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**Statement by Andrew McIntosh\***  
**Rapporteur on the potential contribution of the Council of Europe  
in the development of the European Higher Education Area**

On the occasion of the Ministerial Conference of the Bologna Process in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium (28-29 April 2009), I call for wider and more secure public support for higher education reform in 2010-2020+ to achieve the European Higher Education Area.

The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly should welcome the creation of a European Higher Education Area in and after 2010, designed to face the challenges of a knowledge society and a global economy, and based on principles of compatibility and comparability. This will need:

- more active support from national Parliaments in order to advance the cause of higher education in the nations of Europe, building on the achievements in the decade of the Bologna Process,
- steering structures which better reflect the full European membership of the Bologna Process, which includes 19 non-EU members,
- support structures which better ensure continuity, impartiality and openness in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

*1999-2009: WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?*

I salute the unprecedentedly deep and continuing Europe-wide cooperation on higher education between 46 participating governments, working with higher education leaders, academics and other staff, students and the European Commission, with the support of the Council of Europe and other stakeholders, which has led to:

- the recognition of higher education as a public responsibility,
- the reform of higher education systems in Europe in ways which benefit from intercultural cooperation and meet the challenges of a global knowledge society,
- greater compatibility and comparability of systems through developing three-cycle degree structures,
- the emergence of a quality strategy based on the linkage between qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and curriculum reform, and the wider application of credit transfer and accumulation instruments,
- better support for research and teaching synergies,
- improved freedom of cross-border movement for students and staff,
- and acceptance of the legal obligations under the European Cultural Convention of 1954 and the Lisbon Recognition Convention of 1997, which has been achieved, not just by governments, but by political decisions by national parliaments.

*2010-2020+: WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?*

The EHEA now needs the explicit and ongoing recognition and support of parliaments and legislatures, not just of potentially changing majority governments and their administrative teams.



National or regional education ministers will be the core decision-makers, and higher education institutions and students the drivers of the process, but they alone will not be able to make a reality of ambitious Bologna principles and policies, such as social cohesion and equity, fair recognition, mobility accessible for all students and academics as well as researchers. Broad-based political support is needed.

The informal Bologna structure has served Europe well during the 'development decade'.

But organisational structure must reflect the work to be done, not past history. The steering process based on a EU model of a trio of presidencies, in which chairmanship changes hands every six months, and a support process based on volunteer host countries providing a secretariat which changes hands every two years, has served its purpose, but is no longer valid. It is not plausible to suggest, as the draft Leuven communiqué does, that the existing organisational structure can be 'endorsed as fit for purpose' for an EHEA.

There should be steering and support structures which will provide continuity, impartiality, and openness:

- steering processes should build on the active participation and contribution, on equal terms, of those more recent members who have not been part of the European Union, notably Turkey, Russia, or the countries of the south Caucasus,
- further support mechanisms for the secretariat of the EHEA should be investigated in terms of ensuring effective continuity and accessibility, as well as professionalism and impartiality.

I also believe that further development work on the Bologna model will be needed to make a reality of the existing commitments, notably:

- further progress in creating synergies between research and teaching in line with the European concept of a university,
- improvements in the way student body membership, and completion rates, reflect the social and economic diversity of Europe's populations,
- improvements in the contribution of higher education to economic and social development in Europe, and to the employability of graduates,
- widening participation through lifelong learning,
- the recognition of strands of higher education other than those on existing western European models,
- clarification of the role, though not necessarily the exclusive role, of public funding in higher education,
- and, furthermore, an open door to the accession to associate status of countries outside Europe,

## *IN CONCLUSION*

The Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly, in the knowledge that EHEA membership is virtually coterminous with Council of Europe membership, have for many years been active in contributing to the achievement of improved transparency, continuity, collective memory, the participation of the higher education sectors' many partners, and wider and more secure political and social support for higher education reform. I look forward to discussing these ideas with those responsible for the transition from Bologna to the EHEA.

\* Rt.Hon. Andrew McIntosh, Member of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and of the British House of Lords, former UK Government Minister.