

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Commissioner Vassiliou apologizes for not being able to be with you in person today and has asked me to deliver her message to you.

I am therefore very grateful for the opportunity to address you on the commissioners' behalf. I would like to thank the Cypriot Presidency, EURASHE, the European University Cyprus and the Open University of Cyprus for organising this important and timely seminar.

Ultimately, as we all know, it is the quality of higher education that decides on the quality of Europe's human resources, and effective quality assurance systems are crucial to the reform and modernisation of our higher education systems.

It is a big challenge, because the nature of higher education is changing, with new teaching methods, a more diverse student population and increasing cross-border links.

And what you are doing is very important work: by strengthening a culture of quality we also encourage improvements in both teaching and learning. Improvements that will result in better design and assessment of programmes, and in better recognition of foreign qualifications and of student mobility periods, thereby contributing to the further internationalisation of our universities and colleges.

The revision of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance was one of the key action points in the Bucharest Communiqué after the last meeting of the Bologna Process. The new guidelines will be crucial for the future direction of higher education in Europe. They will build confidence, and form the basis of the mutual trust that is necessary to remove all barriers to cooperation and mobility.

EURASHE is a key player in this process, and I am happy to acknowledge their very good work.

The Commission is also working on its contribution. We are preparing our second report on progress in developing quality assurance in Europe. We will assess how far we have come in meeting the recommendations of the previous report and identify the key priorities for the next period.

This seminar is an excellent opportunity to start tackling all these challenges and I encourage you to be bold in your thinking and use this opportunity to take Quality Assurance a step further, so that we can all move towards providing real measures of quality in higher education.

Commissioner Vassiliou very much looks forward to the outcomes of your discussions, and we wish you a successful seminar, and an enjoyable time in Cyprus.