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REPORT

on universities and higher education in the European learning area
(2001/2174(INI))

Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport

Rapporteur: Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortines

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PROCEDURAL PAGE

At the sitting of 15 November 2001 the President of Parliament announced that the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport had been authorised to draw up an own-initiative report, pursuant to Rule 163 of the Rules of Procedure, on universities and higher education in the European learning area.

The Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport had appointed Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortines rapporteur at its meeting of 18 September 2001.

The committee considered the draft report at its meetings of 20 November 2001, 18 April 2002 and 23 May 2002.

At the last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Vasco Graça Mour, acting chairman; Cristina Gutiérrez Cortines, rapporteur; Alexandros Alavanos, Pedro Aparicio Sánchez, Juan José Bayona de Perogordo (for Francis Decourrière), Christopher J.P. Beazley, Janelly Fourtou (for Marielle de Sarnez), Marie-Hélène Gillig (for José María Mendiluce Pereiro), Lissy Gröner, Ruth Hieronymi, Ulpu Iivari, Renzo Imbeni, Lucio Manisco, Maria Martens, Antonio Mussa, Gérard Onesta, Barbara O'Toole, Doris Pack, Christa Prets, Gianni Vattimo, Sabine Zissener and Myrsini Zorba (for Giorgio Ruffolo).

The report was tabled on 24 May 2002.

The deadline for tabling amendments will be indicated in the draft agenda for the relevant part-session.

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

European Parliament resolution on universities and higher education in the European learning area (2001/2174(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 149 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to the Council of Europe European Convention of 11 December 1953 (ETS No 015) on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities,
- having regard to the Council of Europe European Convention of 14 December 1959 (ETS No 032) on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications,
- having regard to the Council of Europe European Convention of 6 November 1990 (ETS No 138) on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study,
- having regard to the Council of Europe Convention of 11 April 1997 (ETS No 165) on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region,
- having regard to the Council of Europe Recommendation of 17 March 1998 (No R (98) 3) on access to higher education in Europe,
- having regard to the Council of Europe Recommendation of 30 March 2000 (No R (2000) 8) on the research mission of universities,
- having regard to the Council of Europe Recommendation of 10 July 2001 (2001/613/CE) on mobility in the community of students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers, and trainers,
- having regard to the ‘Magna Charta’ of European universities, signed in Bologna on 18 September 1988,
- having regard to the Sorbonne Declaration of 25 May 1998 and the Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999,
- having regard to the conclusions of the convention of European higher education institutions, held in Salamanca on 29 and 30 March 2001, and the conclusions of the Ministers responsible for higher education meeting in Prague on 19 May 2001,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 May 2001 on the Commission report ‘Implementation of the White Paper “Teaching and learning – Towards the learning society”’¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 23 October 2001 on the Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning²,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 February 2002 on the Commission communication on

¹ Not yet published in OJ.

² Not yet published in OJ.

the draft detailed work programme for the follow-up of the report on the concrete objectives of education and training systems¹,

- having regard to its resolution of 19 February 2002 on the Communication from the Commission on strengthening cooperation with third countries in the field of higher education²,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000 and the Stockholm European Council of 23 and 24 March 2001,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the Education Councils of 12 February 2001³, 28 May 2001⁴, 13 July 2001⁵, and 14 February 2002⁶,
 - having regard to the findings of the public hearing held at Parliament on 20 February 2002 on the theme of ‘Universities and higher education in the EU and in non-member States’,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the Barcelona European Council of 15 and 16 March 2002,
 - having regard to Rule 163 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport (A5-0183/2002),
- A. whereas the freedom and autonomy of universities must remain corner-stones of European society and its institutional framework,
- B. whereas to enable Europe to progress and grow, the foundations must be laid for an active, dynamic European higher education area to boost renewal and ongoing development,
- C. whereas universities should cultivate critical thought and research, lay emphasis on observation, logical reasoning, curiosity, interest in our natural and social environment and the will to experiment,
- D. whereas for social reasons and to promote equal opportunities, Member States must commit themselves to supporting and are duty-bound to support the development of public universities,
- E. whereas the Union and the Member States must provide universities and higher education centres with the necessary means of action,
- F. whereas student, teacher, and researcher mobility enriches knowledge, fosters renewal, and helps to uncover new cultural and social realities,
- G. whereas mobility cannot be complete and effective without genuine recognition of

¹ Not yet published in OJ.

