



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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Subject : Council Resolution on modernising universities for Europe's competitiveness in a  
global knowledge economy  
– adoption of Council Resolution

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Delegations will find attached the text of the Council conclusions as adopted by the  
Competitiveness Council on 23 November 2007.

## **COUNCIL RESOLUTION**

**of 23 November 2007**

**on modernising universities for Europe's competitiveness in a global knowledge economy**

(2007/C XXX/YY.)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECALLING the political background to this issue as set out in the annex to this Resolution:

REAFFIRMS:

1. The need to advance in bringing about the modernisation of Europe's universities, addressing their interlinked roles in education, research and innovation, as a key element of Europe's drive to create a knowledge-based society and economy and improve its competitiveness;
2. The importance of increasing lifelong learning opportunities, widening higher education access to non-traditional and adult learners and developing the lifelong learning dimension of universities;
3. The importance of creating greater opportunities for women to pursue careers in science;
4. The principle that motivated and talented students should be able to take advantage of mobility opportunities, irrespective of their social or economic background, and the need to increase not only the mobility of students, but also that of researchers, teachers and other university staff;
5. The need for universities to have sufficient autonomy, better governance and accountability in their structures to face new societal needs and to enable them to increase and diversify their sources of public and private funding in order to reduce the funding gap with the European Union's main competitors;

6. The importance of Quality Assurance as a powerful driver of change in higher education;
7. The role of universities, through education, research and innovation, in the transfer of knowledge to the economy and society as a main contribution to Europe's competitiveness and the need for closer cooperation between academia and the world of enterprise.

RECOGNISES:

1. the need for consistency in the work towards the European Higher Education Area on the one hand, and the European Research Area on the other;
2. that the challenges posed by globalisation require that the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area be fully open to the world and that Europe's universities aim to become worldwide competitive players;
3. the need to accelerate reform of universities in order not only to stimulate progress across the whole higher education system but also to foster the emergence and strengthening of European higher education institutions which can demonstrate their excellence at international level;
4. the need to increase mobility of students, researchers, teachers and other university staff while at the same time recognising the importance of having a broad social composition of those benefiting from such mobility;
5. that increased lifelong learning opportunities, widening access to higher education for all, including non-traditional learners, and improving employability, are key objectives of higher education policy both at European and national level.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES TO:

1. Promote excellence in higher education and research by developing institutions and networks able to compete internationally and to contribute to attracting to Europe the best talent, and providing these institutions with the autonomy to develop their full potential;
2. Promote the internationalisation of higher education institutions by encouraging quality assurance through independent evaluation and peer review of universities, enhancing mobility, promoting the use of joint and double degrees and facilitating recognition of qualifications and periods of study;
3. Take the necessary measures to modernise higher education institutions by granting them autonomy and greater accountability to enable them:
  - to improve their management practices
  - to develop their innovative capacity; and
  - to strengthen their capacity to modernise their curricula to meet labour market and learner needs more effectively;and to enhance access to higher education, thereby meeting the requirements of economic and technological competitiveness and broader societal goals;
4. Promote the contribution of higher education institutions to innovation, growth and employment, as well as to social and cultural life, by encouraging them to develop and reinforce partnerships with other parties, such as the private sector, research institutions, regional and local authorities and civil society;
5. Put into place concrete incentives to encourage higher education institutions to open up to non-traditional learners and adult students and further develop their role in lifelong learning increasing, when appropriate, the diversity of the tertiary education system;
6. Develop better learning and research environments for students and young researchers, by strengthening project-based learning and early involvement of students in research, especially in the areas of science and technology;

7. Take measures to ensure that student and researcher support systems promote the widest possible and most equitable participation in mobility schemes, such as improving access to higher education for all motivated and talented students and researchers, including those with disabilities, regardless of gender, income, social, or linguistic background, and broadening the social dimension of higher education by providing better support for students and researchers in the EU and information on study, mobility and career opportunities, with a view to ensuring the best possible training opportunities for all. One of these measures could be to contribute to the monitoring of the social dimension in higher education, so that internationally comparable data will become available on this topic;
8. Enhance the attractiveness of European higher education systems by encouraging institutions to fully use the cooperation and mobility opportunities, namely those offered by the Erasmus Mundus programme for the promotion of academic excellence at world wide level;
9. Make use of the structural funds for modernising higher education.

