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# **FROM BERGEN TO LONDON: CONTRIBUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE TO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS**

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The present document provides an overview of the Council of Europe's contribution to the Bologna Process following the Ministerial conference held in Bergen in May 2005 and leading up to the one to be held in London in May 2007.

The document is divided into the following parts:

1. The Council of Europe contribution to the Bologna Process: an Overview
2. "Unresolved Issues in the Bologna Process": Discussion document submitted to the plenary session of the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR), held in Strasbourg on September 21 – 22, 2006.
3. Council of Europe Forum on the Responsibility of Higher Education for Democratic Culture: Declaration adopted by the Forum
4. Council of Europe Forum on the Responsibility of Higher Education for Democratic Culture: Report by the General Rapporteur
5. Council of Europe Forum on the Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: the Role of Public Authorities and Institutions: recommendations adopted by the Forum
6. Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research: main outcomes
7. Council of Europe Higher Education Series: on overview of publications

Additional information may be found at the Council of Europe's higher education web site [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/default\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/default_EN.asp)? and its section on the Bologna Process

[http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/EHEA2010/BolognaPedestrians\\_en.asp#P109\\_12249](http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/EHEA2010/BolognaPedestrians_en.asp#P109_12249).

## **1. THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONTRIBUTION TO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: AN OVERVIEW**

The year 2005 marked the half-way point in the process of establishing a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. The Council of Europe continued to contribute expertise and policy advice to the Bologna Process, and also participated in the Conference of European Education Ministers in Bergen on May 19 - 20. The European Higher Education Area was also referred to in key Council of Europe events such as the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government in Warsaw, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Cultural Convention and the European Year of Citizenship through Education.

The Higher Education and Research Division specifically continued its work with the steering bodies of the Bologna Process and more generally in the areas of the recognition of qualifications, support and advice to new member countries, and specific dimensions of the Process including governance, public responsibility, democratic citizenship and culture and the social dimension of higher education.

### **The Bologna Process in the Council of Europe's programme**

*The Council of Europe shall build on its work on language learning and recognition of diplomas and qualifications. It shall continue to play an important role in the Bologna process aimed at creation of European Higher Education Area by 2010.*

- Action Plan, Third Summit of Heads of State and Government (Warsaw, May 2005)

### **Governing Bodies**

In May 2005, the Ministers responsible for higher education in the participating countries of the Bologna Process met in Bergen where they confirmed in the conference Communiqué their dedication to the EHEA. In looking forward to the next Ministerial conference in 2007, and beyond 2010, there was commitment to emphasize practical implementation, begin working on the elaboration of national qualifications frameworks, a renewed stress on the importance of the social dimension of higher education and quality assurance, a desire to improve the “external dimension” by increasing contact with other parts of the world, and to enlarge the circle of consultative members.

The Council of Europe continues to contribute to policy development within the Bologna Process as a consultative member. The Council of Europe contributed to the Bergen Ministerial Conference, and is an active participant in the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and Board. The work of the Council is guided by the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR), which has a unique double representation of policy makers from both higher

education institutions and governments. The Committee meets once a year, while the Bureau oversees its work between plenary sessions.

### **Recognition and Quality Assurance**

*We call on all participating countries to address recognition problems identified by the ENIC/NARIC networks. We will draw up national action plans to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. These plans will form part of each country's national report for the next Ministerial Conference.*

- Bergen Communiqué, Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education (Bergen, May 2005)

With increased attention being paid to the implementation of the principles of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention and its subsidiary texts, one of the next big challenges will be the development of national action plans on recognition in time for the Ministerial meeting in London 2007. Through the ENIC and NARIC Advisory Networks, the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and other related bodies, the Council of Europe will continue to support the fostering of improvements to the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. In early 2006, the ENIC Bureau, the NARIC Advisory Board and the Bureau of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee elaborated draft guidelines for national action plans and submitted them to the BFUG for consideration. The BFUG adopted the Guidelines at its meeting in Wien in April 2006.

The Council of Europe is also engaged in quality assurance through the ENIC Network. The recognition of qualifications, as defined by the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997), is a significant factor in the EHEA and promotes the development of recognition practices, disseminates examples of good practices, addresses new recognition issues, such as trans-national education, and promotes mobility and international cooperation. Transparent quality assurance systems and provisions are fundamental to the recognition of qualifications internationally as well as nationally. Working in close cooperation with the NARIC Network of the European Union, in addition to aiding with the implementation of the Convention, the ENIC Network works through national authorities to provide information on:

- the recognition of foreign diplomas, degrees and other qualifications;
- education systems at home and abroad;
- opportunities for studying abroad, including information pertaining to mobility and equivalence.

In September 2006, the Council of Europe organized a conference on quality assurance, see below.

## **New Members of the Bologna Process**

From its original membership of 29 countries, the accession of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in 2005, in addition to those who joined in 2001 and 2003, means that the Bologna Process now encompasses 45 countries united around the European Cultural Convention, the principles and objectives of the Bologna Declaration, and a pan-European vision of the EHEA. Officially welcomed into the Process at the Bologna Summit in Bergen, these five countries join the long list of those who have benefited from the guidance of the Council of Europe in the creation of new legislation, the development of higher education policy, and the sharing of examples of good practice. Throughout the year, experts and members of the Secretariat offered their guidance and direction through visits, consultations, conferences and played an advisory role in the sphere of national legislation.

Highlights in 2005 included:

- a seminar on Curriculum Reform in Albanian Higher Education (Tirana, 16-17 March)
- a conference on European Higher Education Policies and Reform and a seminar on the Recognition of Qualifications (Baku, 20 – 22 April)
- a conference on European Higher Education Policies and Reform and a seminar on the Recognition of Qualifications (Yerevan, 2 – 4 November)
- a conference on the implementation of the Bologna Process in Georgia (Tbilisi, 8-9 November)
- an advisory mission on higher education reform and the Bologna Process in “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (Skopje, 9-10 November)
- an advisory mission, Ministry of Education of Albania (Tirana, 6-7 December)
- a conference on “The Dynamics of the Bologna Process in the Republic of Moldova” (Chişinău, 8 – 9 December)

In 2006, activities have thus far included:

- an advisory mission on the reform of higher education legislation in “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (Ohrid, 13 – 14 January)
- an advisory mission on the reform of specific aspects of higher education legislation in Albania (Tirana, 16 – 17 January)
- co organization, with the Austrian Presidency of the Bologna Process, a meeting of the countries that acceded to the Bologna Process in 2005 as well as Albania on the activities of the Process in the period 2005 – 2007 and the functioning of the BFUG and the working groups;
- the launching conference for work on a new Master Plan for higher education in Albania (Tirana, 22 – 23 March)
- a national conference on qualifications frameworks (Tirana, 19 – 20 July).

## **Council of Europe Higher Education Forum**

September 2005 marked the first annual Council of Europe Higher Education Forum: *Higher Education Governance between Democratic Culture, Academic Aspirations and Market Forces* (Strasbourg, 23 – 24 September) which presented the results of two years of work on the question of “higher education governance.” As a contribution to the Bologna Process as well as to the European Year of Citizenship through Education, questions of how to define and understand governance, how to promote good governance policy, and recommendations for good governance were all prominent topics of discussion. The results of this Forum were published in spring 2006 (Jürgen Kohler and Josef Huber, eds.).

On 22 – 23 June 2006 a Forum on Democratic Culture in Higher Education was organized at Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg in cooperation with American partners as well as the EUA. The Forum gave institutions and organizations the opportunity to commit their support for promoting democratic culture and citizenship through higher education. The Forum adopted a Declaration which, among other things, calls on higher education institutions and actors to organize activities in and around their own institutions and associations to promote the development and maintenance of a democratic culture and to coordinate these activities through the web site established as a follow up to the Forum: <http://dc.ecml.at/>.

On 19 - 20 September, the Third Council of Europe Forum on Higher Education took place in Strasbourg and focused on “Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The Role of Public Authorities and Institutions”. The EUA and ENQA contributed to the preparation of this Forum.

## **Publications**

The *Council of Europe Higher Education Series*, launched in 2004 to explore higher education issues of concern to policy makers in Ministries, higher education institutions, non-governmental organizations, and student representatives, published its 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> volumes.

In April 2005, *The Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research* (Luc Weber and Sjur Bergan, eds.) was published to highlight the results of a Council of Europe conference that explored the meaning of public responsibility in complex societies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This work examines both overall policies on higher education and specific aspects such as higher education for a democratic culture, access to research results, financing, equal opportunities, the approach to regulation, and new trends in higher education.

