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Tuning Educational structures in Europe

From Prague to Berlin, the EU contribution

Opening address at the Tuning Closing Conference

Brussels, 31 May 2002

Mrs Viviane Reding, EU Commissioner

- I welcome you all to Brussels, to the premises of the European Commission, all professors participating in the Tuning project, the president of the European University Association EUA (prof. Eric Froment), the Secretary General of the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education EURASHE (Mr. Søren Nørgaard), the students and their associations, the president of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ENQA (Mr. Christian Thune), the employers (UNICE), professional associations and other interested parties.
- A particular word of welcome for the Rectors of the Universities of Deusto (Spain) and Groningen (the Netherlands): Prof. Abrego de Lacy .and Prof. D. Bosscher.

The two universities (through Mrs. Julia Gonzalez and Mr. Robert Wagenaar) are coordinating the Tuning project and we thank them for their hard work.

Commission européenne, B-1049 Bruxelles / Europese Commissie, B-1049 Brussel - Belgium. Telephone: (32-2) 299 11 11. Office: B-7 06/68. Telephone: direct line (32-2) 2955396. Fax: (32-2) 2994153.

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- The European Commission is proud to host this conference and by saying so, I wish to stress that Tuning is an university initiative proposed by universities, but one in which we believe, and have supported through the Socrates programme.
- Why is the Tuning project receiving so much attention and creating so many expectations? I believe this is because the Tuning project is at the heart of the Bologna process.
- The Tuning project addresses several of the Bologna action lines, notably:
 - Easily readable and comparable degrees
 - Adoption of a system of two cycles
 - Credit transfer
 - Quality assurance

and

 - Life long learning
- We still have a lot to do to make the European Higher Education Area a reality by 2010. We are still far away from a situation in which transparency, quality and recognition are common features in Europe
- We, the European Commission, are actively supporting the Bologna Process and we have set out our own Action plan "from Prague to Berlin - the European contribution"

- I will highlight three areas for which I believe a special push is needed and for which I have proposed specific measures:
 - Credits for life long learning
 - European Masters
 - Quality Assurance

- Credits for lifelong learning. In the future there should be no more drop-outs. Every individual should have the opportunity to learn throughout life - in the formal education system, but also outside the formal system through life and work experience and through self-study.

And people should be able to have their learning validated (accredited) so that it can eventually contribute to formal certificates and even degrees.

For this reason we are currently supporting 3 exploratory projects under the so-called Joint Actions (Socrates-Leonardo-Youth) in order to collect and analyse existing experience in validating informal and non formal learning, and to help design a new pilot scheme for credit accumulation for life long learning. This new pilot - a kind of "ECTS"-plus - could start in 2003 or 2004 as a new Joint Action project on a much wider scale, opening doors and providing access to learning opportunities for all.

- European Masters. I want universities in Europe to pool their resources and create high quality courses at Master level.

- These Master courses (centres of excellence) would raise the profile and attractiveness of European Higher Education for European students but also for students and teachers from other continents. Europe should become the most favoured destination for high level learning in the world.
- In order to stimulate the creation of European Masters, we follow a 3-step approach. First a quick survey to study current practice and to define a typology and a model (or a few models). We need to be clear what "European" means: how many partners, what type of curriculum integration we want, what recognition arrangements? Researchers from the European University Association (EUA) are at present carrying out this survey.
- Step two is a small pilot scheme (2002-2003) to assess good practice in 10 different existing joint master programmes and see how the masters courses could be developed in future. We will support this through the Socrates programme and it will again be coordinated by the EUA.
- The pilot scheme will be launched in Brussels on 20 September 2002. The results of the survey will be discussed at this event.
- On the basis of the findings of both the survey and the pilot scheme, I envisage a third step: systematic support for a growing number of European masters (50, 100, 150, etc) in the coming years (perhaps even as early as from 2003-2004). We will support this through the Socrates programme and possibly from new Commission initiatives to encourage students from the rest of the world to come to study here, and to appreciate the excellence there is in European Higher education.

- Quality Assurance. In this field, progress has been made since the Commission began supporting pilot schemes through Socrates in the last decade of the last century.
- On the basis of the Council recommendation on cooperation in quality assurance in higher education of December 1998, many countries have set up their own Quality Assurance agencies and a European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) has been created.
- I believe we now need to go a step further and make quality assurance and evaluation more widely spread, more common and more coherent. This means we need to progress both on quality assurance inside universities, and on external mechanisms to support this.
- For the internal quality assurance we are cooperating with the European University Association on a pilot scheme (2002-2003) on "quality culture" in order to help universities (and colleges or polytechnics) to learn from each other in small groups how to introduce internal quality assurance mechanisms in areas such as teaching, research and student support.
- As for external quality assurance, we are cooperating with the ENQA network. ENQA is coordinating an evaluation of the quality of education in 5 universities in 5 countries in 3 different fields: history, physics and veterinary science. 3 designated ENQA member agencies work together with the respective Socrates-Erasmus Thematic Networks. The innovation here lies in the fact that study programmes will be evaluated against common criteria, so we shall be able to see comparisons across Europe.
- These common criteria will - as far as possible - be based on the findings of the Tuning project. So we can already see that Tuning is having an impact!

- Common criteria are a delicate issue. Who should define them? Governments? Professional bodies (increasingly active in certain fields)? Academics? Some combination of these actors and stakeholders? Could the Socrates-Erasmus Thematic Networks play a role here?

- As I said, we are beginning to define criteria (or reference points) in the Tuning project, but criteria, standards or reference points used in evaluations should be clear and allow meaningful comparison. At the same time, they should not be too rigid but allow for innovation. They should not be the lowest common denominator. Not an easy task.

- The Commission will monitor the outcomes of the two pilot schemes on quality (internal and external). They will stimulate the debate on the future organisation of quality assurance and accreditation in Europe in the run up to the Higher Education convention in Graz, May 2003 and to the Ministerial Meeting in Berlin, September 2003. We will set out our conclusions in a Report on the Council Recommendation on Quality.

- The Commission's plans in the higher education area fit into the broader agenda defined by the Heads of State and Government in Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002). Our Ministers aimed at making Europe "*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*". In Barcelona, they added three things of importance.
 - ❖ First, they redefined what they think is important about the way in which society in Europe works: "*the European social model is based on good economic performance, a high level of social protection and education*"

and social dialogue". That's the first time they have explicitly recognised the fundamental role that education plays in society and this is an important marker.

- ❖ Secondly, they "*set the objective of making its educative and training systems a world quality reference by 2010*". Again, a challenge for the Ministers: a recognition that quality today is judged not just by national or regional standards, nor even by European ones: but by world-wide competition. That's a point that researchers know well, and which applies particularly strongly to universities.
 - ❖ And thirdly, they endorsed specifically the three main objectives adopted by Education Ministers: increasing quality of provision, generalising access to education and training at all ages; and opening up the education and training systems to the wider world.
- The Tuning project is at the crossroads of all these developments and therefore this project is so interesting and so challenging.

You have called it a closing conference but in my view it is too early for that.

Let's call it a new beginning of cooperation and standard setting across traditional boundaries!

I open this conference and I wish you every success.

Contact:

Peter Van der Hijden, DG EAC, A2, tel 65229