



THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITIES IN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF EUROPE¹

EUA STATEMENT TO THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION

As the European Convention moves forward to the phase of drafting proposals for Europe's future constitution, the European University Association (EUA), as the representative body of European Universities (34 National Rectors' Conferences and over 600 individual institutions), addresses itself to the members of the European Convention and to the Heads of Government who will subsequently form the Intergovernmental Conference.

The EUA wishes to underline the fundamental role of the university in building Europe, and in further defining and developing the European social model.

The link between higher education and research lies at the heart of the university, an institution whose historical roots are pan-European, and whose mission to ensure the relationship between the production, transmission, dissemination and use of knowledge remains uniquely adapted to shaping our common European future. This is the strength and originality of the university, an institution which has maintained its dual responsibility for teaching and research over many centuries. Through remaining autonomous, accountable and independent of political interference, the university has been at the centre of European development - promoting learning, stimulating critical thought and innovation, and at the same time ensuring continuity.

In recent decades, in response to growing societal demands and increased student numbers, the university has shown itself capable of responding to new challenges through opening to its environment, both economic and cultural, and playing a full role in civil society.

Europe's universities have become active partners in building Europe, both within the European Union and beyond, supporting cooperation, mobility and networking, in particular within the framework of the Bologna process. This has been aptly demonstrated in the key role played by Europe's universities since 1989 in uniting

¹ Launched through the Laeken Declaration of 15 December 2001

peoples throughout the continent, and fostering peace, stability and sustainable development.

Looking to the future, Europe's universities will play a fundamental role in further developing Europe and in responding to the needs of citizens. Acting at local, regional, national, European and global level, constructing a shared community based upon common values, their mission is to: educate ever larger numbers of young, and not so young, people across Europe for active citizenship and employment. Not only future leaders, but also the majority of Europe's citizens will pass through the universities at formative periods in their life, experiencing training by and through research, and ensuring constant contact and interaction between students, teachers and researchers; build links with all types of stakeholders: economic, social and cultural, thus showing their willingness to listen and respond to the various needs of society; transmit knowledge, and take responsibility for the creation of a major part of new knowledge, so important for the well-being of citizens, and for fostering economic growth and regional development; ensure the training of young researchers, and preserve the commitment to teaching and research across Europe, providing a guarantee of geographically balanced economic, cultural and social development.

In March 2000, the European Council set the strategic goal for Europe to become, "*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*" and in Barcelona went further, calling for Europe's education systems to become, "*a world reference*" by 2010.

If these ambitions are to be fulfilled, Europe needs strong universities, and a renewed and concerted commitment to higher education. Europe's universities are unique institutions, and developing the enormous potential of this resource is a fundamental condition for the successful construction of Europe.

As autonomous institutions with a distinct European mission, universities across the continent make a fundamental contribution to building European society through their role in the production, transmission and transfer of knowledge.

**European University Association (EUA),
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