The publication in November 2005 of *Standards for Recognition: the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its Subsidiary Texts* (Andrejs Rauhvargers and Sjur Bergan, eds.) brought together for the first time in one volume the Council of Europe/UNESCO legal standards for the recognition of qualifications with all subsidiary texts and an introductory article which provides background, context and an accessible explanation of their significance.

Spring 2006 saw the publication of *Recognition in the Bologna Process: Policy Development and the Road to Good Practice* (Andrejs Rauhvargers and Sjur Bergan, eds.) which presents the proceedings, outcomes and recommendations from the conference on improving the recognition system of degrees and study credit points in the European Higher Education Area held in Riga, December 2004.

Also in spring 2006, the fifth volume of the series appeared. *Higher Education Governance between Democratic Culture, Academic Aspirations and Market Forces* (Jürgen Kohler and Josef Huber, eds.) presents the outcomes of the Higher Education Forum held in September 2005 and describes governance issues in higher education and links them to basic issues debated in society at large. It also links governance issues to the Bologna Process.

### **Other Council of Europe Initiatives**

In addition to the statement of the Third Summit Action Plan for the Bologna Process, 2005 also saw the inclusion of higher education in two other important Council of Europe initiatives. To mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Cultural Convention, the Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs met in October 2005 and concluded their meeting with the signing of the Faro Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue. In this document the vision of intercultural dialogue both within Europe and with the rest of the world is developed with particular mention of the role that the Bologna Process can play. At its 2006 plenary session, the CDESR adopted a Statement on the contribution of higher education to intercultural dialogue.

2005 was also the European Year of Citizenship through Education. In its message to the Bergen meeting of the Ministers of the EHEA, the Council of Europe stressed that in keeping with its commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law, contributions to the Bologna Process “emphasiz[ed] higher education governance built on the participation of all groups, the development and maintenance of the basic values of Europe's university heritage and the recognition that higher education and research are vital to the sustainable development of European societies.” This was followed-up at the Plenary session of the CDESR in September where the key role higher education plays in the development of modern societies based on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and how the issue of good governance is crucial for the promotion of democratic culture both within the higher education community and society at large, was confirmed.

In June 2006, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted Recommendation 1762 (2006) on academic freedom and university autonomy.

As part of the Russian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, on 2 – 3 November, the Council of Europe and the Russian University of People's Friendship will organize a conference on the role of students in making the European Higher Education Area a reality.

In late 2006 the Council of Europe will organize two informal Ministerial conferences focusing on the Bologna Process: one on 27 – 28 November for the countries of South East Europe and

one on 12 – 13 December for the five countries that acceded to the Bologna Process in 2005. Both conferences will be held at Council of Europe Headquarters in Strasbourg. They will outline key issues in the Bologna Process and aim to assist participating countries in their preparation for the Ministerial conference in London in May 2007.



**2. UNRESOLVED ISSUES IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS. DISCUSSION DOCUMENT SUBMITTED TO THE 2006 PLENARY SESSION OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (CDESR), STRASBOURG, 21 – 22 SEPTEMBER 2006)**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Bologna Process aims to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010. While substantial progress has been made in reaching this goal, a number of issues still remain to be addressed. Some of these are of great importance to the further development of the European Higher Education Area beyond 2010, and a debate on these issues should be launched without delay.

The purpose of the present document is precisely to launch such a debate at the CDESR plenary session, drawing on the unique position of the CDESR as a pan-European forum of policy makers in government and at higher education institutions. It is hoped that this debate will make suggestions as well as stimulate further debate within the Bologna Process as well as at national level.

In outlining and addressing unresolved issues, it may be useful briefly to recall the main achievements and developments so far of the Bologna Process.

**SOME KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

The Bologna Process was launched in 1999 as a framework encompassing 29 countries that were either members of the European Union, applicants for EU membership or part of the European Economic Area<sup>1</sup>. It was, however, foreseen that new members could accede to the Process, and in the first period, the criteria for membership were linked to eligibility for specific EU programmes. In 2003, however, membership was opened to countries that are not part of these EU programmes but that have ratified the European Cultural Convention and whose Ministers in writing confirm the country's commitments to the goals of the European Higher Education Area. With the most recent accessions in 2005, the Bologna Process is now pan-European and encompasses 45 members. Of the parties to the European Cultural Convention, only Belarus, Monaco, Montenegro<sup>2</sup> and San Marino are not members of the Bologna Process.

While the Bologna Process was initiated by Ministers of Education, and while the meetings of Ministers every two years remain the top decision making mechanism of the Bologna Process, it relies on cooperation between public authorities, higher education institutions and students and staff, with the active contribution of international institutions and organizations. This

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<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Switzerland which does, however, have strong links to EU members in many areas, including higher education.

<sup>2</sup> At its meeting on 12 – 13 October 2006, the Bologna Follow Up Group is likely to consider the relationship of Montenegro to the Bologna Process following Montenegro's declaration of independence on 3 June 2006.

partnership, for which the CDESER is in many ways a pioneer, is crucial to the success of the European Higher Education Area.

The Bologna Process is characterized by implementation at national level, and under the competence of national authorities<sup>3</sup>, of policies and objectives agreed at European level.

Much of the focus of the Bologna Process has been on structural reform, and here member countries have carried out – or are in the process of carrying out – extensive reforms of their systems. They include:

- the introduction of three tier degree systems;
- introduction of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), or of systems compatible with the ECTS;
- by 2010, setting up of national qualifications frameworks compatible with the overarching qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area, adopted in 2005;
- introduction of national quality assurance mechanisms compatible with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted in 2005;
- based on the commitment to ratification of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention, to a review of national legislation to ensure that this is compatible with the Convention, and to the elaboration of national action plans for recognition.

The European Higher Education Area is founded on a number of key principles and values, including:

- International mobility of students and staff;
- Autonomous universities;
- Student participation in the governance of higher education;
- Public responsibility for higher education;
- The social dimension of the Bologna Process<sup>4</sup>.

However, the principles and values of the Bologna Process have only partially been made explicit, which leads us to a consideration of unresolved issues.

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<sup>3</sup> Without prejudice to the constitutional arrangements of some members of the Bologna Process, where the competent authorities in higher education are at a level other than national, such as canton, Community, or *Land*.

<sup>4</sup> From “Requirements and Procedures for Joining the Bologna Process”, elaborated by the Bologna Secretariat and dated 6 July 2004, [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/01BFUG/040614-B/BFUGB3\\_7\\_Accessions.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/01BFUG/040614-B/BFUGB3_7_Accessions.pdf).

## UNRESOLVED ISSUES

### **The vision and values of the European Higher Education Area**

The Bologna Process represents the most extensive reform of European higher education since at least the immediate aftermath of 1968. The policy goals of the European Higher Education Area enjoy the support of 45 governments and a majority of higher education institutions, students and staff, even if there is also some scepticism to some of the policies of the Process as well as a feeling of lack of information. They have also attracted considerable attention and interest from other regions of the world.

Yet, a clearly articulated vision of the European Higher Education Area, subscribed to by the Ministers of the Bologna Process and by the consultative members, has so far not been put forward. There is certainly an underlying, tacit vision of the Bologna Process as leading towards a European Higher Education Area characterized by increased mobility of students, staff and holders of qualifications, and improving the quality and attractiveness of European higher education for European students as well as for students from other areas of the world. There is also an underlying assumption that reforming higher education will help make Europe a more competitive region in economic terms, and in this respect, the links to the EU Lisbon Agenda are clear, with its often quoted and commented goal of making Europe (here meaning the European Union) the world's most competitive economy by 2010.

There is, however, little in the way of a clearly and coherently articulated view of the purposes and role of higher education in modern society nor of the link between the reforms of the Bologna Process and the history, heritage and specificity of higher education in Europe. An exception to the latter point is the Bologna conference on "The Cultural Heritage and Academic Values of the European University and the Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area", organized by the Holy See on 30 March – 1 April 2006 in association with the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES.

If we look at the political documents of the Bologna Process, there seems to be development from a strong emphasis on the economic and labour market aspects of higher education in the Bologna Declaration through an increased emphasis on the social and citizenship dimension in the Prague Communiqué to the inclusion of research and research training in the Berlin Communiqué. However, this does not amount to a clearly enunciated view of the purposes of higher education, such as the one articulated by the Council of Europe in its considerations on the public responsibility for higher education and research, which defines four overriding purposes of higher education:

1. preparation for the labour market;
2. preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
3. personal development;
4. development of a broad advanced knowledge base.

