

Opening statement for Bologna Policy Forum

12 March

[Acknowledgements and greetings]

It is a great pleasure for me to see that so many of you have accepted our hosts' invitation to participate in this Policy Forum. I congratulate the governments of Austria and Hungary and the Spanish Presidency on their initiative.

The global dimension of the Bologna Process has always mattered a great deal to the European Commission.

As you probably know, we have regular policy dialogues on education with many countries and regions, and we have a range of programmes at our disposal to give tangible shape to these exchanges.

I would like to be a bit more specific on this point. Our education and training policies cover a broad range of measures that promote capacity-building in higher education – and the Tempus programme is a notable example.

Tempus is an assistance programme based on cooperation among higher–education institutions in the partner countries neighbouring the EU and those in our Member States.

Its objectives are to assist partner countries which voluntarily wish to bring their higher–education institutions and systems closer to developments in the European Union.

I am pleased to see some countries participating in this Forum that have been participating actively in Tempus for years.

We also maintain excellent relations with our worldwide partners through bilateral cooperation programmes. These include

- the agreements we have signed with the US and Canada;
- EDULINK for Africa; and
- ALFA for Latin America.

In 2008, we launched a new multilateral framework to support cooperation in post–secondary education with industrialised countries.

Of special importance in this context is Erasmus Mundus, Europe’s flagship programme for worldwide academic cooperation.

The European Masters Courses and scholarships offered under Erasmus Mundus have greatly improved the attractiveness of Europe’s universities and have stimulated the free circulation of talent and brainpower between the EU and the rest of the world.

Let me remind you that in 2009 Erasmus Mundus was extended to cover doctoral programmes.

But higher education is not only about education, it is also about research.

Here, Marie Curie Actions offer opportunities to individual researchers to participate in international research teams. Funding is available for researchers to move both within Europe and internationally.

In this connection, I should also mention the European Institute of Innovation and Technology.

The mission of the EIT is to grow and capitalise on the innovation capacity of actors from higher education, research, business and entrepreneurship.

The most important point is that participation in its operational arms – the so-called Knowledge and Innovation Communities – is open to organisations from the EU and beyond.

More generally, the European Commission has worked hard to promote Europe's universities worldwide; one recent example is the "Study in Europe" campaign, funded by Erasmus Mundus.

Our aim with "Study in Europe" has been to project an accurate image of European higher education beyond our borders.

Among other things, we do so through the "Study in Europe" website, through fairs and information campaigns, and through a pilot network of European education advisers.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

One of the most remarkable achievements of the Bologna Process is the interest it has generated among our partners around the world.

This level of popularity is even producing amusing results. Often in international meetings we can see that non-European delegates are more upbeat about the Bologna process than self-critical European ones.

Several non-European countries are bringing their systems in line with the Bologna framework, which is becoming a useful platform to frame our dialogue with partners in other regions of the world.

Apart from that, the Bologna reforms have also helped put Europe's higher education on the global map.

The adoption of the bachelor/master structure has made our study programmes more accessible and more understandable, including to non-European students. In addition, many programmes are now taught in English, particularly at master and doctoral level.

All these factors have helped European universities integrate with the rest of the world in two ways; i) by attracting international students, teachers and researchers; and ii) by preparing their own graduates for a truly global environment.

It is not only the content of our reforms that has raised interest, but also the form of the policy dialogue that steers the process.

The Bologna Follow-up Group has found an innovative working method based on trust and dialogue between public authorities and stakeholders, notably academic institutions and students.

Close

Ladies and Gentlemen:

My address so far has been devoted to policies, programmes, and working methods. This is all very well, of course, but there is a great deal more to international co-operation in higher education.

There are the economic implications – of course – so crucial in our knowledge age. There are the intellectual and scientific implications, because every new exchange of students, researchers and staff is a potential source of innovation and advancements. And then there are the socio–political implications, on which I would like to close.

Academic exchanges and cooperation are perhaps among the best ways to project Europe's ideals and model on the global scene.

They are the best way to share with the world our effort to bring together peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds and traditions and build stable, respectful and peaceful relations among peoples and countries – both within Europe and with our neighbours across the world.

Viewed in this light, co–operation in higher education can be an important part of the external relations' policies of the EU.

This is also why I am so pleased to see that so many of you have decided to participate in this second Bologna Policy Forum.

Last year's Forum got the dialogue started. I think the time is now ripe for Europe's higher-education community and its partners around the world to engage in serious dialogue on matters of mutual interest, and I congratulate again our hosts for preparing today's discussions so well.

Thank you.