² Not yet published in OJ.

³ Press No: 5927/01.

⁴ Press No: 8536/01.

⁵ OJ C 204, 20.7.2001, pp. 6-7.

⁶ Press No: 6111/02.

qualifications and diplomas and cannot be fully achieved without an adequate financial commitment,

1. Maintains that to bring about a European higher education area, the Union must increase its support to universities and points out that such aid would be perfectly possible to provide without infringing subsidiarity;
2. Maintains that Europe must invest in education on a larger scale because knowledge is the key to Europe's competitiveness and economic and social development;
3. Calls on the Commission to accord a more prominent place to universities in its programmes and policies and calls for universities to play a more active role in implementing the *acquis communautaire*;
4. Calls on university presidents, teachers and researchers to play an active part in creating a European higher education area and fully to play their role in strengthening the intellectual, cultural, social, scientific and technological dimension of European integration;
5. Believes that the Bologna Process should be accelerated and strengthened by boosting convergence and cohesion among universities without detracting in any way, however, from the diversity of teaching within the different branches of knowledge or from the specific character of universities;
6. Maintains that the models and criteria for academic convergence and assessment of projects and curricula in European and national programmes should be flexible and possible to tailor to the diversity of the fields of learning and research;

Quality assessment

7. Believes that a culture of quality and effort should be fostered through transparent external assessment, which should be made accessible to citizens to assist them in their decision-taking and recommends that, when the Commission assesses the quality of the various national university systems, one of the determining factors should be the availability of funds for study grants, hardship allowances, university residences and student health care; calls on the Union to make greater efforts to ensure that the availability of such funds in the different countries is brought into line with standard European criteria;

Mobility and recognition of qualifications

8. Calls on the Member States and universities to take steps to overcome the legal and administrative obstacles posing difficulties to mobility and to adopt rapid, flexible systems for processing and recognising diplomas, studies, and qualifications, including those that do not exist in a given country; recommends also that official status or teaching and research staff complements be made more flexible to encourage the recruitment of professionals and experts;

9. Calls on the Member States and universities to acknowledge the importance of learning modern foreign languages at University level and to make language courses more readily available for students following other courses. Linguistic proficiency in more than one language would open the doors to greater mobility within the European Union, leading to greater European integration;
10. Suggests to universities and colleges of higher education that their internal rules facilitate the admission of teachers and students from other countries, taking account of the experience that they have gained in other universities;

Common networks and services

11. Affirms that common Europe-wide public networks and services need to be set up to facilitate access to scientific, technical, and bibliographic information, which by definition should be managed jointly;

European master's degrees

12. Supports the proposals being put forward by the Commission to establish common studies and qualifications or European master's degrees in collaboration with all the universities of the European Union Member States;
13. Calls on the competent authorities to encourage the inclusion of practical experience (for example, placements) as part of university courses;

University and Sport

14. Stresses that it is important to increase and promote sporting activity at universities and to encourage university teams to take part in regional, national and international championships;

Students

15. Points out to the authorities responsible for grants policy that the number of study and post-graduate training bursaries should be increased, mainly for those students wishing to study abroad; also suggests that post-graduate grants at least should be awarded on the basis of merit as well as household income;

Research and postgraduate education

16. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to increase funding for and intensify the coordination strategies for universities for the purposes of postgraduate education and to encourage studies at doctoral and post-doctoral level, which generate critical mass and will form the bedrock of the future European research area;
17. Calls on the Commission and Member States to consider forging partnerships with public or private undertakings or local authorities so as to improve the funding of doctoral or post-doctoral studies;