As has been underlined by the Council of Europe on many occasions, these four main goals are integrated and complementary rather than contradictory. They should therefore be considered as integrated rather than segregated, and higher education policies should aim at furthering all four purposes.

An important issue is therefore how we could contribute to a debate of the overall vision, goals and purposes of the European Higher Education Area. The economic aspect of higher education is fundamental, and it was one of the main motives for launching the Bologna Process. However, a discussion limited to the economic importance of higher education would miss other aspects that are also of fundamental importance. Not least, such a lop-sided debate would miss an important opportunity to promote a holistic development of higher education in Europe.

An important challenge in this respect is how a focus on the values of higher education and on democratic citizenship can be (re)introduced into the discussion of the European Higher Education Area.

### **Actors and responsibilities**

As mentioned, the Bologna Process has succeeded in bringing together public authorities, higher education institutions, students and staff and international organizations in working for higher education reform. As of 2005, the Bologna Process has also included social partners as consultative members of the BFUG, following working contacts established earlier. In this sense, the Bologna Process has successfully established a broad platform of cooperation and debate between many of the main actors that need to be involved in the development of higher education in Europe.

At another level, however, the Bologna Process has so far been less successful, possibly because it has not focused enough on the issues. The Ministers have twice stated that higher education is “a public good and a public responsibility”. This issue has been taken up by the Council of Europe in the CDESR conference on the Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research, which led to a publication and also a draft Recommendation. The Bureau and the Secretariat believe this is a very valuable contribution to the European policy debate, but this debate needs to be continued. Essentially, the question is not whether higher education should or should not be a public responsibility, but what measures need to be taken if continued public responsibility for higher education – and also research – are to characterize European higher education in the future.

Most observers would agree that the traditional model of dominant to exclusive public funding and public provision, depending on the context and the country, will most likely not be sufficient to ensure top quality higher education and research in the future. The draft recommendation currently under consideration spells out some basic principles, but more debate is needed on the proper balance between and roles of public and private funding and actors in the European Higher Education Area. A positive vision needs to be developed on the possible contributions of different actors to the common goal of strengthening higher education in Europe. It might also

be useful to analyze factors and circumstances that could prevent the continued development of higher education in Europe as well as possible remedies or countermeasures.

While university autonomy<sup>5</sup> is a key principle of the Bologna Process, this principle also needs to be considered in the light of developments in society. Traditionally, emphasis has been on legal autonomy, which remains important. However, legal autonomy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for university autonomy to become or remain a reality. Traditionally, autonomy has also been defined in relation to public authorities (commonly expressed as “the state”). This remains an important aspect of university autonomy, but the relationship of universities to other actors who influence the environment in which universities operate must also be considered. One obvious example is the relationship of universities to bodies or companies that finance important parts of an institution’s activities, e.g. through major research projects. Lack of *de jure* autonomy in relation to public authorities due to legal provisions are relatively easy to identify, whereas lack of *de facto* autonomy in relation to a variety of actors for economic reasons, informal pressure, the influence of public opinion or of interest groups or because institutions adapt their behaviour to what they expect will be future political priorities is far more subtle and hence more difficult to define.

Many of these issues boil down to a consideration of the relationship between higher education and the state, and this again is a plurifaceted issue. On the one hand, it has to do with the relationship between higher education and political authorities or - if one prefers – the political process. Traditionally, most European countries have seen higher education as an important part of their national policies. There has been an assumption that the political process sets the national agenda and that political decisions to a significant degree determine the development of higher education. Over the past decade or more, the predominant position of the political process and of political decisions has, however, been diminished, as many other actors have come to occupy positions of influence. To some, this is a source of regret, as they see the development as one away from democratic control and decision making towards influence linked to control over resources or special interests. To others, this development is a source of satisfaction, as they see it as one away from undue political influence over decisions that are better made by economic actors, the market or those with particular stakes in the decisions. Whatever view one takes of these developments, the reality of the developments is fairly widely recognized, yet the impact of these developments on higher education policy is very far from being adequately explored. A fundamental question is how far the political process guides the development of our societies, and what impact the answer to this question has on the development of higher education.

This also raises the questions of policy measures. To what extent can and should policy be implemented through legislation, and to what extent are other measures needed, such as financial incentives or punishment, development of attitudes and consciousness, voluntary agreement and association, and other “soft” policy measures? The often quoted concept of mutual trust is also relevant here: there is broad agreement that mutual trust is needed, yet mutual trust needs to be developed through practice and cooperation, and it cannot easily be established by decree.

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<sup>5</sup> See also Recommendation 1762 (2006) by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy, available at <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta06/ERec1762.htm>.

On the other hand, the issue also touches on the relationship between the national level and other levels of actors. Traditionally, higher education has largely been linked to the development of national institutions, policies and cultures, as witnessed by institutions bearing names such as “national” or “state” universities. We also refer to national higher education systems, national qualifications frameworks, national quality assurance systems and the like. In some countries, one also finds Ministries of National Education. Yet, at the same time, there is much discussion of the internationalization of higher education, of transnational or borderless education, of global education markets and of global trends.

The Bologna Process is itself a pan-European process which is clearly influenced by developments elsewhere (in particular in North America) and which in its turn has stimulated great interest in other parts of the world, including in North America, but also in regions such as Latin America and Asia and the Pacific. At the same time, however, the Bologna Process may be described as a process in which policies are developed and agreed at European level but implemented within national frameworks. Leaving aside the question of the relationship between higher education and regional and local authorities, the issue of higher education in relation to national and international levels need to be explored further. The proposal for a register of quality assurance agencies and the “portability of quality assurance” enabling higher education institutions to choose to undergo quality assurance with an agency from a country other than the one(s) in which the institution operates has several aspects, but the issues of national vs. international competence over higher education is one of the key issues. Are we going towards a (re)nationalization or a (re)internationalization of higher education, where should we be going, and what can we do to go where we want to go?

### **Quality development and roles of institutions**

This leads us to a consideration of quality assurance, which is one of the key elements of the Bologna Process (and the subject of the Council of Europe Higher Education Forum to be held immediately before the CDESR plenary session, on 19 – 20 September 2006). On the positive side, this focus includes not only external quality control, but also a strong emphasis on the role of institutions in enhancing the quality of their own activities. The double emphasis on quality development (quality culture) as well as quality assurance, and on the role of higher education institutions as well as of public authorities, is positive and valuable. Governance issues are important also in this context, as is the issue of university autonomy, both of which were referred to in the preceding paragraphs.

Yet there is another aspect of the quality debate that has been less present, although it was raised at the conference on the use of credits organized by the EUA and the Swiss authorities in Zürich in October 2002 and it also has to do with the issue of public responsibility and the contributions of different actors.

This issue has to do with the mission and responsibilities, not of higher education as a whole, but of individual institutions. Should higher education institutions broadly have the same mission, or should they differentiate their role according to aspirations, resources and past performance? If so, what role should public authorities play in ensuring a diversified higher education system,

and to what extent should it be left to individual institutions to determine their own profile and ambitions? Again, this is not a question that can easily be answered in absolute terms, by a simple yes/no, and it raises a set of very difficult questions to institutions, staff and students and public authorities. These include:

- If higher education in Europe is research based, does this mean that all institutions and staff should be actively engaged in research, or does it mean that all staff should have some personal experience of research, e.g. through their own training, but not necessarily be active researchers?
- Should all institutions aim to carry out research?
- If yes, how should public authorities fund research?
- If no, what should be the criteria for funding of higher education, as this could imply relying on a broader set of criteria than today?
- If no, what are the implications for criteria for academic advancement? Should there be alternative career tracks emphasizing research and teaching differently? In this case, how could the “higher education teaching career track” be made attractive?
- Perhaps the most difficult and painful set of questions of all: can all countries and higher education systems realistically aim at having at least one high class research university? If not, at least high class research in at least a limited number of area? If national ambition – or *de facto* achievement – is less than one top class research university, how can transfer and use of high quality and level competence be ensured?

### **Higher education governance**

The traditional model of higher education governance in Europe may, perhaps somewhat simplified, be summarized as “governance by the academic community, of the academic community, and for the academic community”. In the course of the past 30 – 40 years, in particular, the definition of what constitutes the academic community has been considerably enlarged, with a substantial role in institutional governance for students and a somewhat less significant role for technical and administrative staff. Yet, until relatively recently, the predominant model was one in which tenured staff had a majority on institutional governance bodies, and the underlying reasoning was that tenured staff held the highest competence in the core mission of higher education: teaching and research.

