

Odile Quintin
Director General higher education and culture
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MODERNISING UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE

Sehr geehrte Frau Präsidentin,

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

ich freue mich sehr, Sie heute hier in Brüssel begrüßen zu dürfen. In den vergangenen Jahren hat die Europäische Kommission, zusammen mit den Mitgliedsstaaten, sich für eine grundlegende Erneuerung der europäischen Hochschulen eingesetzt. Ich will unser heutiges Treffen nutzen, Ihnen darzulegen, wie wir die Hochschulen in ein neues Zeitalter führen wollen. Das Jahr 2010 (zweitausendzehn), von dem wir uns konkrete Ergebnisse der Lissabon Strategie und des Bologna Prozesses erwarten, rückt rasch näher und wir alle wissen, dass es in den verbleibenden zwei Jahren noch sehr viel zu tun gibt. Die Hauptverantwortung für die meisten Maßnahmen liegt bei den Regierungen, aber im Bereich der Hochschulbildung und –forschung wird Europa seine Ziele ohne die aktive Teilnahme der Hochschulen nicht erreichen.

Deshalb freue ich mich über Ihren Besuch in Brüssel und über die Gelegenheit, Ihnen die Agenda der Europäischen Kommission für die Modernisierung der Hochschulen vorstellen zu dürfen. Ich bitte um Verständnis dafür, dass ich dies auf Englisch tun werde.

What I propose is to examine with you the areas I consider crucial for the success of Europe's higher education systems.

Vision on modernising universities - entering a new era

In my view universities should prepare for the new era in higher education by diversifying, both in offer and demand.

For years, most higher education institutions have uniformly striven to follow one model only, as research-intensive universities. Now, however, the view is spreading that this is in nobody's interest. Europe, the institutions and the students are better off when individual universities develop their own specific mission and profile, matching their particular environment.

Your organisation acknowledged this diversity many years ago, by opening up to all types of higher education institutions. You are the stronger for it. As you have found, grouping all institutions under one common roof allows you to formulate the needs and expectations of German higher education institutions with one voice.

It is not only the institutions that will diversify. Students' choices will grow exponentially. At present many students in Europe are still hostages of long study programmes, but with the introduction of the two-cycle structure, they are beginning to have a choice: Should I stay or should I go? Increasingly, university bachelors will opt to leave their institution, and work or study elsewhere at home or abroad.

Hand in hand with this wider choice, European higher education will become more accessible and more attractive, thanks to the Bologna reforms. Thousands of masters taught in the English language will be on offer in the coming years, backed up with quality assurance and ECTS credits. This is sure to affect demand and lead to a more diverse student population.

Adult learners will seek access to higher education; and they will demand more in terms of course quality and student services. Universities will be called on to

open their doors to non-traditional learners and to become regional "Open Learning Centres".

At the same time, universities will be under pressure to cater for the high flyers, for the excellence we need in our economy and society, and to appeal to the best students and scholars in Europe and from other continents. Not all institutions will be able to offer the whole spectrum of courses and qualifications. Concentration and specialisation will be inevitable.

These changes trigger a rethinking on how higher education systems are funded, steered and managed, and how they can best achieve global attractiveness. Today, I want to address these issues, mention briefly some new Commission initiatives that will help bring about the new era for higher education, and, of course, give you the latest on the EIT.

The right funding mix

To begin with, funding. Increasingly, public funding is following new principles, embracing the growing diversity of higher education institutions and focusing on outcomes rather than on inputs.

The situation would improve measurably, if Member States followed the Commission's recommendation of 2006, of devoting at least 2% of GDP to higher education.

Let me mention one German project that we are following closely: the Excellence Initiative. I congratulate the German federal and Lander governments on this initiative. It does not solve all the financial problems of German higher education, but it does provide top research institutions with substantial additional funds. It has stimulated a far-reaching discussion on the different institutional profiles and missions. Not least, it has set in motion a

drive for innovation and change that is viewed with some envy in other countries.

However, it is clear that the lion's share of any additional investments in higher education and research will come *not* from the public purse but from private sources: enterprises, foundations and private households.

Tuition fees figure here. There is increasing evidence that free access to higher education does not necessarily guarantee social equity. The idea of contributing to funding higher education is becoming more acceptable. Money invested in a university degree gives higher returns than money in the bank.

I am well aware that some countries successfully combine free tuition and social equity, but I invite all stakeholders to take a fresh and unbiased look at the different options. We are following with interest the developments in Germany on tuition fees.

Effective public steering

As well as diversifying funding, we need to give more freedom to our universities. This doesn't mean that Governments are abdicating responsibility - on the contrary. Public authorities will stay responsible for the rules of the game, for example for qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition.

But governments are entering a new type of partnership with their universities. One where institutions manage their human and financial resources as they see fit, and take their own strategic decisions on launching new study programmes and on their research portfolios.

This new freedom should allow universities to be more innovative and responsive to their own needs and the needs of society.

I know that a lot has been happening in the different German states, and that higher education institutions today have more financial autonomy than in the past. But we also know that many of you still suffer from too much "Kameralistik".

Curricular reforms and global attractiveness

What about the global position of Europe's higher education systems?

The Lisbon Strategy has the objective to make European education and training systems a world quality reference; the Bologna Process, which the Commission fully supports, also aims to make European higher education more attractive around the globe.

Germany is taking a very thorough approach to implementing the reforms, an example of "deutsche Gründlichkeit"; the stocktaking reports show that you are making steady progress. I know that the German Rectors' Conference is very active, advising its members on how to implement reforms, for example, in the difficult area of study programmes leading to state examinations, and I congratulate you on your commitment.

