



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

Speech
by the Acting President of the Council
of the European Union and
Federal Minister of Education and Research,
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on the occasion of the
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"Bildung verbindet – Education Unites – L'éducation rapproche les hommes" is the motto of the German EU Council Presidency. Education and joint learning make a major contribution to European integration. "Education Unites" – that also goes for the Bologna process.

Bologna stands for a successful reform process towards a European Higher Education Area. 45 European states are involved, 5,600 European higher education institutions with over 31 million students participate and a vast majority of institutions want to see the rapid implementation of the European Higher Education Area.

The German institutions of higher education, for example, have already converted half of their study programmes: 338 German universities are now offering 5,660 bachelor and master programmes. These have undergone a quality control procedure. But we must make quality assurance less bureaucratic in future and we must introduce an accreditation system which is not only less bureaucratic, but also more transparent.

But we must always be aware of one thing: Bologna does not stand for harmonization, but for diversity. For Germany, for example, this means that we must handle the strict time frame of three years for bachelor courses and two years for master courses more flexibly.

Our aim must be a European Higher Education Area which maintains its national academic cultures and the variety of study schemes – particularly in the phase of doctoral studies.

The two-cycle bachelor and master system has become the European standard. There is also a third cycle, that of doctoral studies, which must guarantee genuine specialist diversity. This applies in particular to doctoral studies as a basis for research careers.

The new structures also call for new tutoring schemes. The Final Declaration of the Conference should therefore contain a reference to the need to improve these schemes. Successful studies are only possible if the bachelor phase is accompanied by appropriate tutoring support.

Improvements in the comparability of study courses have still not really succeeded in increasing student mobility. We must therefore encourage strategic alliances within the international higher education area.

The Bologna process and the European Higher Education Area are receiving great international attention. The Bologna process is modernizing and internationalizing teaching and research at institutions of higher education in an exemplary way. The attractiveness and competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area is growing.

I am certain that the Bologna process will give rise to a new, future-oriented generation of graduates who will contribute their share to the European knowledge society.

But we want to increase the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area even more. Students and scientists from across the world must be aware of Europe. They must see Europe as a region in which they can fully develop their talent, in which they want to live and work. Therefore, we must make research and studies in Europe even more attractive.

This includes all those who come to us from non-European countries as well as the young men and women in our countries who, despite their abilities, have not yet been considering studies or a career in science.

We need these interested and creative young people. The worldwide demand for highly qualified staff is growing rapidly. There is already a shortage of 700,000 researchers in the European Union today. We will only be able to attract them if they find attractive working and living conditions in industry and science.

The aim of the Bologna reforms is therefore to increase the competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area. This must be seen in the context of the Lisbon Strategy, which sets the objective of making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. In order to achieve this objective, we need future-oriented higher education systems and a European Knowledge Area.

In future:

- We must continue our efforts to increase the mobility of young people. Mobility broadens horizons. Mobility provides a European perspective for young people's lives, in particular with a view to the Bologna process.
- We must strike a new balance in the relationship between theory and practice, research and teaching. This is particularly important for providing a targeted education for young women and men. Institutions of higher education, industry and politics must get together and cooperate in the development of curricula and learning content.
- We must increase the autonomy of institutions of higher education. Only their comprehensive academic freedom will set free the forces which we need in the competition with other regions in the world. In this respect, we are on the right way with the 7th Research Framework Programme and the ERC. However, we must avoid overregulation which would restrict creativity and intellectual curiosity within the European Higher Education Area.

We have just launched the debate about where we want to go with the European Higher Education Area and will have to continue it over the years to come. I am therefore particularly interested in the panel discussion we will have this afternoon on this topic.

We must awaken creativity and productivity. Only then can we realise a European Higher Education Area which enables quality and diversity.

"Bildung verbindet – Education Unites - L'éducation rapproche les hommes." This must be the focus of all our considerations on the future of education in the Bologna states.

Thank you.