Recently, however, there has been a tendency towards a significant departure from this model. Representatives of external stakeholders have, in many but far from all countries, been included as members of university governance bodies. In some cases, institutional leaders have also been sought from outside of the institution and hired on fixed term contracts rather than been elected by and among the academic community for fixed terms. This is a significant, if far from universal shift, also because the inclusion of external representatives tend to imply that tenured academic staff no longer have a majority on institutional governance bodies, which also seem, in many cases, to have been reduced in size. The consequences of this change – in effect a change in the definition of the key competencies required for higher education governance from competence in teaching and research toward stakeholder competence and/or competence in

broader societal issues, including the relationship between higher education and the broader society – have so far been insufficiently explored.

At the same time, higher education institutions are also affected by the “managerial society” or the “audit society”. This is in many ways a double edged sword. On the one hand, efficient management has many benefits for higher education institutions, and both the academic community, public authorities, various stakeholders and the public at large have a legitimate interest in higher education institutions being accountable for their use of resources. On the other hand, there is a feeling among many members of the academic community that developments may go too far, or that they have already done so. Partly, this may be a reluctance to change old ways, but there is also a very legitimate concern that the methods of private business management are not immediately applicable to higher education, and that a sensible alternative has yet to be found. Accountability is a sound principle, but the methods and measure of accountability should be adapted to the reality of higher education. In particular, there is legitimate concern that the time perspective allowed in accountability exercises is insufficient to meet the reality of research.

The Council of Europe’s Forum and publication on higher education governance are important contributions to this debate,. However, like the debate on public responsibility, the debate on higher education governance also needs to be continued.

### **The first degree in the labour market**

As mentioned, the economic function of higher education was one of the main concerns in launching the Bologna Process, and the emphasis on the three tier qualifications framework must be seen in this context. The Bologna Declaration states:

The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification.

Yet, this aspect of the reform of the degree structure has so far received far less attention than the workload associated with the different cycles.

The experience with what is often referred to as the employability of the first degree varies. In countries where the three tier degree system is well established, such as Ireland and the United Kingdom, the first degree also seems to be well established in the labour market. In countries where the degree system has traditionally been one of a long university degree and where the three tier system has been introduced only recently – or where it is still being introduced, there seems to be much less acceptance of the first degree in the labour market.

There may be several reasons for this, and this paper does not pretend to offer a full analysis. However, one important reason may be lack of understanding among employers of the potential value of the first degree, paired with a failing to define and understand the learning outcomes and functions of the different degrees. It is obvious that the first degree is not an adequate preparation for all kinds of employment for which academic qualifications are required. That,



however, is not an argument for saying that the first degree is inadequate for all kinds of employment, and it may be symptomatic that the examples often used to argue that a first degree is insufficient are taken from regulated professions. While a first degree is clearly insufficient for exercising regulated professions like medicine, civil engineering or architecture<sup>6</sup>, that is not an argument in relation to many other jobs, most of which belong to the non-regulated part of the labour market.

Higher education authorities and institutions must therefore define the learning outcomes of first degrees, engage with employers and their organization and seek to overcome traditional assumptions that equate quality with length of studies without considering the purpose for which a qualification will be put to use. It is important to define both learning outcomes and quality in relation to purpose, and this should be a key element in elaborating national qualifications frameworks.

## **Mobility**

Increased mobility of students and staff is one of the main goals of the Bologna Process, perhaps even the ultimate goal. Mobility is also furthered by large scale organized mobility programmes, in particular the EU programmes, but also regional programmes like CEEPUS and NORDPLUS. Many countries also have their own mobility programmes and goals, in particular for attracting students from outside of Europe (whether Europe is defined as the EHEA or, in particular for the purpose of charging study fees, as the European Union<sup>7</sup>).

Yet the “Bologna vision” of mobility is incomplete and inconsistently articulated. In part, this has to do with the interaction between higher education policies and other areas of public policy (see below) in part it has to do with inadequate consideration of objectives, means and policies, and in part it may have to do with difficulties in reconciling pan-European goals for mobility with national goals, in particular where possibilities for charging substantial study fees are involved. What kind of mobility do we want to encourage, and what means will help achieve these goals, once defined?

## **Higher education for sustainable societies**

Contributing to developing and maintaining sustainable societies should be considered one of the main roles of higher education, and should therefore also be an important consideration in establishing the European Higher Education Area. Sustainability is most commonly considered in the context of environmental issues and policies, but such considerations equally well apply to a whole range of issues of modern society. Environmental sustainability is a *sine qua non*, and developing the knowledge and understanding required to make life on Earth sustainable is one of

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<sup>6</sup> These are professions covered by specific legislation at national levels as well as by EU Directives on professional recognition. Very often, regulations specify the educational qualifications needed as well as supplementary requirements, such as a practice period under supervision.

<sup>7</sup> According to EU legislation, EU members cannot charge higher fees of students from other EU countries than of students from their own country.

the main missions of higher education. This requires advanced research but also broad understanding of the major issues among the population at large as well as among societal actors and decision makers.

However, sustainable societies also require sustainable social and economic policies that provide for meaningful and gainful employment and afford members of society the opportunity to make good use of their talents. Members of society must feel they have a real stake in the development and well being of their local, regional, national, European and international society. This touches on the Council of Europe's core missions of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, in which education plays an important role. It also touches on the role of education in developing understanding and values in addition to instrumental knowledge and skills.

How can these fundamental aspects of the mission of higher education be incorporated into the European Higher Education Area?

### **Interaction between higher education policies and other areas of public policies**

The Bologna Process aims to create a European Higher Education Area. The goal has been formulated by Ministers responsible for higher education, it is supported by the higher education community and it relies primarily on higher education policies to reach its goal. However, it will not be possible to establish a European Higher Education Area without also considering measures from other areas of public policy, in the same way as stakeholders from other areas – in particular, the social partners, who have an important function in higher education, but whose concerns are not limited to higher education – have been brought into the process.

This is most starkly illustrated by the goal of increasing academic mobility, which includes the mobility for teachers (hence of employees) and of holders of qualifications (hence of both current and prospective employees). This goal of increasing academic mobility is formulated at the same time that many European governments seek to limit immigration, in other words, general mobility for work and residence purposes. In some countries, there is also a debate about “selective mobility”. It is not immediately obvious that the simultaneous goals of increasing academic mobility and limiting immigration are readily compatible, nor is it obvious that governments are prepared to consider specific rules for academic mobility as opposed to other forms of mobility. The case in favour of mobility therefore needs to be made to political decision makers as well as to the general public.

Similarly, the issues of social security and pension rights are of fundamental importance to academic mobility, in particular staff mobility. Labour law, for example regulations limiting working hours, issues of civil responsibility and liability, for example in cases of malpractice, and provisions for child care are other areas where general regulations may affect academic mobility and ultimately the functioning of the European Higher Education Area if provisions are radically different among countries within the Area.

The financing of higher education – of institutions as well as of projects and of individuals such as students – is also an area in which higher education policies interact with other areas of public

policy. Few institutions today can fully achieve their ambitions with traditional public funding alone, and tend to supplement their traditional funding with project funds from other public sources or from private sources. This raises a number of issues, including the ones invoked earlier about the role of the political process in setting the agenda but also of whether general public policies on finance are well adapted to the needs of higher education. To what extent does general legislation concerning taxes on investment or the acquisition of major equipment reduce the possibilities of higher education institutions to acquire “heavy” research equipment? Conversely, what would be the effect of financial provisions specifically targeted at higher education? What are the effects of rigid or less rigid systems of remuneration of academic staff or of regulations governing the transfer of public funds from one budget year or one type of expenditure to another.

General labour legislation can also have an impact on higher education, e.g. as concerns regulations concerning hiring and firing of staff, permanent and temporary contracts, and not least maximum working hours. What, for example, is the effect of regulations concerning maximum working hours in a given period (day, week, month, year) on experimental science that require intensive efforts over a limited period of time or on the general tendency of higher education staff to put in very long hours?

While these paragraphs on financing and labour legislation raise more questions than they answer, they do seek to make the case that higher education needs to define its specific needs in these areas and then to put this case to the relevant public authorities, which include but are not limited to those responsible for higher education policies.