INVITES THE COMMISSION to support the Member States with regard to the modernisation agenda, and in particular to:

1. Identify, in consultation with the relevant higher education and research stakeholders, as well as national authorities, possible measures to address the challenges and obstacles that universities in the European Union face in realising their modernisation and in fully contributing to the goals of the Lisbon agenda;
2. Facilitate mutual learning, in the context of the Lisbon Agenda, in particular within the Education and Training 2010 work programme and the follow-up of the Green Paper on the ERA, as well as through encouraging partnerships between universities and industry/private sector;

3. Identify possible measures to address the obstacles to the mobility of students, teachers and researchers across Europe and in particular to the mutual recognition of credits and diplomas and promote the exchange of good practices in this regard;
  
  4. Monitor and assess the impact of, in liaison with national programme structures:
    - the social background of students participating in ERASMUS,
    - the contribution of ERASMUS to the modernisation agenda
    - the contribution of ERASMUS MUNDUS to the international attractiveness of European Universitiesand report back to the Member States on this by mid-2008.
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Political Background

- (1) Community action in education and training is based on Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty.
- (2) The European Councils, of Lisbon in March 2000 and Barcelona in March 2002 respectively, agreed to set a strategic goal for the European Union to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010, to make the education and training systems of the European Union a world quality reference by 2010 and create a European Research and Innovation Area.
- (3) The Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling higher education to make its full contribution to the Lisbon strategy<sup>1</sup> underlines the importance of the reforms to higher education.
- (4) The European Heads of State and Government, at the Informal European Summit at Hampton Court (UK) in October 2005 and the European Council in March 2007, highlighted the importance of the knowledge triangle: education, research and innovation for the competitiveness of the European Union. They invited the Commission to identify concrete actions which would build on the Commission's Communications "The role of universities in the Europe of knowledge"<sup>2</sup> and "Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy"<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 292/1, 24.11.2005.

<sup>2</sup> COM(2003) 58 final.

<sup>3</sup> COM(2005) 152 final.

- (5) The Commission's Communication "Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research, Innovation" of May 2006<sup>4</sup>, pointed to nine areas where action would help universities to modernise. The European Council in June 2006 called for a follow-up to the Commission's Communication and encouraged Member States to promote excellence and foster modernisation, restructuring and innovation in the higher education sector in order to unlock its potential and to underpin Europe's drive for more growth and jobs.
- (6) The Commission's Green paper of April 2007 "the European Research Area: new perspectives" served as a basis for broad stakeholder consultation and institutional and public debate. It highlights the need to strengthen the role of universities and research institutions in promoting excellence.
- (7) The "Aho" Group Report on Creating an innovative Europe calls for stronger interaction between universities and other stakeholders in innovation.
- (8) The intergovernmental Bologna process of 46 participating countries has resulted in progress to make European higher education more competitive internationally and in reforming some aspects of higher education, including measures to increase mobility and make Europe's citizens more employable through the creation of the European Higher Education Area.
- (9) The Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning 2007-2013<sup>5</sup> is based on the premise that an advanced knowledge society is the key to higher growth and employment rates, and that education and training are essential priorities for the European Union in order to achieve the Lisbon goals.

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<sup>4</sup> COM(2006) 208 final.

<sup>5</sup> Decision N° 1720/2006/EC of OJ L 327/45 of 24 November 2006.

- (10) The Erasmus programme within the Lifelong Learning programme pursues the dual objectives of supporting the achievement of a European Area of Higher Education and of reinforcing the contribution of higher education and advanced vocational education to the process of innovation, and supports to this end in particular large-scale mobility of university staff and students as well as multilateral projects and networks focussing on innovation, experimentation, the development of new concepts and competences and the modernisation of higher education institutions in Europe.
- (11) The Decision of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013), with the Specific Programme “Ideas” and the European Research Council based upon it, provides important new instruments which will influence the research activities within European universities.
- (12) The Commission made a proposal in November 2006<sup>6</sup> to establish the European Institute of Technology to promote integrated innovation, research and higher education activities, and the Competitiveness Council agreed in its meeting of 25 June 2007 on a general approach with regard to the proposal.
- (13) The Commission's proposal to renew the Erasmus Mundus programme for the period 2009–2013 aims to enhance quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding, contributing to the attractiveness of European higher education systems and academic excellence through innovative and extensive cooperation with third countries.
- (14) The Contribution of the Commission to the October Meeting of Heads of State and Government held on 18-19 October in Lisbon "The European Interest: Succeeding in the age of globalisation", in particular the section on "More R &D and innovation" emphasised the importance of higher education modernisation in the external dimension of the Lisbon Strategy.

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<sup>6</sup> COM(2006) 604 final/2.