



Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca

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The knowledge society is no longer in front of us. It is already around us. Mankind has just entered an information and knowledge oriented age. Worldwide investments in research and development are growing faster than wealth and largely exceed 1,000 billion dollar per year, thus amounting to 2% of the world gross domestic product.

The world map of new knowledge creation is changing rapidly. New countries – such as China, India and Brazil – have already joined the G8 on scientific research. The world of science is no longer limited to the continents facing the Atlantic Ocean, with an enclave in the East (Japan), but is nowadays multi-centred and is spreading over all continents.

High Tech commodities – which incorporate, in the words of the sociologist Luciano Gallino, “endless growing” knowledge – are an increasingly important part of international trade and certainly the most dynamic part of it.

If Europe wants to play a leading role in this exceptional change – as we planned in Lisbon in 2000 – it should urgently aim to reach great numbers: it should, for instance, as stated in Lisbon, increase investments in R&D up to 3% of GDP. But if Europe wants to act as a leader in the age of knowledge, it should also, and above all, aim to achieve a high quality goal. We should guarantee to European students a very high quality education, the best possible. Our universities should achieve top excellence, pervasively and steadily.

This is the reason why, in our opinion, the meeting which Rome has the honour to host today – the European Quality Assurance Forum 2007 – has a high strategic value.

We are not starting from the very beginning.

We have a great tradition. As a matter of fact universities, in their modern meaning, originated in Europe. Modern science was born in our continent.

And our present is also great. Europe can nowadays rely on truly exceptional cultural and human resources: 4,000 universities and research institutions; 435,000 researchers; 1.5 million people working in the Research and Development; 17 million students. Pure excellence is far from being unknown in our scientific research and higher education centres.

Yet neither our great past nor our solid present can guarantee our future. In the next few years, for the first time over many centuries, we will experience a world where most of scientists, technicians and great intellectuals live outside the borders of Europe and North America.

This should not frighten us. On the contrary, we should avail ourselves of all possible opportunities. We should take advantage from the “enormous tradition” and the positive present in order to construct our future in the multi-centred world of knowledge. A future where Europe could and should accomplish a special



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mission: making the knowledge society democratic, because science – as Francis Bacon said– should not be in favour of anyone but to the benefit of the whole mankind.

In order to accomplish all the above we have to focus on quality.

In the next few days you will explain us in detail how to assure to our universities an increasingly high quality for the future. We should definitely follow the three following lines.

1. To bring the European investments in higher education at least at the levels achieved in the United States and in Japan. From this point of view great differences exist among EU countries. The point is that all EU largest countries – Germany, France, United Kingdom, Spain, Poland and, even more so, my Country – are investing in higher education about the half than USA and Japan. We have to teach more, better, and to a costantly increasing number of people.

2. To speed up the «Bologna Process», by integrating the education capability of various EU countries in order to build up the «European space for higher education» on solid foundations. This is not a vague wish. Without a strong integration of the higher education offer, Europe will unlikely achieve absolute excellence in higher education.

3. To acquire a strong «evaluation culture». In Italy the Agency for University and Research Evaluation (ANVUR) is being set up, aiming to acknowledge and reward merits. In my opinion, the integrated network of the European universities will have to establish common rules in order to acknowledge and reward merit..

In the end I would like to remind that also modern education originates in Europe and that its father, the Moravian Jan Amos Komensky, known as Comenius, wrote in *Pansophiae prodromus* in 1639: «Now, finally, the steady effort of some people to bring the study method to perfection so that anything which should be known can be easily instilled in human minds, is coming out. Should this effort (hopefully) succeed, here is the way to rapidly teach everything to everyone».

Well then, the quality project of Comenius should become our own project. If we want our Europe to play a key role in the building up of a democratic knowledge society, we should aim at improving our capability to teach “everything to everyone”, achieving in the meantime the “highest perfection”.