However, as the discussion around the Bergen Communiqué showed, there is considerable reluctance, at least among many member states, towards bringing other areas of public policy into the Bologna Process, even if there seems to be a very general and rather abstract acknowledgement that doing so would increase the prospects of successful implementation of the European Higher Education Area. One major challenge is therefore to define the most pertinent areas and issues of broader public policy that need to be addressed to successfully establish the EHEA and then find a way to bring them into the Bologna Process. This again will probably require addressing the broader vision for the EHEA which was one of the starting points for this document.

## **CONCLUSION**

This document is intended to launch a debate at the CDESR plenary session on outstanding issues in the Bologna Process. It does not pretend to be exhaustive, but the Secretariat hopes the document may have identified at least most of the most pertinent outstanding issues. While the list of potential issues may be quite long, it is also important that further discussion focus on a manageable number of issues. This discussion should aim to offer guidance for further work on these issues, leading up to the 2007 Ministerial meeting in London but also considerably beyond this. Partly, this discussion should be about finalizing the establishment of the Europe Higher Education Area, but to a large extent, it will also be about setting the agenda for the EHEA once it has been established.

### **3. COUNCIL OF EUROPE FORUM ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE: DECLARATION ADOPTED BY THE FORUM**

#### **The Responsibility of Higher Education for a Democratic Culture: Citizenship, Human Rights and Sustainability**

##### Context and Challenge

Issues of democracy define the political debates of our societies and underpin their sustainable development. We, as representatives of higher education institutions and associations, students, faculty and other interested parties from various parts of the world welcome this focus on democracy in public debates, through which humane and just societies thrive and develop.

Yet, along with the global spread of democratic ideas and societies, a crisis of confidence persists. An increased emphasis on the rhetoric as opposed to the practice of democracy, low and decreasing levels of participation in politics and civic activities, a decline of trust in public authority as well as social institutions, and a decrease in student participation give rise to concern for a democratic future of our multicultural and diverse societies. As higher education leaders, we cannot remain indifferent to these challenges.

Education and schooling are decisive forces shaping the democratic development of societies. Therefore, the role of education for democratic culture is emphasized in the Action Plan adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe at their Third Summit in Warsaw in May 2005 as well as in the Declaration adopted on the Council's 50th anniversary (May 1999). The latter proclaimed the centrality of education in democratic development: "to make education for democratic citizenship based on all the rights and responsibilities of citizens, an essential component of all educational, training, cultural and youth policies and practices." That commitment was reaffirmed in the Council's 2005 Year of Citizenship Through Education.

As was recognized by 536 college and university presidents in the United States in a Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education to educate citizens, universities are strategic institutions for the democratic development of societies.

##### Citizenship, Human Rights and Sustainability

Democracy can only flourish with strong supportive institutions and laws, and a pervasive democratic culture, which encompasses democratic values, ways of knowing and acting, ethical judgments, analytical competencies, and skills of engagement. It includes concern for the sustainable well being of fellow human beings as well as of the environment in which we live. It includes awareness of and concern for human rights as well as openness to the cultural diversity of human experience and willingness to give due consideration to the views of others.

The use of the Earth's resources raises issues of sustainable development and the very future of life on our planet. Even if public and political awareness of ecological issues and their importance for economic development is increasing, it is insufficient. Democratic culture interlinks with sustainable development as a conduit for economic and development concerns, and as a precondition for social cohesion and viable societies. Education is a condition *sine qua non* for sustainable development.

### The Commitment of Higher Education

As higher education leaders and policy makers we affirm our commitment to democratic principles and practice; our conviction that higher education has an essential role in furthering democratic culture; and our responsibility to educate each successive generation to renew and develop the attitudes, values and skills needed for this to become a reality. We recognize that the contribution of students as well as academic and non-academic staff to this effort is essential.

We further affirm our conviction that complex environmental, economic and societal issues can only be solved at the local, national and global levels if citizens can combine basic democratic values with a knowledge and understanding of the relationship of these challenges.

We subscribe to the responsibility of higher education to foster citizen commitment to sustainable public policies and actions that go beyond considerations of individual benefits.

We accept our responsibility to safeguard democracy, and promote a democratic culture, by supporting and advancing within higher education as well as society at large, the principles of:

- Democratic and accountable structures, processes and practice;
- Active democratic citizenship
- Human rights, mutual respect and social justice
- Environmental and societal sustainability
- Dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts

### A Call for Action

We pledge to undertake efforts in our respective institutions and associations to launch a debate about this declaration, to have it endorsed by our appropriate governance bodies, and to work for programmes, policies and practices that encourage academic, administrative and technical staff, students and other interested parties to:

- become aware of their responsibilities as educated citizens, for the development of their societies, the values of democracy, human rights and social, environmental and economic sustainability; and,
- take action in their local as well as in the national and global communities to put these principles into practice.
- encourage education for democracy in the curriculum and all aspects of institutional life.
- assume responsibility for the future of their universities and colleges;

To give visibility to these shared commitments, we will seek opportunities to organize activities within our own institutions and associations as well as in and with the communities of which we are a part. We call on the Council of Europe to coordinate a web site through which institutions and associations can highlight and advance their activities throughout the year, and we suggest that our efforts be publicized on or around December 10 - the International Day of Human Rights and the day on which the Nobel Prizes are announced.

We call on all higher education leaders and policy makers who commit to democracy, citizenship, human rights and sustainability to join us in our undertaking.

#### **4. COUNCIL OF EUROPE FORUM ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE: REPORT BY THE GENERAL RAPPORTEUR**

*David Crosier, European University Association*

##### **PREAMBLE**

On June 22 – 23, 2006 the Council of Europe held its second Higher Education Forum, on the topic of *Higher Education and Democratic Culture: Citizenship, Human Rights and Civic Responsibility*. This short report of the event will disappoint anyone who expects to find a neatly digestible summary and highlights. To attempt to summarise or pick out highlights, however, would be to do an injustice to the debate, to the range and depth of contributions, and to the rationale for action set out in the Declaration adopted at the Forum. Moreover, as this report is published alongside the main presentations from the Forum, there is no need to take such an approach: the impressive presentations merit being read and reflected upon in their entirety, and the questions that they raise need to be considered in context.

Instead this General Report attempts to convey a sense of the critical importance of the issues dealt with, as well as to reflect on and describe the comprehensive approach taken to link the notions of democratic culture, human rights, citizenship and sustainability. Hopefully the report will also give some sense of the extraordinary atmosphere created at the event by bringing together participants with such diverse and extraordinary experience. Indeed, what united the participants, who included leaders of higher education institutions, student representatives, civil society organisation figureheads, and heads of public authorities, was their commitment to shared values, and to taking action in a spirit of public engagement through higher education to sustain and develop democratic culture. While no-one will have left Strasbourg with a sense of unqualified optimism, there is little doubt that most will have left with a strengthened resolve to continue to act with conviction to advance the democratic fabric of society.

A particular paradox concerning the participants at the event should also be highlighted: those who attended are likely to be among the group whose need to be there was least critical. By responding positively to the invitation, participants indicated their sensitivity to the importance of working together to sustain democratic culture. The problem in our societies is that there are so many who neglect the importance of these issues, and fail to act appropriately in the interest of both today's and tomorrow's society.

The Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR) should therefore be applauded for its initiative in organising this Forum and bringing these crucial issues to the forefront of international attention. Moreover the event would not have been so positive without the committed and enthusiastic involvement of the US Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy, comprised of the American Council on Education, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and Campus Compact. While the Forum was built on strong foundations laid in

previous, related activities, including the Council of Europe project on the University as a Site of Citizenship, and initiative for the European Year of Citizenship through Education in 2005, this event clearly moved the discussion beyond previous outcomes. Indeed one of the overarching conclusions from the Forum is very simple and stark: that as the speed of change in our world increases, none of us is in a position to be complacent about the future of human society, and how we act today may therefore have dramatic consequences for the future.

## **DEMOCRACY AND HIGHER EDUCATION**

A Chinese saying blesses those with the good fortune to live in interesting times. While it is a moot point whether in our post-modern societies we are currently more blessed and fortunate than our predecessor generations, there is no doubt that we are living in interesting times – times that provide ample evidence that democracy is not a state of being that can be taken for granted and sustained without effort. Yet many who have grown up in democratic societies think little about the notion of democratic culture nor of the processes required to sustain and develop society. Higher education institutions often reflect this negligent attitude, and yet they have an important responsibility, of which they may be more or less conscious, for the quality of democratic society. This is a responsibility which needs to be thought about and acted upon, and there was general agreement at the Forum that higher education institutions both can and should do much more to fulfill this imperative societal responsibility.

