the Bologna process for higher education and the new Bruges-Copenhagen process for Vocational Education and Training, with due respect of course for the differences in scope and academic ambition of the institutions concerned.

Talking about transparency, I should not forget the new Web Portal for learning opportunities PLOTEUS, launched by the Commission this year. PLOTEUS provides easy access to the web sites of your institution and other information in more and more detail and in more and more languages.

Talking about languages, I would like to draw your attention to the third ingredient of a European Qualifications Framework, the one I would call 'the Common Language of Competences'.

The Common Language of Competences

Qualifications or diplomas can be described by their name in the national language, English or Latin. The learning behind can be made more transparent with ECTS and the use of the Diploma Supplement. Another and new way to increase transparency is to describe the outcomes of the studies, the so-called 'competences': what a learner knows in theory and is able to do in practice on the labour market.

Experts of the 'Joint Quality Initiative' have formulated generic competences they expect from bachelors and masters. The 135 universities and other higher education institutions gathered in the project supported by the Commission on '*Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*' are describing both generic and subject-specific competences for nine different subject areas and they, the experts, discover that the competences we expect from graduates across Europe are not that different.

The Tuning project is now entering into its second phase. The higher education sector outside traditional universities is represented in the subject area Business Studies and in the new subject area Nursing.

I find the "competences approach" extremely promising. It provides a common language for describing higher learning without interfering in the organisation of the institution and the method of teaching. Agreement on core competences will facilitate comparison and recognition of degrees, whilst respecting the autonomy of the university and its capacity to innovate and experiment. Competence descriptors will assist institutions in curriculum development. They can also be used for the purpose of internal and external quality assurance.

Knowledge develops continuously through research, and societal needs change overtime, so competences need regular updating. Here, Socrates-Erasmus Thematic Networks could play a role bringing together experts and stakeholders from academia and society.

Quality assurance

Fourth and last but not least, we need sound quality assurance for all higher education provision in order to build a European Qualifications Framework. Fortunately, we witness remarkable progress in this field. The good experience of the European Pilot projects launched by the Commission in the nineties convinced in 1998 the Council of Ministers to adopt a Recommendation on the Promotion of Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Since then, almost all countries have set up an external quality assurance system or laid the foundations for such a system. The European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies ENQA, whose members carry out regular external quality evaluations, is growing fast across in countries across the wider Europe. University

networks and notably the EUA stimulate their members to develop an internal quality culture. The Commission encourages good practice in both internal and external quality assurance.

I believe time has come to go a step further. Ministers in Bologna called for ‘comparable criteria’ and ‘comparable methodologies’. Ministers in Prague called for a ‘common framework of reference’ and ‘scenarios’ to be developed. We can and should demonstrate progress in this central field.

This summer, the Commission will adopt a Report on the implementation of the 1998 Council Recommendation on co-operation in quality assurance in higher education, in which Commissioner Reding will propose to make European quality assurance more coherent and more reliable.

The Commissioner will propose to apply comparable methodologies in evaluations across Europe, based on the rich methodological experiences of the ENQA network members. She will also propose to apply comparable criteria in evaluations across Europe.

One set of comparable criteria would be to systematically evaluate the existence and effectiveness of sound internal quality assurance mechanisms within the institutions concerned.

Another set of comparable criteria would be to evaluate the use of learning outcomes or competences: Has the university defined what the graduate is supposed to know in theory and able to do in practice on the labour market? Are these competences relevant for the field concerned? Are they properly described and assessed? Is the university doing a fair, a good or an excellent job in transmitting these competences to their students?

The Commission will finally propose to link the national, regional and professional quality evaluation systems and arrive at a system of “meta-accreditation”, making quality assurance agencies themselves subject to periodical quality evaluation. Guidelines need to be established to ensure that external quality evaluation is fair and appropriate and leaves room for institutions to experiment and innovate.

Any system of meta-accreditation would need to be designed carefully and include all relevant stakeholders from academia and society in order to ensure that legitimate interests are well represented. I am pleased to note that EURASHE is involved in the current reflection on the future infrastructure of quality assurance in Europe: how to link the emerging national quality assurance systems into an overarching European framework.

More coherence in quality assurance in Europe will also facilitate recognition of diplomas and periods of study. It will not be the magic

solution, leading to automatic recognition in all cases, but it will help admission officers, credential evaluators and employers taking swifter and better informed recognition decisions.

A strong European framework for quality assurance, covering universities and other higher education institutions, public and private, would bring transparency on quality and also help institutions face the challenges posed by the co-existence of for profit- and non for profit education, allowed for by the General Agreement on trade in Services (GATS) in the WTO framework. Despite the presence of for profit providers, education remains a public responsibility. Governments should create and maintain a framework for higher education, ensuring quality and equitable access.

In Conclusion, I believe we that a lot of work still needs to be done but that we have the ingredients - the four I described to you - to create a 'European Qualifications Framework'. National reforms combined with European initiatives such as ECTS and TUNING can make a big difference. The Recommendations of the recent Copenhagen Bologna Seminar on qualification structures, are very promising in this respect and have my full support.

My second theme is " How higher education institutions can open up to the wider world"

The Bologna process is also an invitation to the higher education sector to open up to the wider world, to society that surrounds them and to

other countries and continents. European Higher education should become more attractive for our own citizens and for students and scholars from abroad.

This means action for higher education institutions in two fields: 1) entering into in the field of lifelong learning and 2) setting out a European (and international) strategy.

