

## PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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### **Recommendation 1892 (2009)<sup>1</sup> Contribution of the Council of Europe to the development of the European Higher Education Area**

1. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe underlines the importance of a European dimension in higher education which will both foster understanding among European peoples and provide better educational results, responding more adequately to the demands of our time. In a globalised, knowledge-based and interdependent world, well-educated human resources are a key factor for social, economic and democratic stability and welfare. Especially in times of economic crisis, states must also invest in people and their education.

2. The European Cultural Convention of 1954 (ETS No. 18), the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region of 1997 (ETS No. 165, hereinafter the Lisbon Recognition Convention) and the fundamental right to education under Article 2 of the first Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 9) have set the legal framework for a European dimension in higher education and constitute the basis for the Bologna Process.

3. Recalling its Recommendation 1620 (2003) on the Council of Europe contribution to the higher education area, the Assembly believes that the official launch of the European Higher Education Area in 2010 requires greater support by member states, national parliaments, institutions of higher education and students. It also calls for more Council of Europe involvement in developing the European Higher Education Area by 2020 throughout Europe.

4. Recalling its Recommendation 1762 (2006) on academic freedom and university autonomy, the Assembly reaffirms its recommendation to the Committee of Ministers that these principles be recognised as fundamental freedoms throughout Europe alongside, and equal to, the fundamental right to education. Academic freedom and university autonomy have been essential for the foundation of universities in Europe and the admission of students from abroad for many centuries.

5. The Assembly emphasises the power of national legislators to set the standards for higher education in accordance with national traditions, circumstances and requirements. The creation of the European Higher Education Area requires the explicit and ongoing recognition and support of parliaments, not just of potentially changing majority governments and their administrative teams.

6. The Assembly welcomes the progress made over the past decade by the states participating in the Bologna Process in defining common policies for European higher education.

All of those states, bar the Holy See, are member states of the Council of Europe and all are signatories to these above-mentioned conventions, with the exception of Greece, which has not yet signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

7. The Bologna Process will become the European Higher Education Area in 2010. The Assembly strongly supports this transformation which constitutes a policy objective of the highest importance for all states and people in the European Higher Education Area. It requires the consolidation of the existing achievements throughout Europe. Non-member states of the European Union must not be left behind. Quality assurance, the mutual recognition of diplomas and other qualifications leading to admission to higher education institutions as well as the mutual recognition of study periods spent at, and qualifications obtained from, higher education institutions, are a necessary condition for the establishment of the European Higher Education Area.

8. The Assembly appreciates the voluntary initiatives by the past and present ministries providing the secretariat services to the Bologna Process. It notes with concern that such secretariat structures depend on the availability and resources of particular ministries which have to serve primarily national interests, and that they become the owner of the archives. While the informal Bologna structure has served well during the development decade, a reformed steering process will be needed for the creation of the European Higher Education Area which is not led by European Union presidencies, in which chairmanship changes every six months, and a support process based on volunteer host countries providing a secretariat which changes hands every two years.

9. The Assembly welcomes the participation of the European Commission in the Bologna Process and the provision of large financial contributions by the European Union, for instance under the Erasmus programme, supporting higher education, vocational training and lifelong learning while respecting the principle of subsidiarity and the national powers of its member states.

10. The realisation of the European Higher Education Area depends on higher education institutions and students. Both students and higher education institutions must become the driving force and owners of European standards in higher education. The Assembly recalls in this context the establishment of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport in 2007, which provides for a unique platform for states and sport associations alike and aims to promote sport through policy and standard setting, monitoring, capacity building and the exchange of good practice. This enlarged partial agreement can serve as an example to be followed for an effective co-operation between states and non-governmental stakeholders in the field of higher education and as a potential forum supporting the European Higher Education Area.

11. All signatories to the European Cultural Convention are represented in the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research by both a governmental representative and a representative from academia. The Assembly welcomes this dual representation, which allows states to discuss policies, standards and action among

themselves, to decide on common positions and to ensure their implementation at the level of national governments and institutions. The Council of Europe Secretariat offers neutral professional assistance to all members of the steering committee who lead the committee work.

12. The creation of the European Higher Education Area must take account of globalisation. Neither a European fortress nor an ivory tower should be created. Therefore, the Assembly believes that international co-operation in higher education must be reinforced. Being open to accession by non-European states, the Lisbon Recognition Convention provides an adequate legal basis for such wider co-operation. Non-European signatories to this convention should also be invited to participate as observers in the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research.

13. The Assembly calls on its member parliaments to actively contribute to an open political debate and analyse their national requirements and legislation regarding the creation of the European Higher Education Area.

14. The Assembly invites the European University Association, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, the European Students' Union, the Observatory of the Magna Charta Universitatum and other non-governmental stakeholders to study further possibilities for their greater involvement in shaping the European Higher Education Area. The Assembly welcomes the organisation of a meeting with these stakeholders following up this recommendation.

15. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

15.1. launch in 2010, with their ministries responsible for higher education and research as well as higher education institutions, a European campaign in all member states to promote the development of the European Higher Education Area by 2020;

15.2. call on Greece to sign and ratify the Lisbon Recognition Convention, call on Belgium, Italy and Spain to ratify this convention without delay, and invite interested non-member states to request accession to it;

15.3. analyse whether the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) should be amended to ensure social rights including access to higher education for students in their own countries and for students studying abroad, as well as social rights for researchers, teachers and other academic staff working abroad;

15.4. analyse whether the European Agreement on continued Payment of Scholarships to Students Studying Abroad (ETS No. 69) and the European Agreement on Regulations governing the Movement of Persons between Member States of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 25) should be amended to support the development of the European Higher Education Area;

15.5. allocate more resources to the Council of Europe's higher education sector including the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research, in order to provide greater support to the Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area;

15.6. analyse the feasibility of setting up an enlarged partial agreement, which should be open to membership by states, associations of higher education institutions and student associations and have the objective of facilitating policy and standard setting, monitoring, capacity building and the exchange of good practice concerning the European Higher Education Area.

16. The Assembly invites the ministries of Austria, Hungary and Romania, which will host the future ministerial conferences of the Bologna Process in 2010 and 2012 respectively, to:

16.1. entrust the Secretariat of the Council of Europe with the task of storing and making available the collective records of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area;

16.2. second temporarily national experts to the Secretariat of the Council of Europe, in order to create synergies with the permanent secretariat of the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research and other bodies;

16.3. explore, together with the Committee of Ministers and representatives of higher education institutions and students, the possibility of establishing a more stable secretariat of the European Higher Education Area at the Council of Europe;

16.4. discuss and co-ordinate their work with the other members of the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research.

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1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 20 November 2009 (see Doc. 11977, report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr McIntosh).*