That the Council of Europe took the initiative to organise a major international Forum for higher education institutions and public authorities on the topic of higher education and democratic culture can be regarded simultaneously as an extremely welcome initiative and a cause for concern. All who were present in Strasbourg will testify that it was extremely welcome for representatives of higher education institutions, public authorities, student leaders and civil society organisations across the world to have the opportunity to discuss their role in developing and sustaining democratic societies, and that this was a rare and important opportunity to share diverse experience and engage in a fruitful process of mutual learning. However, the fact that it was so acutely necessary in 2006 to pay serious attention to how societies can sustain and develop democracy for the future should be of major concern to us all.

For many higher education institutions in so-called advanced democratic societies the values of democratic society can too easily be taken for granted. Indeed, while many higher education institutions may spontaneously define their work and mission in terms of teaching and research, very likely acknowledging the growing demands of a changing labour market, few would immediately state the role of promoting democratic culture among their primary functions. This is not to say that they do not promote democratic culture, but rather that they do not do it explicitly, rarely have any considered strategy or institutional policy on the matter, and may often fail to identify their social role in educating for democratic citizenship as a primary task.

As democratic culture will always be transmitted through the form as much as the content of the education process, this can be regarded as a perfectly normal state of affairs. However, the inevitability of democracy cannot be taken for granted, and there are many concerns for



tomorrow's society if insufficient effort is made to sustain and develop democratic culture and behaviour within our higher education institutions. Indeed a recurring comment at the Forum was that higher education institutions are very often under so much pressure to respond to short-term demands that their attention to long-term sustainable development is far from adequate.

Examples discussed at the Forum from the new democratic nations in Central and Eastern Europe were particularly enlightening in this respect. Josef Jařab, a leading intellectual dissident in the former Czechoslovakia before becoming a major Czech political figure in the democratic era, commented that his personal experience had taught him how it was much easier to criticise and analyse the failings of a country lacking democracy than to take decisions on policy and practice within a democratic nation. Doing the right thing to sustain and develop democracy is far from being a simple matter. The Forum discussed how western support to the fledgling European nations in the early nineties following the euphoria of political change tended to focus on the functioning of democratic institutions, combined with support to radical economic transformation. A process towards democratic governance which had taken centuries to evolve in many western countries was thus concentrated into a few years as new institutions were developed and new laws put in place. Yet important though it is to have well functioning democratic institutions, transparent electoral procedures and the other paraphernalia of democratic society, attention also needs to be paid to developing a genuine culture of democracy. For a holistic notion of democracy to be integrated into all aspects of life requires radical change in attitudes and behaviour, and this can be neither imported nor developed overnight. There is indeed a critical role to be played through both formal and informal education, but not for the first or the last time, the importance of such matters was undoubtedly under-estimated.

Recent experience in the Middle East offers similar lessons. Events in Iraq have demonstrated that it is unrealistic to expect democracy to develop and prosper through a combination of military intervention and subsequent support to economic change without seeking to develop democratic culture and a high sense of civic responsibility, especially if short term financial benefits and improvement of living conditions tend to accrue only to a minority within the country. People and nations are all affected by their history and experience, and hence although we are all traveling along paths which may appear to be convergent and have the same destination, we depart from different starting points and do not proceed at the same pace. While affirming the universality of ideas, principles and aspirations, including human rights and sustainable democracy, it is therefore also essential to acknowledge and appreciate the reality and diversity of individual and national experience.

If the forms of democracy are to be reinvented and reshaped to meet demands of changing societies, it is also important to consider the forces that may enhance or threaten their development. There is indeed no doubt that the world is changing fast, and is already very different from a few years ago. Post industrial societies are becoming increasingly complex, and globalisation now affects all aspects of our lives. This can have great positive benefits, many of which were discussed during the Forum. The educational opportunities offered by the extraordinary evolution in information and communication technologies, for example, are limited only by our imagination. Brenda Gourley demonstrated this point with examples from the UK's Open University, illustrating the major impact that these technologies are already having on

widening participation in higher education, and creating new opportunities for communities of learners and scholars around the world to communicate and explore ideas.

However, as the American science fiction writer William Gibson observed, “the future is already here: it’s just unevenly distributed”, and a number of contributors, notably Goolam Mohammedbai, drew attention to the barriers to education caused by social inequity and faced most dramatically by those in the developing world. While technology may offer many solutions to bridge societal differences and to broaden educational opportunities, if globalisation continues to be driven wholly or primarily by an economic rationale, its benefits may fail to extend to all, and indeed a new set of problems may be created.

At this stage, many primary needs are not being met in developing nations. Many in the developing world are therefore simply not in a position to consider questions of democracy and higher education as a priority while there is insufficient food for the population, and access to primary and secondary education remains greatly restricted. Indeed, unless we do more to ensure that basic needs in society are met we may create the conditions where interest gaps between groups in our global society will widen, and where far from offering opportunities to develop democratic societies where they are yet to exist, we will instead create the conditions which undermine democracy both at home and abroad. One of the key messages of the Forum was thus to recognise that a concern for democracy must aim to improve conditions at local and national level, but this must also be done by taking into account and addressing the situations of people and countries in other parts of our common world.

## **CONDITIONS FOR SUSTAINING DEMOCRACY**

The Forum made important connections between different spheres of life that are often considered separately. Issues such as a concern for sustainable development, the global environment and human rights are an integral aspect of democratic life in a global age, and their links need to be explored and better understood.

Whatever the merits of democracy, there is no doubt that if it is to prosper it requires citizens who are active and engaged. In our fast-moving, media driven western societies, much attention has been focused in recent years on the act of voting, and a crisis of democracy is often announced by reference to declining voter statistics in parliamentary elections. While voting is indeed important - and it should be of concern that large swathes of the population in western democracies are now more likely to vote for a candidate in a TV reality show than for one in a political election – the act of voting is but one manifestation of democratic behaviour.

The attitudes and behaviour of democratic governments also affect citizen voting patterns, and many may see such developments as the increased influence on legislation through the lobbying of business and industry rather than through the exercise of open democratic debate as one reason to lose faith in the act of voting. The rise of local and global social movements, assisted by technological developments, has also provided new ways in which individuals may act and engage politically, and such developments, which are a vital aspect of civic society engagement

in the modern world, should therefore not be ignored in discussion on the decline in participation in traditional political processes.

Participants also drew attention to the crucial point that a fair distribution of societal opportunities remains critical to the sustainability of democracy. At a global level, it is clear that the gap between the developed and the developing world is not closing fast enough, and in some ways not yet closing at all. Attention to urgent and pressing needs, such as food and healthcare, is of course essential but such humanitarian action should not deflect from a focus also on sustainable development, and in particular through increasing and widening access to educational opportunities - the key to long-term, sustainable democratic development in all parts of the globe. The Forum agreed that democracy cannot flourish alongside poverty and illiteracy, and that if we want to promote democracy it is therefore a categorical imperative to address the issues of social inequity at a global level.

Moreover, within even the most advanced democratic states, educational opportunities are a function of social reality. Nowhere can it be claimed that equal access to opportunities exists not only in law but in societal reality. Some societies do better than others, and there is evidence that countries which pay attention to extending educational opportunities equitably tend to benefit both economically and socially. Hence a strong case can be made that social justice and equal opportunities provide a rational strategy for economic progress and development. Beyond the economic case, there is also an immense danger that the democratic fabric of our societies risks being torn apart if these issues of inequality and social justice are not tackled.

## **THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

The Forum explored the role and responsibilities of higher education in a fast-changing global world. Higher education institutions need to ask themselves where their role in local and global affairs begins and ends. As institutions dealing with universal knowledge, they are by definition global actors. At the same time their main sphere of influence and engagement may be at a very local level. Hence higher education institutions are ideally placed, through their panoply of actions – teaching, research and societal involvement – to facilitate the organic development of democratic culture.

