



**Minister for Education and Research
Kristin Clemet, Norway
Opening Speech
IVth Ministerial Conference of the
Bologna Process
Bergen, Norway May 19 2005**

Dear colleagues, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Introduction

It is a great pleasure for me to finally welcome you to the ministerial conference of the Bologna Process here in Bergen. All participating countries are present, with most delegations headed by the responsible minister. We also welcome five applicant countries with their ministers, our consultative organisations, and a number of observers and guests from other countries and international organisations. We hope you feel welcome here in Norway.

The Bologna Process started in 1999, based on the important meeting between some of the ministers in Sorbonne the year before. It drew up the ambitious goal of establishing a European Higher Education Area within the first decade of this millennium. And it pointed at the actions needed to achieve it.

Today, we are halfway to 2010, and time is ripe to take stock, to confirm our commitment and to draw up strategies for the future work. That is, dear

colleagues, our agenda these days. We can be proud of what we have achieved so far! In all our countries, huge reforms have taken and are taking place within higher education. The ratio of implementation is quite remarkable keeping in mind that no supranational element exists in the Process.

I hope this meeting will contribute to taking the Process several steps further.

Why is the process so important?

This process is important because it is important to the people of our countries. I think that also may explain its success, and the commitment we all feel to it. If not, we would probably have been somewhere else today. Strong universities with internationally high quality are in today's world of knowledge, a prerequisite for the personal development and success of each individual. It creates the basis for democratic development, cultural identity and creativity and future innovation and growth. We, as responsible ministers strive for the well-being of people and nations, and want to see higher education to develop capacities and qualities to take on that task in these changing times.

And I think we all realise that strong European cooperation in this field, increases the chance of success. First of all because higher education institutions always have co-operated across national borders. Scholars and scientists have always had an international aspect in their work, and students have always travelled. If we look at the history of the University of Oxford as an example, the arrival of Emo of Friesland in 1190 is recorded as the first known overseas student. He set in train the University's tradition of international scholarly links. So, mobility of students is definitely not a new phenomenon

The Bologna Process has contributed to a renaissance for this principle of the old university world, as mobility is the essential aim of the process. But instead of being an opportunity for the selected few as was the case in earlier times, the possibility to travel and study abroad shall now be a possibility for *all* students, regardless of economic and social background. This is our aim – our modern addition to an old principle.

Furthermore, this international dimension of academia is of increasing importance, through globalisation. Competition and cooperation are in a strange way two sides of the same coin. It is by sharing knowledge through cooperation; we will be able to compete at the international arena. This requires of course a certain balance, to avoid one-way competence traffic. I will return to this later.

Since Berlin, much of the work being done in the process has concentrated on creating the necessary basis for the increased mobility, cooperation and openness. There has been important development in quality assurance, through the close cooperation between ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESIB. This is important, because not all cross-border higher education represents high quality. The mutually shared standards and guidelines for quality assurance that have been developed, should aim at securing that the education you get abroad is fully valid also at home.

There has also been important development in the realisation of an overarching framework of qualifications. Furthermore, we will learn in this conference that the degree structure of the Bologna declaration is gaining ground in all countries of the process.

But we should avoid mixing necessary coordination with copying. The strength and fascination of Europe is its diversity; in culture and language, in geography, and in ways of thinking. When stimulating alternative thinking, environments have always increased their chances of adapting to changes, and thus - at the end of the day - surviving.

My expectations for this conference are high. But I do not think this is the right time to increase the number of action lines. To keep the momentum of the process we must even more determined focus on achieving the aims of the action lines established. Based on these lines, I would like to discuss three important challenges:

First of all, the social dimension. Social and economic differences affect both the situation for students within countries, and the mobility between countries. We have worked hard to facilitate and remove obstacles to mobility within the European Higher Education Area. There is, however, still work to be done to make sure that all students may take advantage of the possibilities we have created. We will discuss this in the context of the communiqué later today.

Our countries have different economic possibilities. But still we may gain from using this cooperation to explore ways of improving study conditions and access for all students, regardless of their social and economic background. The strong student cooperation across Europe should be seen as an important resource to this end.

Secondly, the external dimension. The Bologna Process is also about openness and attractiveness. We should thus be sensitive to the way we are looked upon from outside. We should be satisfied with the interest from other countries and regions, some of them represented at this meeting. And we should listen to their

concerns. Let me refer to a comment made by the secretary general of the African Association of Universities, Aki Sawyerr. He has said that he was afraid that a one-way student flow to the European Higher Education Area from a region like Africa, combined with restrictive immigrations policies, might result in what he called an “intellectual festung Bologna”.

This is a concern we have to take seriously. It reflects an anxiety that Europe is neglecting its obligations towards the poorer parts of the world. I think we should signal clearly that such an anxiety is not justified. In Berlin we stated that “in international academic co-operation and exchanges, academic values should prevail”. I believe we are all concerned that the relations between the European Higher Education Area and the rest of the world should be governed by fairness in a responsible way.

I welcome the interest from countries outside Europe for the process. They want to learn from our experiences and find ways to join us in our efforts. This shows an increased interest for Europe as a source for co-operation and sharing of knowledge and competence. This, I think, is a very promising development emerging from the Bologna process. We should carefully discuss how we may stimulate this development, and share experiences with other regions of the world.

Last, but not least, I would like to focus on the implementation. The work so far has focussed on the *structural* elements of the Process. From the stocktaking report it is quite evident that we have come a long way towards implementing the structural elements of the Process.

In our future work we may have to focus more on the *implementation* of the elements of the Process. In this work the role of strong and autonomous

universities and other higher education institutions will be central.

Implementation means change inside institutions, in programmes and in ways of engaging students in the learning process. I think we all have our national discussions at both the political and institutional level about this. We will later in this conference discuss the future contact between the process and organisations of university staff. We should here signal that we welcome them as constructive partners in the process.

Conclusion

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

At this stage of the process we should also start thinking on the process Beyond 2010, when the European Higher Education Area hopefully is in place. I will therefore invite ministers to discuss different options for how the process might develop during our meeting. This is meant only as the start of a discussion, but I believe it may become a crucial point for our future agenda.

As politicians we must work to realise ideas, ambitions and hopes. So, to conclude my opening address, let me convey some of my hopes for this process:

- Within 2010, we should observe a distinct improvement in the quality of European higher education.
- At the same time, the national systems of higher education should communicate in order to facilitate mobility for students and staff within Europe.
- In addition, we will have systems of quality assurance and quality improvement in all countries.
- In other words, we should aim at making Europe stronger and more attractive to good students and researchers. This will be to the benefit of

our countries, and will make a better future for the students and researchers in Europe.

- And, we should do all this in openness and with fairness towards other and poorer parts of the world.

I wish you welcome to cooperate towards these goals, - and once again –
heartily welcome to Norway!