The European Commission is helping European universities to "go global", through our education and research programmes. In education, Erasmus Mundus has attracted great attention. This success story will continue with the second round of Erasmus Mundus, which, from 2009, will include doctoral studies.

Our Global Promotion Project within Erasmus Mundus will ratchet European quality and distinctiveness higher up the attention scale of the best partners, students and scholars world-wide.

As you know, the Commission's interest in education and training is two-fold: to help Member States and their institutions to improve the quality of their

education and training systems, and to make it easier for students to choose where and what to study, by offering accessible, transparent and comparable information. That is why we are supporting two initiatives where Germany plays a key role.

First, extending the ranking developed by CHE - the German Centre for Higher Education Development - to the Netherlands and Flanders. This initiative takes account of diversity in terms of languages, subject areas, profiles, student services, research and teaching quality. We think that the CHE ranking could be far more suited to European needs and expectations than the better-known rankings such as THES and Shanghai.

We expect the outcomes of this pilot project later this year. The results to date seem to suggest that an extension to other regions and countries is feasible, but not without difficulties. Apart from the investment needed in time, effort and money to gather the input from professors and students for each ranking, a European extension of this initiative would require more clarity on the different types of higher education institutions in Europe: there is little use in comparing the mechanical engineering department of a regional college with that of a top-level research university.

This brings me to the second initiative where Germany, and the HRK in particular, is actively involved: a classification system for European higher education institutions based on the variety of missions of institutions in education and research. Results here are also expected this year. Hopefully, it will provide an ideal complement to the ranking initiative. I believe we can look forward to having accessible, reliable and user-friendly information on the diverse profiles, missions and study programmes of higher education institutions.

University-enterprise cooperation

What else should we be doing to realise the potential of European universities?

Without a doubt, our universities should increasingly become significant players in the economy. They should be able to respond better and faster to the market and to develop partnerships which harness scientific and technological knowledge. This means recognising that universities' relationship with the business community is of strategic importance and forms part of their commitment to the public interest.

Structured partnerships with business bring many opportunities:

- Opportunities for universities to improve the sharing of research results, intellectual property rights, patents and licences, enhancing the impact of university-based research on SMEs and regional innovation.
- Opportunities for additional funding, for example to expand research capacity or to provide retraining courses.
- And for making education and training programmes more relevant through placements of students and researchers in business, and improving the lifelong career prospects of researchers, by adding entrepreneurial skills to scientific expertise.

Entrepreneurial, management and innovation skills should be built into graduate education, research training and lifelong learning strategies for university staff.

Initiative for university - enterprise cooperation

How do we go about building new partnerships between academia and business?

We need incremental action at institutional, national and European level.

Commissioner Figel' will launch a University-Enterprise Forum next month, focussing on themes such as curricula reform, continuing education and stakeholder involvement in university governance. We envisage a light and open-ended structure for dialogue between the main stakeholders at EU level. The Forum will collect ideas, sustain the momentum for reform, and disseminate messages among the key players. Dialogue at EU level will stimulate real partnerships on the ground.

European Institute of Innovation and Technology

And talking of better links between business and higher education, let me update you on our flagship European Institute of Innovation and Technology.

We have made real progress. Last November, Ministers reached a political agreement on establishing and financing the EIT. Formal adoption of the EIT Regulation should come soon, by the end of February.

The EIT is a new initiative to reinforce the innovation capacity of the Union and the Member States, by bringing together the best actors operating in the knowledge triangle. It will be a flagship for excellence in innovation; and it will be a model for other partnerships in the way it combines the worlds of academia, research and business.

The EIT's mission will be carried out by excellence-driven autonomous partnerships called "Knowledge and Innovation Communities" (KICs). The KICs will pool together the best European innovation actors and resources, giving the EIT its momentum.

A Governing Board will steer the EIT - 18 independent professionals of the highest calibre, balanced between business, research and education, to be joined by 4 staff and student representatives. The Board will provide strategic guidance

and decide on the areas in which to invest and to establish the KICs. It will also monitor and evaluate their work.

With its innovative governance, its high-level opportunities for interdisciplinary study and research and its involvement of public and private stakeholders, the EIT is a striking emblem of the openness of the European Higher Education and Research Areas. It is my conviction that it will inspire governments and universities alike.

The Commission is moving fast towards appointing the first members of the Governing Board. We have just launched the procedures for nominating the four-member Identification Committee that will prepare a list of potential members of the Governing Board. The nominees will be of unquestionable independence, again balancing higher education, research, and business experience. They will guarantee the independence, legitimacy and credibility of the identification and selection process.

We also published a call for pilot projects to provide new models and experience of excellence-driven integrated partnerships at European level, in line with the aims of the EIT. We selected four proposals out of the 53 submitted. These four will be coordinated by: Universität Karlsruhe; Inno Germany AG, a private service company; le Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique, a public research centre from France; and finally, Uppsala University from Sweden.

Conclusion

Europe has come a long way recently in reforming its higher education systems, but we must not delude ourselves: in most countries the challenges are still enormous - you know best what the specific challenges are for Germany. We must continue to make great efforts in order to reach truly open landscapes of higher education and research.

Die Europäische Kommission wird die Mitgliedsstaaten und ihre Hochschulen auch weiterhin durch politischen Dialog und durch ihre Programme wie das Programm für Lebenslanges Lernen und das Rahmenprogramm für Forschung und Entwicklung unterstützen.

Ich hoffe, dieser Besuch in Brüssel wird Ihnen Anregungen und Informationen für Ihre tägliche Arbeit in Ihrer Hochschule geben und danke für Ihre Aufmerksamkeit.