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For the past 9 years, we have been working very diligently in Europe to implement the Bologna Process. Cooperation has been the hallmark of these efforts and has taken many forms:

- Cooperation of the stakeholders with the governments: each of us around this table has contributed to the policy discussions in the Bologna Process and has made important proposals that have been adopted by the ministers.
- Cooperation in the E4 Group: we have developed together the European Standards and Guidelines, the European Quality Assurance Register and the European Quality Assurance Forum.
- Cooperation between universities to develop joint degrees, mobility exchange, etc., in order to create a European Higher Education Area.

With globalisation, however, the competition for talents is growing around the world and many policymakers view higher education as having a central role to play in this. International rankings are part and parcel of this new global competition.

- As we heard this morning, rankings have weaknesses and perverse effects but many policymakers are tempted to devise new ranking schemes in order to improve the international positions of their institutions.
- Institutions are also tempted to play the ranking game and some have become complicit. These institutions want to be in the top 20 internationally whether it is in response to their government's aspiration or their own.
- Thus, the dissatisfaction of some policymakers and the frustration of some institutions are leading us, today, to a situation where there are proposals on the table to develop better rankings schemes – even though rankings have existed for at least 20 years and none of them has proven to be reliable or free of unintended and negative consequences.
- Their major problems are:
 1. that they impose a set of externally-defined indicators on a diverse sector; and
 2. that they are increasingly equated with standards and confused with evaluation and quality assurance

How can we, in Europe, deal with the tensions that are at the heart of government policies?

How can the higher education sector respond to the conflicting pressures of improving our institutional position in rankings, expanding access, developing lifelong learning and achieving excellence in research?

How can we ensure that we meet the diverse needs of society and avoid the standardisation and homogeneity that could result from rankings?

How can we be accountable and at the same time promote creativity and risk taking in higher education?

I believe that, at the policy level, the starting points for answering these questions are:

1. To ensure a diversified higher education sector and promote the notion of parity of esteem among different types of institutions.
2. To continue our efforts to develop internal quality processes in institutions.

3. To stress a contextual definition of quality, an approach that is exactly antithetical to rankings.

Our focus at EUA has been on strengthening the strategic capacity of universities, through the development of internal quality processes. We stress that each university must define its quality standards and indicators in the context of its specific profile.

The fact that in this audience so many of you are responsible for these internal quality procedures is a testimony of the progress we have achieved.

We are equally appreciative that many quality assurance agencies have changed their approaches in order to take into account these institutional developments.

Given these considerations, I would submit that we need to continue to focus our efforts on:

1. The need to have a diversified higher education sector and, therefore, a multi-dimensional definition of quality.
2. The need to ensure the vitality and creativity of research and education in Europe, which implies strengthened institutional governance, in part, through internal quality processes.

However challenging these efforts will be, we need to remember that rankings will not go away. Therefore, it will also be important that universities work harder at providing information to the public about their own performance. This information must be reliable and helpful to students and a range of stakeholders. I hope that, in the years ahead, we will make significant strides toward that goal, which will help reduce the importance and impact of rankings.