18. Recommends that the universities develop sister research institutes and trans-European networks be set up to link those research centres to others providing advanced training and stresses in particular the need for a publicly funded European research network to limit the harmful effects on both EU and developing countries caused by the cost of patents for pharmaceutical, agricultural and other high-technology products;
19. Considers that universities should be more involved in major debates and should become a forum for the discussion of major scientific topics which affect mankind's future, such as the development of biotechnology;
20. Suggests that Member States and universities, acting independently, should seek to recognise the career of research worker alongside that of university teacher;

Lifelong learning

21. Calls on the Commission, the Member States, and social players to incorporate universities and higher education centres in lifelong learning, refresher training, and technology transfer programmes and to promote specific university programmes with the aim in particular of providing professional skills for those prematurely excluded from the labour market because of technological change or other economic factors;

Relations between university and society

22. Considers it important to develop strategies and incentives to increase the involvement of universities and research centres in regional, national and European problems and thus increase their role as a driving force behind the economic and social system;

Private universities

23. Considers that private universities or higher education centres form part of the European education system and contribute to its development; takes the view, however, that these centres must continue to be managed transparently and the quality of their courses and performance must be assessed;

Artistic studies

24. Stresses that it would be useful to devise a flexible advanced level course of studies capable of providing artistic training at university level, with courses based essentially on practical studies, professional activity and merit;

Green paper

25. Calls on the Commission, without encroaching on the autonomy of the universities or the Member States or detracting from the distinctive nature of given institutions and studies, to propose to draw up a green paper on a future European higher education area, which, after study and discussion involving all sectors, should seek to:
 - assess the state of play regarding European universities, their roles, and the types of

education that they provide;

- examine the various regulations and working conditions for teachers, research workers, administrative staff and students;
- establish a committee of experts to study and review the impact of universities on the learning and research systems, using assessment criteria in line with the suggestions put forward in this report;
- identify the common programmes and public services that universities require as centres of instruction and research and which, if they were to be brought into being, would enable them to perform their tasks more easily;
- propose that universities play a more active part in disseminating the *acquis communautaire*, revitalising learning, and applying it to the production system;

European University Seat

26. Call on the Commission and Member States to promote the establishment of a European University Seat, essentially to:

- act as a centre for meetings and exchange of experience, promoting the establishment of joint projects;
- supply and exchange information on common programmes, types of instruction, the introduction of quality assessment systems and their outcome, and postgraduate training;
- enable universities to be represented in European institutions and policy;
- inform students or citizens wishing to study at European universities of possibilities available, courses on offer, recognition of diplomas, etc.;
- promote convergence among and the competitiveness of universities at European and international level;
- encourage assessment along the lines proposed in this report;

suggests that those represented in this centre should include the Commission, the Member States, Parliament, the European University Association (EUA), and European students' and researchers' organisations;

27. Calls on the Commission and Member States to support the establishment of a European University of Culture, devoted to the teaching of artistic, literary and philosophical disciplines and communication sciences so as to contribute to the creation of a European research area for these subjects and meet the need for intercultural dialogue with other regions of the world;

Funding

28. Points out that the Member States and regions with higher education responsibilities must ensure that public universities have the funding required to enable them to perform their teaching and research roles to a sufficiently high standard; believes that, in return, universities, as public institutions, must continue to run their affairs openly and provide information on their areas of activity and the results achieved;

Distance teaching universities and the media

29. Considers that academic activity and university research findings need to occupy a more prominent place in the mass media;
30. Recommends that distance teaching universities be supported, new technologies used to provide training leading to qualifications, and teaching professionals, the most underprivileged groups, people with special needs and women placed in a position to gain access to knowledge and revitalise their skills in accordance with suitable rules and procedures;
31. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

1. Introduction

This own-initiative report, the first document that Parliament has produced on universities as such, is intended to chart and open the way to a policy explicitly supporting universities as training centres for professionals and researchers. All the bodies concerned should accordingly intensify the work done to date and press swiftly ahead towards solidly based, resolute cooperation with a view to consolidating the European higher education area and further exploring the avenues offered by the existing legal framework, which is not invariably exploited to good effect and in many cases is perceived as more of a hindrance than a help.