Democracy is only able to thrive if an appropriate educational environment is created and sustained. Even in advanced democratic societies, higher education often fails to meet the democratic principles advocated by participants, and outlined in the Declaration adopted at the Forum. For example, do institutions offer the space to express minority opinions – and in a way that they will not only be expressed, but also listened to and considered? Are students regarded as the subject of their individual learning process, or are they too often treated as the object and receivers of an educational experience devised by teachers? Do institutions care appropriately for students as individuals, enabling them to be valued and to participate fully in the life of their institution and wider society? Are all members of our communities equally valued and accepted? Is the environment able to adapt to accommodate the needs of those who may not conform to a dominant societal norm, including those with disabilities? Are our institutions capable of

adapting to meet the needs of different individuals and societal groups? Do all our institutions actually think about how they may need to change to fulfill their societal obligations? If we are genuinely concerned about the sustainable future of democracy it is essential that our institutions are asking and addressing such questions.

Higher education institutions are not only instrumental in shaping societal forces but are also subject to the societal forces at large. Just as universities may be a bastion of democratic values, they may also become an instrument of anti-democratic forces. This was clearly illustrated at the Forum through a living example from Belarus. Taciana Khoma, a student at the Belarus State Economic University (BSEU), was expelled in 2005 immediately after being elected to the Executive Committee of ESIB, the umbrella organization of National Unions of Students in Europe. The official reason given for her expulsion was that she had violated university regulations by not informing the university of her intention to travel to the ESIB meeting. For the Belarus government and the BSEU, the intention in this case as in many others in non democratic regimes, was clearly to repress critical and free thinking. However, their action backfired as an international campaign for Taciana to be reinstated gathered enormous support and media attention. This has undoubtedly inspired many of those committed to democratic change to pursue their actions, and Taciana herself has continued to demonstrate the courage of her convictions and her commitment to democracy in pursuing her work on behalf of all students in Europe. Yet although the forces of free thinking may have partially triumphed in this instance, Belarus, along with many other non-democratic regimes will continue to consider higher education as an important instrument for societal control and repression.

It is often difficult to assess when and how higher education institutions may be failing to act to protect democratic values, and often only with historical hindsight can the danger be analysed and understood. For example, it is possible now to point to European universities that were complicit in the rise of Nazism, failing to protect student and staff members of the Jewish community in the 1930s. The role of higher education institutions in sustaining the regimes of the former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe is also a subject of important historical attention now. More recently, some academics in former Yugoslavia played a significant role in writing and promoting nationalistic material that ultimately contributed to years of conflict in the break-up of the country. Counter-examples should of course also be noted, such as the development during the Milošević period of the Alternative Academic Education Network, which did so much to maintain academic values when the conditions did not allow public higher education institutions to fulfill their societal duties, but the point remains that higher education institutions can become a force not only for positive societal change but also for negative developments. Thinking of today's challenges in the international arena, many questions should therefore be asked of, and by, higher education institutions. What, for example, is an appropriate role for universities with regard to the Middle East? What role should higher education institutions play in addressing responses to terrorism? Undoubtedly, there will be a range of answers to such questions in democratic society, but the questions should not be put aside if an appropriate role for an engaged university in democratic society is to be forged.

## THE APPLICATION OF DEMOCRACY IN HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

Even if there are worries about both the nature and the decline of citizenship participation in democratic society, democracy as a framework for local, national, regional and international government is widely accepted. Relatively little attention, however, is given to its application within governance of higher education. What does a democratic higher education institution look like, and how does it differ from a non democratic counterpart? The first point of consideration for many would be the structures and mechanisms of institutional governance. Some would answer that as long as staff have the opportunity to elect their peers to various positions – such as Deans and Senate – the conditions for democratic functioning are ensured. However, in many parts of the world such procedures are increasingly considered as insufficient so long as students, who are the primary beneficiaries and stakeholders in higher education, are given little or no say in how institutions are run. Hence adequate student representation in governance structures has become a major point of consideration, raising the much-debated question of “what is adequate?”

Yet even admitting that the question of student participation is satisfactorily resolved, is this sufficient to ensure the public responsibility of the institution in a democratic society, or should other societal representatives also have their say in the running of the institution? Addressing this question has led to an increasing trend in Europe, (much later than in the United States) in the rise in Governing Boards with strong stakeholder representation. One question which will inevitably emerge as a consequence of this development is which societal representatives are perceived as having a legitimate stake in higher education institutions? Very often it is the institutional role in supplying the labour market with suitably skilled and qualified graduates that is privileged, and leading figures from local industry and business are predominantly elected or selected as Board members. One striking aspect about such structures is that all involved tend to have benefited personally from the experience of higher education. Yet in many of our societies, a majority or significant minority of the population has no experience of higher education. If this section of the public is absent from governance structures, is it not likely that its interests will also be neglected? The absence of representatives of a significant constituency raises concerns about democratic legitimacy, and if the notion of democracy in higher education is taken seriously, the question of how to ensure that society is adequately represented therefore needs to move centre stage.

Just as the question of democratic governance structures for parliaments and legislature is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democratic society to prosper, so too is this the case for higher education institutions. Even if governance structures are agreed and accepted, there is no guarantee that practice and behaviour within the institution will meet democratic expectations. Again the concepts of democratic culture, or living democracy in practice, are central to this discussion. The Forum noted that higher education institutions often fail to reflect the diversity of populations both in their staff and student profile, may remain complacent about taking action to change the situation, and in the worst examples behave with a combination of arrogance and indifference towards their students. A striking example was given by Frank Rhodes in answer to a question following his keynote speech. He told how his daughter had described the difference between two US higher education institutions where she had studied – the first a highly reputed university, and the second a smaller, lesser known liberal arts college. Explaining that her

experience had been far happier and more productive at the liberal arts college, she commented that her time there had been characterised by the feeling that “everyone is on your side”.

This of course begs the question that if an institution is not on the side of its students, or is not perceived by its students to be on their side, then whose side is it on? The example also raises the difficulty for institutions to be on the side of many students especially when they will be drawn from increasingly diverse backgrounds, and will have very different needs. However enlightened staff in different institutions may be, this issue is likely to pose challenges. Particular attention needs to be paid to those students from traditionally under-represented groups – who may include socio-economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, adult returners, students from particular ethnic groups, or students from an under-represented gender group in particular discipline areas. While all students may need support, it is likely that those from such under-represented groups will need more support than others.

In considering this aspect of expanding opportunities for higher education, participants were also reminded that there is much work to be done in all institutions and countries. There is very clear evidence that opportunities for higher education are unequally distributed, and that this is reflected not only in terms of entry to all cycles of higher education, but also with regard to successful completion of studies, entry into the labour market, as well as in academic career progression. While meritocracy is commonly proclaimed as a basis for access, reality consistently fails to live up to this ideal. Addressing these questions will require major societal attention which extends beyond the realm of higher education, and should be a major item of social policy. Nevertheless all higher education institutions have important responsibilities to address these issues within the framework of an overall social policy agenda.

## **AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE**

Participants left the Forum with a strong sense of affirmed common commitment, and the feeling that, although these are ongoing and never-ending issues, a significant step had been taken in Strasbourg. The Forum adopted a clear and comprehensive Declaration, and the debate around this document signified the participants’ intent to ensure that there is both meaningful output from the Forum, and significant follow-up action. Indeed the Declaration signals not the end of an event, but the launch of a process calling for action from higher education institutions across the globe, and underpinned by a set of common values and principles. This commitment is embodied by the launch of a website which will offer higher education institutions a space to illustrate initiatives and practice in favour of sustainable development of democratic culture, and which will thus be developed as a common resource for institutions. A particular focus of the website will take place on or around the 10 December, International Human Rights Day.

There was a strong agreement that higher education institutions have a responsibility for ensuring social justice throughout their work. Although higher education institutions should not shoulder the responsibility for all of society’s problems, they can and should take their particular responsibilities for developing democracy seriously. It should not be a matter of lip service to promote the values of human rights, social justice and democracy in higher education, but rather

a matter of fundamental principle that has to be thought through and acted upon, and which should thus have an impact on all aspects of higher education.

The Forum concluded that this process can be helped by recognising that we can no longer afford to sit back and allow the course of democracy to find its own path, but rather that we all have a responsibility to continue to work together as a responsive and responsible network of actors engaged in higher education. While individual actions may have a limited impact on the development of higher education systems, each of us has a responsibility not only to the current generation, but also to the future that our actions prepare. Our contributions are therefore significant, and will become even more so if opportunities to bring together our diverse experience are seized. This was the sense in which the participants of the Higher Education Forum adopted the Declaration which affirms the responsibility of higher education to safeguard democracy, and to promote a democratic culture by supporting and advancing the key principles and values which are outlined in the text.