1) Lifelong learning

As regards lifelong learning, I believe the higher education sector outside universities with its strong professional orientation has more experience than traditional research oriented universities, which are often perceived as ‘ivory towers. However, all higher education institutions should realise that the number of 18-24 year old campus students will decrease in the years to come. In the past few decades, institutions were blessed by the growing overall participation rate in higher education and notably the advent of female students. In future, institutions will have to open their doors to non-traditional learners or close down departments.

All institutions should therefore rethink the way in which students enter and leave their institution and the type of courses on offer to them. They should consider providing courses at unusual hours (evenings and weekends), to unusual students (workers, adults) at unusual places (the workplace), using unusual techniques (distance learning and ICT).

Higher education institutions, should consider to create 'welcome centres' where they assess non-traditional learners, give advice on individual learning paths, decide on admission to full courses or individual modules, leading or not leading to a degree. Universities and other higher education institutions should try to be at the centre of what I call the 'learning region' establishing links with social partners and other education and training providers. Institutions should of course make their educational offer transparent through ECTS, the Diploma Supplement and put their entire course offer on the Web

Each institution will have to define its own profile and position itself in the continuum of lifelong learning. Do I concentrate on the 18-24 year olds in my town or region? That is a legitimate choice, small is beautiful. Or do I widen my scope to welcome regular students and non-traditional learners from within my country. Does my institution want to be a European, or even an international player?

2) Developing a European Strategy

Furthermore, I would encourage every higher education institution to consider its European profile, to examine which partners suit their own interests and future development best. For the sake of the mobile students, offering them an Erasmus experience they will cherish the rest of their life. However, the vast majority of students is non-mobile. I hope, with joint public and private effort, to increase the percentage of mobile students, which is now less than 5 % of graduates. But we all

know that the majority of students will study and work solely in their own town or region.

These students will also be confronted in their private and professional life with other language and cultures. They also need to be prepared for an increasingly European environment. These students should also benefit from the European and international atmosphere you create at your institution, joining in the classroom with foreign students, learning languages, taking part in summer courses, being in contact with visiting or permanent professors from abroad.

They also will benefit from the fact that your institutions are engaged in European projects and networks, in particular as regards the Socrates-Erasmus Thematic Networks, which nowadays exist in almost every field of study.

I also invite all higher education institutions to keep an keen eye on two new programmes the Commission hopes to see adopted by the end of the year. The first one is on E-learning. It aims to promote and facilitate the effective integration of information and communication technologies in European education and training systems through virtual campuses and the e-twinning of schools. The other programme is called 'Erasmus Mundus'.

Erasmus Mundus will allow the best students and scholars from other continents to follow joint master programmes, taught in different

European countries, alongside their European counterparts. The programme is part of a broader effort of the Commission to establish an intercultural dialogue between the EU, its neighbouring regions and other continents.

Erasmus Mundus also means increased European cooperation in promoting the European higher education offer in the wider world. A marketing strategy is needed indeed to bring European quality and distinctiveness to the attention of the best partners, students and scholars in other continents. It will be a flagship programme putting European higher education on the map.

The example of Erasmus Mundus will hopefully show that one way of becoming stronger as an individual institution is to cooperate and create consortia in order to pool resources in the delivery of joint degrees. These may be joint degrees at bachelor, master and at doctoral level.

Experiences with existing and new programmes and your comments will help the Commission to design a new generation of programmes that will run as from 2007.

Finally, I would recommend all institutions to read the recent Commission Communication on the Role of the Universities (meaning

all higher education institutions) in the Europe of knowledge¹ which raises a number of questions such as:

- ◆ how to achieve adequate and sustainable incomes for institutions;
- ◆ how to ensure institutional autonomy;
- ◆ how to create the conditions within which institutions can attain and develop excellence;
- ◆ how to make higher education institutions contribute better to local and regional needs;
- ◆ How to establish closer co-operation between higher education institutions and enterprises

My third and last theme is to share with you what the Commission expects from the Ministers in Berlin

I would expect Ministers in Berlin to mark a decisive step towards the creation a ‘European Qualification Framework’, allowing citizens to move from one learning opportunity to another with fair and swift recognition. This means that signatory states should proceed and establish national qualifications frameworks where they do not yet exist and co-operate in order to make sure that they fit the overall European framework.

It also means that the signatory states should do their ‘Bologna homework’ and set clear targets. For example: all signatory states

¹ The role of the Universities in the Europe of Knowledge. COM(2003) 58 final of 05.02.2003.

should have started implementing the two cycles by 2005 (two years from now and six years after Bologna). It also means that all stakeholders in quality assurance co-operate in the design of a system of meta-accreditation based on comparable methodologies and criteria.

In this context Commissioner Reding will urge ministers to give special attention to the Europe-wide recognition of joint degrees starting with the Joint Masters: If three or more higher education institutions and countries recognise a joint degree, legal or in fact this degree should be recognised Europe-wide!

As regards mobility, Mrs Reding will also urge the Ministers to join forces with public and private sponsors in order to triple the number of Erasmus students by 2010.

And finally, She will ask Ministers to make student loans and grants portable in order to enable their students to carry out short or longer periods of study or even full cycles in other European countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the potential in Europe is enormous. We have the biggest single market in the world. Thousands of higher education institutions produce knowledge and transmit their knowledge to hundreds of thousands of graduates every year. Many institutions, many individual departments are world class. But we do not use our potential to the full. There are still too many barriers to the mobility of students, teachers and researchers. Institutions do not co-operate

enough, the transmission of new knowledge to the world of enterprise is not well organised and funding is often inadequate or used inefficiently.

I would expect the higher education sector to take up these challenges and take a pro-active stand on what higher education institutions can do in order to realise the Bologna reforms, in order to face globalisation, to serve the learners of the future and contribute to the “Europe of knowledge”.

I wish you a most successful Conference.