

Jan Figel, European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth - Welcome Address

Introduction

- I am very pleased to participate for the second time in a Bologna summit and to be able to welcome the good progress made at and between Ministerial Conferences.
- Most of the items requested in Bergen have been achieved, thanks to the hard work of universities and the support given by their governments.
- The results accomplished demonstrate the effectiveness of the Bologna working method: Common targets are agreed and implemented in close cooperation with the higher education sector. Difficulties and how to overcome them are openly discussed and reported on. It is very much the way in which we approach education and training policy in the EU: through voluntary work around a set of common objectives.
- Commonly agreed objectives reflect a shared sense of urgency: Europe must get its act together and modernise its education and training systems for the sake of our societies and our economies. Too much of the knowledge generated and taught in universities is not effectively put to social and economic use and too much talent is being wasted.
- The Bologna reforms provide part of the answer to our problems and I welcome the progress demonstrated in the Stocktaking exercises. I am proud of the contribution made by the Commission's Eurydice network and I recommend that you take a close look at

the country analyses and the comparative overviews in the Eurydice reports.

- A word of caution as well. Things are not always as rosy as they seem. The Trends Report of EUA and the Student Survey will confirm that progress has been made, but will also point to weaknesses in the implementation of Bologna reforms. Hard work is still ahead of us if we want these reforms to be real and complete in everyday university life.
- Meanwhile, a number of important decisions are expected from you at this Ministerial meeting, notably as regards **quality assurance** and the **external dimension of European higher education**. Let me say a few words on both topics, starting with quality assurance.

The Register of European Quality Assurance Agencies

- The Register is the logical consequence of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality assurance adopted by Ministers in Bergen. The Register will help to raise the visibility of European higher education and boost confidence in institutions and programmes within Europe and worldwide. It is important to underline that the Register is a voluntary information tool. It creates no obligations and may be used by countries and universities as they see fit.
- The Register is a political co-production of Bologna and the EU, as it also fulfils the requirements laid down by the EU Council and Parliament in the Recommendation on Quality Assurance in Higher Education of February 2006. I believe the Register strikes the right

balance between European and national interests and I hope it will get your green light today or tomorrow.

An external dimension strategy for European higher education

- The draft Communiqué acknowledges the importance of the link between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area (EHEA and ERA), which is embedded in the current round of the Bologna Process, inter alia, through the attention given to the doctoral level
- What is true for research is also true for education: European higher education cannot operate in a vacuum we need to put the European higher education area in a global context.
- I therefore greatly welcome the proposal to adopt a strategy for the external dimension of the Bologna Process. Better connected higher education systems will help to promote mutual understanding among peoples. I also believe that international dialogue, comparison and competition are strong drivers for quality enhancement in the field of higher education.
- Several countries in other parts of the world have made special efforts to bring their higher education systems more closely into line with the Bologna framework. I think we should acknowledge these efforts and examine whether it is possible to establish some kind of partnership agreement in areas like degree recognition, mobility and mutual learning.
- The Commission will make every effort to support the external dimension strategy. As you know we support capacity building in neighbouring countries through the Tempus programme, we support

cooperation with other continents through a series of bilateral programmes (EU-USA/Canada, Asia-Link, EDULINK, ALFA and ALBAN for Latin America) and the new Nyerere Programme for Africa.

- I would particularly like to mention the EU's flagship programme for worldwide academic cooperation, Erasmus Mundus. By the end of the programme's first phase in 2008, 100 courses and 8,000 scholarship-holders will have received EU support.
- Research shows that European higher education is well perceived in some parts of the world but largely unknown in others. To address this deficit, the Commission has launched the Global Promotion Project, which aims to strengthen worldwide the image of European higher education, by creating a user-friendly website for international students, experimenting with innovative services such as European education advisers in certain parts of the world, developing higher education marketing competence at institutional and national level and organising European fairs and campaigns.
- Successive Bologna Ministerial Communiqués have asked for a simplification of visa regimes in order to facilitate international recruitment of students and staff. I am happy to inform you that the two Council Directives of 2004 and 2005 on the admission of students and researchers from non-EU countries are beginning to facilitate visa procedures by providing for more standardised provisions and predictable decisions. Once all countries will have adjusted their national laws and regulations accordingly, these Directives will greatly help in making the European Higher Education Area even more attractive to non-Europeans.

- Bologna curricular reforms are important, but more is needed to modernise higher education in Europe. Governments should give institutions more autonomy. Universities should modernise the content of their curricula, create virtual campuses, reform their governance and professionalize their management of human resources, investment and administrative procedures, diversify their funding and open up to new types of learners, business and society at large.
- The development of lifelong learning policies is a key issue in Europe's modernisation agenda. I am therefore very happy about the progress made since Bergen in the development of the European Qualifications Framework. The EQF builds upon the work accomplished in the Bologna context, and develops it further in a lifelong learning perspective. As the EQF is a broader framework encompassing qualifications acquired in different education and training systems, including at the highest levels, it cannot be identical to the Bologna framework for higher education. But with the help of experts from the Bologna follow-up group, we have made sure that the two are fully compatible. The Commission will continue to support the compatibility of approaches between higher education and other areas of education and training during the implementation of the EQF. The EQF is mirrored by the development of qualification frameworks in many countries, which cover all levels of education and training and are seen as important tools to support lifelong learning.
- The modernisation agenda - for education, research and innovation - has the support of our political leaders. It also reflects what I heard about modernisation and diversity at the EUA Convention in Lisbon one month ago. I am happy to inform you

that there is also a broad consensus on the need for modernisation among higher education staff:

- A Eurobarometer survey held in January and February of this year shows broad support for higher education reform in terms of Bologna and beyond. Most university teachers feel that their institutions need more autonomy and better internal management. They believe that partnerships with business and competition among institutions will reinforce universities and that private funding and student fees are an acceptable source of extra income. A large majority acknowledged the need for European quality standards and for European quality labels and most believe that student mobility should become an obligatory part of study programmes. Relations with industry are no longer a taboo but a source of income and inspiration.

Concluding remarks

- In all our efforts to modernise we must not forget the social and cultural dimension of higher education. It is a space where values play a central role, where knowledge is created and transmitted; it is a place where many of our young people mature. Students have rightly underlined the social dimension of higher education on the Bologna agenda. You will find an interesting Eurydice study on the social dimension among the papers in this hall. The struggle for quality and excellence needs to go hand in hand with guarantees for equity and access.
- I wish us all a very successful conference.