The question of how higher education develops cannot be separated from the issue of how we envisage the development of the society in which we live. This process therefore does not start from zero, and will not end at any particular point. Instead it will require continual energy and commitment to develop higher education as a fundamental pillar of democratic society. This commitment to democratic culture should also be a fundamental aspect of the European Higher Education Area that we are constructing together, and an important element of its interaction with other parts of the world. The Forum has played an important role in initiating this global dialogue, and providing the opportunity for it to be taken forward, identifying not only common concerns to address, but also many areas of common ground to build upon.

5.

## COUNCIL OF EUROPE HIGHER EDUCATION FORUM

### **The Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The Role of Public Authorities and Institutions**

#### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Council of Europe Higher Education Forum on *The Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: the Role of Public Authorities and Institutions*, held in Strasbourg on 19 – 20 September 2006 with the cooperation of ENQA and the EUA, focused on the relationship between quality assurance, the public responsibility for higher education and research and higher education governance.

The Forum took as its starting point the premise that striving to achieve high quality underlies higher education and research, and that achievement of quality is a joint responsibility of all partners in higher education. Institutions, staff and students as well as public authorities should continue to see quality improvement as an essential goal of their learning, teaching and research.

Quality in higher education should be considered in the light of the requirements of the academic community and disciplines as well as the broader needs and expectations of society, of which higher education and research are a part. This should include considerations of ethics and opportunities for personal development as well as of the extent to which institutions provide equal opportunities for learners and the extent to which they stimulate innovation.

Public authorities should, in cooperation and consultation with higher education institutions, staff, students and other stakeholders, develop visions and goals for the higher education systems for which they are responsible and provide the framework for their implementation. They should seek to develop mutual trust within the European Higher Education Area.

Higher education institutions should make explicit their mission and aims, which should then form the basis for the development and assessment of the quality of the institution.

The definition, development and assessment of quality are complementary aspects of the quest for quality in higher education and research. Quality assurance, therefore, is linked to an ongoing debate on the goals of higher education and research as well as continuous work to improve the ability of institutions, staff and students to meet those goals.

Public authorities as well as institutions and quality assurance agencies should recognize that different stages of development of institutions and higher education systems may require different approaches and methodologies. These may include the use of quantitative and qualitative indicators and criteria, which may vary according to the stage of development of the system. The balance between methodologies may change over time and will tend to shift from quantitative towards qualitative approaches in line with the increasing maturity of the systems.



The development and maintenance of good quality higher education and research are contingent on attractive working conditions for staff and students as well as on the framework laid down by public authorities

The Forum expressed support for the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted by Ministers in Bergen in May 2005.

Since, as stated by Ministers in their Berlin Communiqué, the main responsibility for quality development and quality assurance in higher education rests with the institutions, higher education governance and management must have the continuous development of quality as one of its main goals. Public authorities should encourage and ensure monitoring of quality assurance and quality enhancement activities.

Quality enhancement should be a continuous concern of, and mobilize, higher education institutions and all their members individually. Institutions should also seek input from and cooperation with external stakeholders.

External quality assurance, carried out through mandates given by competent public authorities, constitutes an important complement to the quality culture of higher education institutions. The resources and efforts spent on external quality assurance should be commensurate with the benefits derived from it and should be no more than necessary to achieve these benefits. This is particularly important when considering the range and scope of quality assurance and accreditation activities.

While reports from internal and external quality assessment exercise play an important role in maintaining and improving the quality of higher education, the most critical phase in this work is the follow-up given to these reports, which should be seen as a main responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves. Quality assurance and enhancement exercises should therefore be focused on the future, should include leadership and management, and should in particular concentrate on the capacity of institutions for effective change, supported by quality culture and adequate resources.

All European countries should be seeking to place their systems in a broader European and international context. In particular in the case of smaller higher education systems, regional cooperation could be sought in quality assurance.

Adequate and understandable information in respect of the outcomes of quality reviews should be made widely accessible.

Quality assurance should contribute to enhancing fair recognition of qualifications across the European Higher Education Area, which requires adequate information on the quality of education provision and outcomes as well as closer cooperation between recognition and quality assurance agencies.

The Council of Europe and its Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR) should use its position as a pan-European platform anchored in an organization of values to ensure that the core values of universities are embedded in the European Higher Education Area and help find adequate ways to nurture these as our societies change.

## 6. STEERING COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH: MAIN OUTCOMES

The 2006 plenary session of the Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research (CDESR) was held in Strasbourg on September 21 – 22, 2006. Among other things, the plenary session:

- approved a draft Recommendation on the Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research and decided to submit it to the Committee of Ministers for adoption;
- adopted a Statement on the contribution of higher education to intercultural dialogue;
- expressed its support for a university network on intercultural dialogue and mandated its Bureau to follow up the issue on the basis of the discussion in the plenary session
- considered its contribution to the follow up of the Third Summit and in particular underlined the importance of its new project on “The University Between Humanism and Market: Redefining its Values and Functions for the 21st Century”, which will address a number of issues that are a fundamental part of this contribution ;
- considered and adopted the project description for this project;
- took note of and welcomed the contributions of the Council of Europe to the European Higher Education Area, through intergovernmental, bi-lateral and regional activities including the recognition of qualifications, the public responsibility for higher education and research and higher education governance and through participation in the steering bodies of the Bologna Process
- held an extensive debate on unresolved issues in the Bologna Process (see document 2);
- took note of the outcomes of the Forum on the Responsibility of Higher Education for Democratic Culture, held in Strasbourg on 22 – 23 June 2006, and in particular of the Declaration adopted by the Forum, welcomed its contribution to the implementation of the fundamental aims of the Action Plan and underlined the importance of the close cooperation established with key actors in United States higher education on this topic and thanked the US partners for their contributions to the Forum;
- asked all delegations to undertake the necessary efforts to ensure adherence to the Declaration by higher education institutions in their respective countries and for this purpose to widely disseminate the information on the global network for higher education and democratic culture and its online platform
- took note of the conclusions and recommendations of the Forum on “The Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education”, held in Strasbourg on 19 – 20 September 2006 and asked delegations to disseminate these in their respective countries;
- took note of the Council of Europe’s activities aiming to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and in particular encouraged the ENIC Network to continue to

provide guidance for the elaboration and implementation of national action plans for recognition in the framework of the Bologna Process;

- took note of Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1762 (2006) on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy, underlined the importance of a political statement by an international parliamentary body on this issue and mandated the Bureau to consider possible follow up to this Recommendation on the basis of the discussion in the plenary session.
- took note of the outcomes of the European Year of Citizenship through Education as well as its own contributions to the Year and underlined the importance of the Forum on the Responsibility of Higher Education for Democratic Culture and the follow up to the Declaration adopted at this Forum in the follow up to the Year.
- Decided to hold its 2007 plenary session in Strasbourg on September 20 – 21, 2007.

The CDESR also elected its Bureau as follows:

Chair:	Mr. Luc Weber (academic member, Switzerland, 2006 – 2007)
Vice Chair:	Mr. Radu Damian (government member, Romania, 2006 – 2007)
Other members:	Mr. Andrejs Rauhvargers (academic member, Latvia, 2006 – 2008)
	Mr. Giuseppe Ronsisvalle (academic member, Italy, 2006 – 2008)
	Mr. Keith Andrews (government member, United Kingdom, 2006 – 2008)
	Ms. Gro Beate Vige (government member, Norway, 2006 – 2008)

and noted that the terms of Bureau members Mr. Germain Dondelinger (government member, Luxembourg) and Mr. Virgílio Meira Soares (academic member, Portugal) continue until the plenary session of 2007.

## 7. COUNCIL OF EUROPE HIGHER EDUCATION SERIES: AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLICATIONS

1. *The university as res publica. Higher education governance, student participation and the university as a site of citizenship* (Sjur Bergan, ed.) (Strasbourg 2004: Council of Europe Publishing)
2. *The public responsibility for higher education and research* (Luc Weber and Sjur Bergan, eds.) (Strasbourg 2005: Council of Europe Publishing)
3. *Standards for recognition: the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts* (Sjur Bergan and Andrejs Rauhvargers, eds.) (Strasbourg 2005: Council of Europe Publishing)
4. *Recognition in the Bologna Process: policy development and the road to good practice* (Andrejs Rauhvargers and Sjur Bergan, eds.) (Strasbourg 2005: Council of Europe Publishing)
5. *Higher education governance between democratic culture, academic aspirations and market forces* (Jürgen Kohler and Josef Huber, eds.) (Strasbourg 2005: Council of Europe Publishing)