2. Universities as the foundation of the European edifice

Since ancient times, universities have been the prime movers in defining the core values of our culture and technical and political development, *laying the foundations on which the European edifice has risen up by establishing the supremacy of reason and dialogue, formulating the ethical and political principles*, honing natural and political law, and developing science and technical expertise and the theory and practice of medicine, engineering, the humanities, and the social sciences.

Through the centuries, the universities have been laying down *a philosophical and scientific bedrock; they have fostered experimental sciences and the critical spirit* and, in moments of crisis, served as the repository of democratic ideas. They have, moreover, helped to overcome the dark chapters of history by deepening understanding.

European universities have managed to adapt and respond to social changes and the new needs of our age as regards social well-being by opening their doors to all citizens.

However, the traditional role of universities as scientific powerhouses is currently being questioned in Europe because much top-flight research is being conducted outside the university environment and mass higher education has placed severe strains on teaching, at times reducing quality and competitiveness.

Furthermore, the desire of many universities and governments to meet the social demand for qualifications and the extraordinary increase in the student body has made itself felt in the dearth of measures and resources for research and postgraduate training.

At present, now that the 'knowledge-based society'¹ has become a priority for the Union, what needs to be done is to check whether the policies being implemented are coherent and effective. It is necessary to *ascertain that European bodies have worked out and for that matter drawn up proper combined strategies to boost universities as focal points of technical, learning, and cultural renewal* in a world founded on intellectual and scientific expertise.

Comparative statistics on European universities in the research sphere show that their leadership capacity, contributions to science, and powers to regenerate have declined. That being the case, and bearing in mind that the system concerned is one that is slow to respond to the stimuli applied to it, the most important steps to take are to foster scientific and technical

¹ Lisbon European Council (23 and 24 March 2000).

debate, train young people, and restore the scientific leadership that Europe has always enjoyed.

3. European policy on universities: specific measures, convergence projects, and initiatives to encourage mobility

The Union has been pursuing various measures to promote convergence, by encouraging universities, teachers, and students to forge ties, and enable universities to move closer together by sharing experiences.

The Socrates/Erasmus programme has proved to be one of the most effective means afforded to the Commission and the Member States to promote student and teacher mobility, devise joint courses, organise intensive courses, and help set up specialist subject networks.

It is worth drawing attention to the mobility performance as regards both students (86 000 Erasmus students in the 1997/98 academic year, approximately 1% of all students enrolled in higher education, and 97 041 in 1999/2000 within the EU/EEA) and teachers (7 000 teachers in the 1998/99 academic year and 9 837 in 1999/2000 within the EU/EEA).

In addition, however, the Socrates programme has provided a basis for the specific measures that are so vital if convergence is to be achieved, for example:

- the *European Credit Transfer System* (ECTS). This system for assigning and transferring credits, used by over 5 000 faculties or departments, enables study periods completed by Erasmus students outside their countries of origin (though not their qualifications) to be recognised more easily.

- '*TUNING Educational Structures in Europe*', a pilot project in which some 70 European universities are taking part, aims to establish a methodology to allow further Europe-wide harmonisation of educational structures in five specific disciplines (mathematics, geology, business studies, history, and education science). The welcome given to the project and the speed with which agreements have been concluded show that if the Council and Commission lend their resolute support, swift and smooth progress can be made towards convergence in many branches of knowledge.

- The *ENQA network* (*European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*): this European network, set up in accordance with the Council Recommendation on European cooperation¹ and the aims of the Bologna Process, is intended to disseminate information, experience, good practice, and quality assessment and assurance systems among the parties involved, namely public authorities, higher education institutions, and quality assessment agencies.

In spite of the efforts undertaken, it can nevertheless be said that mutual recognition of qualifications is proceeding on a very modest scale, Erasmus student mobility extends to no more than 1% of the student population, and the European higher education area is still a dream.

