

BOLOGNA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE 2010

Policy Forum Information Session

Vienna, 12 March 2010

Introductory remarks by Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, UNESCO

Ministers, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be here today and deliver these introductory remarks to the Policy Forum Information session.

UNESCO is proud to be part of this historic event which is the launch of the European Higher Education Area. As a global organization, however, with 193 Member States, it places special emphasis on the *International Openness* of the Bologna Process.

Let me remind of a major event that UNESCO organized in July 2009, the World Conference on Higher Education entitled the New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development. To mark its global coverage and to give voice to regional specificities, six regional conferences were organized preceding the global event in Paris.

Therefore, it gives me great pleasure to see familiar faces around this table and to welcome the Minister of Higher Education of Egypt and the Deputy-Minister for Higher Education of Colombia whose countries hosted the regional Conference for the Arab States and that for Latin America and the Caribbean. The other four conferences were hosted by Senegal for Africa, Macau and India for Asia and the Pacific and Bucharest for Europe.

Let me underline that there were a number of convergence between these six conferences in their trend to develop common higher education areas: ENLACES in Latin America and the Pacific, the African Union led Harmonization Strategy for Higher Education in Africa, regional and sub-regional initiatives in Asia and the Pacific and a move towards the creation of an Arab Higher Education and Research Area.

UNESCO's conventions on the recognition of qualifications are underpinning these efforts and in two regions, Asia and the Pacific and Africa they are being revised to respond to new challenges of higher education.

Another element that was a point of convergence in all regions is the high priority given to quality assurance, and capacity building efforts are being promoted through regional quality assurance networks.

There were also differences in the ways different regions approach quality assurance.

In Europe, for instance, which in UNESCO's definition of regions also encompasses North America and Israel, the emphasis is on European tools: the European Guidelines and Standards for Quality Assurance, and the European Quality Register; but also, to mark the 'international openness' of the Bologna process as a recent target – the UNESCO-OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education.

Other regions have different aspirations. For Africa, strengthening human and institutional capacity and linking sub regional and regional QA networks is a priority. Like the Africans, the Latin Americans are promoting the convergence of national and sub-regional accreditation systems. However, they are striving to develop regional standards and procedures for both higher education and research and to involve academic communities in order to legitimize regional accreditation.

The Arab States have set a target of introducing quality assurance and accreditation systems in 50% of HEIs, both public and private, over the next ten years, explicitly acknowledging this burgeoning sub-sector of higher education.

The Asia and Pacific regional Conference in Macau, was the only one that explicitly made a plea for an interregional sharing of experiences, towards *a more dynamic, harmonious, and integrated global higher education*. It also underlined the need for internationally acceptable accreditation standards and a renewed attention to world rankings as a contentious development.

Despite the differences in approach, the internationalization of quality assurance has become a reality.

Recognition of qualifications as a tool for academic mobility and quality assurance are at the heart of the Bologna Process, and the examples presented above demonstrate the interconnectedness of to-day's world. At this point in time when Europe is emerging from a unique ten year process of regional reform and harmonization of higher education, it is time to reflect on the lessons learnt, both positive and negative. Therefore, it is a good time to organize this Information session that leads into the Policy Forum.

It is our hope that this anniversary will mark a greater international openness of the European process so that it links with the wider global higher education community.

We look forward to the Policy Forum as a good vehicle for promoting continuing dialogue on higher education between different parts of the world. UNESCO is certainly committed to supporting these efforts.

Thank you.