



The European Higher Education Area

Joint declaration of the Ministers responsible for higher education Convened in Bologna on the 19th of June 1999

The European process, thanks to the extraordinary achievements of the last few years, has become an increasingly more concrete and relevant reality for the Union and its citizens. Enlargement perspectives as well as deepening relations with other European countries, particularly those of the EES, attribute to that reality even wider dimensions. In the meanwhile we witness a growing awareness in large sectors of the political and academic world and of the public opinion of the necessity to bestow more complete and far-fetching contents to the European construction, in particular building upon and strengthening its intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions.

The Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an unreplaceable factor for growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of providing the citizens with the necessary competences for facing the challenges of the new millennium together with the awareness of shared values and of belonging to a social and cultural common space.

The Sorbonne declaration of the 25th of May 1998, underpinned by such considerations, stressed the Universities central role for developing the European cultural dimensions and singled out the creation of the European area of higher education as a pivotal means to favour the mobility of the citizens, their employability and the Continent's development.

Several European countries have accepted the invitation to engage themselves in the achievement of the objectives drawn by the declaration, signing it or expressing their adherence in principle. The direction taken by several higher education reforms launched in the meantime in Europe has proven the Governments determination to action.

European Universities, on their side, have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in the construction of the European area of higher education, also in the wake of the fundamental principles laid down in the Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988. This is of the highest importance, given that the Universities independence and autonomy ensure the higher education and research systems continuous adaptation to the changing needs, the demands of society and the advances in scientific knowledge.

The course has been set in the right direction and with meaningful determination. The process of convergence of the systems of higher education requires nevertheless constant impulse in order to be fully accomplished. It is necessary to support it promoting concrete measures to achieve tangible steps ahead. Yesterday's Meeting has seen the participation of authoritative experts and scholars from all our countries and provides us with very useful suggestions on the initiatives to be taken.

We must look with special attention at the objective to increase the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation is measured in fact by the attraction that its cultural system exerts on other countries. We need to ensure that the European system of higher education acquires in the world a degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions.

While reaffirming our full support to the principles laid down in the Sorbonne declaration, we engage in concerting our governing action for the attainment in the short term, and in any case within the first decade of the third millennium, of the following objectives that we deem of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of higher education and for the promotion of the European system of higher education in the world.

- Adoption of a system of degrees easily readable and comparable in order to promote the European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education

- Adoption of a system based on two cycles, the first, of three years at least, spendable on the European labour market and in the higher education system as an adequate level of qualification
- Establishment of a system of credits - developing the European Credit Transfer System - acquired also in non higher education contexts, provided they are recognised by the University system, as a proper means to favour the most wide and diffused student mobility
- Elimination of remaining obstacles to the effective exercise of the rights to free mobility and equal treatment with particular attention to:
 - with regard to students, access to all services related to education
 - with regard to teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudice to their rights to pension and social security
- Promotion of criteria and methodologies for quality assessment
- Implementation of the necessary European dimensions of the higher education space, particularly with regards to curricular contents, inter-institutional cooperation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

We hereby commit to attain these objectives - each in the framework of our institutional competences and in full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy - for the consolidation of the European area of higher education. To that purpose we will pursue the ways of intergovernmental cooperation and those in the framework of the European Union (where applicable, on the basis of the subsidiarity principle and availing ourselves of the Strengthened Cooperation instrument) as well as of the other European institutions with competence on higher education.

Convinced that the establishment of the European area of higher education requires constant support, supervision and adaptation to the continuously evolving needs, we decide to meet again within three years in order to assess the progress achieved and the new steps to be taken.