It has proved impossible to break through the inertia of the system whereby university models

¹ Council Recommendation 98/561/EC of 24 September 1998.

remain cloistered in a form of autonomy that poses difficulties to exchanges, impedes mobility, and often rewards inbreeding. To that extent, administrative machinery and the teaching and research career structure deter those seeking to map out an open future driven by cooperation in a Europe without frontiers.

4. The Bologna Process: convergence proposals and need for a flexible system

The Community programmes that operate directly or indirectly in the university sphere (Socrates/Erasmus, Leonardo, etc.) largely accord with the guidelines charted in the *'Bologna Process'*, based on the 1999 'Bologna Declaration', the ultimate goal of which is to establish a 'European higher education area'. In this intergovernmental process, in which 32 European countries are taking part and the European University Association (EUA), the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), and the Council of Europe are involved as observers, the Commission is a full member of the follow-up group.

The process has enabled the initiatives which universities and other bodies involved have been pursuing since the 1988 'Magna Charta' to be systematically organised in a unified project based on the guidelines on comparable and comprehensible degree and diploma systems, credit systems, mobility, quality, and so forth.

At the same time, many universities and countries have been endeavouring to bring their higher education legislation into line with the core aims of Bologna. However, the difficulties encountered when attempting to harmonise the structure of degree and diploma systems with a view to introducing the ECTS system, the reluctance to recognise qualifications, and the cool reception given to transparent external assessment systems have meant that progress has been slower than expected.

Certain assessments of the Bologna Process obtained at the public hearing on universities, held at Parliament in February 2002, along with the opinions put forward at the May 2001 Prague Summit, were revealing in that respect.

Some circles have expressed apprehension about over-simplistic moves towards harmonisation that could limit university autonomy. This indeterminate mistrust is quite unrelated to the degree of autonomy accorded by law and stems instead from the desire to maintain a defensive stance in the face of outside behests, which would put those who did not wish to embrace changes in a difficult position.

However, another much more justified fear has emerged, namely of bureaucratic standardisation and the possibility that the structure of qualifications, curriculum planning, or the recognition of merit might be made subject to fixed uniform criteria. These views should be weighed up because the need for convergence must not reduce diversity or hamper the development of distinctive academic or scientific models.

To alleviate some of these difficulties, this report is proposing that the Bologna Process should continue to be strongly supported but the system made more flexible in order to allow for the diversity of European degree and diploma systems. Harmonisation must be able to encompass the different branches of science (medicine, social sciences and law, the various types of engineering and applied arts, etc.), which involve particular subject combinations, are based on their own reasoning, and meet specific needs.

If diversity is considered to be a European asset, we shall have to establish multifaceted contact systems that recognise the value added which distinguishing nuances provide. In this way, the autonomy of universities and the needs specific to the different degrees and diplomas and scientific and teaching careers could be exercised and met more easily within a freer and more open system.

One point that should be made in this connection is that public and private universities need to exist side by side. Both have managed to coexist throughout the history of European education and at present can be regarded as complementary, since private education can open up new fronts and tackle fields not invariably within reach of those bound by public sector rules. Be that as it may, Parliament will always defend the academic freedom of universities.

5. Conclusion

If we wish European universities to be competitive and respond to the incipient needs of the 'knowledge-based Europe', the foundations of a European higher education area have to be laid under an *institutionally oriented policy*.

To date, for reasons connected with legislative responsibilities, universities have not been considered a matter of paramount importance. Specific policies and programmes have been implemented to help teachers do their job and encourage research and researcher mobility. That notwithstanding, Europe must treat universities as public institutions.

As part of the institutionally oriented policy, this report sets particular store by the need to draw up a green paper on the European higher education area, which, adopting a comprehensive approach, should examine and discuss the current position of universities as public institutions serving citizens.

The findings will enable (regional, national, and European) public aid and support to be geared more closely to the needs of universities and to the process to be completed to bring the European higher education area into being.

In addition, this report maintains that universities need to coordinate their activities more effectively in order to obtain and exchange information about common programmes and projects, types of instruction, the introduction of quality assessment systems and their outcome, and postgraduate training. The cooperation required for that purpose could be pursued within a body such as the 'European University House'.