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REPORT

on modernising Europe's higher education systems
(2011/2294(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

Rapporteur: László Tőkés

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on modernising Europe's higher education systems

(2011/2294(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty on European Union,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 20 September 2011 entitled 'Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems' (COM(2011)0567) and the accompanying staff working document on recent developments in European high education systems (SEC(2011)1063),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 29 June 2011 entitled 'A Budget for Europe 2020' (COM(2011)0500),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 6 October 2010 entitled 'Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative Innovation Union' (COM(2010)0546),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 15 September 2010 entitled 'Youth on the Move – An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union' (COM(2010)0477),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 3 March 2010 entitled 'Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' (COM(2010)2020),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 10 May 2006 entitled 'Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation' (COM(2006)0208),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 28 November 2011 on the modernisation of higher education¹,
- having regard to the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on promoting the learning mobility of young people²,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 14 February 2011 on the role of education and training in the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy³,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the social dimension of

¹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/126375.pdf.

² OJ C 199, 7.7.2011, p. 1.

³ OJ C 70, 4.3.2011, p. 1.

education and training¹,

- having regard to the Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the internationalisation of higher education²,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020')³,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the European Council of 17 June 2010, in particular the part entitled 'A new European strategy for jobs and growth'⁴,
 - having regard to its resolution of 26 October 2011 on the agenda for new skills and jobs⁵,
 - having regard to its resolution of 12 May 2011 on 'Youth on the Move: - a framework for improving Europe's education and training systems'⁶,
 - having regard to its resolution of 18 May 2010 on 'An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering'⁷,
 - having regard to its resolution of 25 October 2011 on mobility and inclusion of people with disabilities and the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020⁸,
 - having regard to its resolution of 9 March 2011 on the EU strategy on Roma inclusion⁹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 20 May 2010 on university business forums¹⁰,
 - having regard to its resolution of 23 September 2008 on the Bologna Process and student mobility¹¹,
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education and the opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A7-0057/2012),
- A. whereas the economic crisis – and its consequences in terms of the imposition of austerity measures and budget cutbacks –, demographic changes, rapid technological change and the resulting demand for new skills pose serious challenges to, and call for far-reaching reforms in, Europe's higher education systems, which must not have a detrimental effect on the quality of education;

¹ OJ C 135, 26.5.2010, p. 2.

² OJ C 135, 26.5.2010, p. 12.

³ OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/council_conclusion_17_june_en.pdf.

⁵ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0466.

⁶ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0230.

⁷ OJ C 161 E, 31.5.2011, p. 21.

⁸ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0453.

⁹ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0092.

¹⁰ OJ C 161 E, 31.5.2011, p. 95.

¹¹ OJ C 8 E, 14.1.2010, p. 18.

- B. whereas, in a knowledge-based society, the future hinges on education, research and innovation;
- C. whereas individuals must be supported in re-thinking their careers and need to widen as well as update their skills and knowledge at an ever faster rate in order to meet the challenges of the labour market, bearing in mind that there is a difference between vocational study programmes, where European harmonisation is feasible and desirable, and humanities courses, where there should continue to be substantial freedom and autonomy in study and research programmes with regard both to the historical and cultural differences among the Member States of the European Union and to the diversity of higher education institutions in terms of teaching and of their specific missions;
- D. whereas the Europe 2020 Strategy states that, by 2020, 40 % of 30-34-year-olds in Europe should complete higher education or equivalent studies, given the estimate that 35 % of all jobs in the EU will require such qualifications; notes, however, that in 2010 only 26 % of the workforce in the EU had attained this qualification level;
- E. whereas more than 21 % of young people in the EU are unemployed;
- F. whereas in the EU in 2010, 16.5 % of young people were not in education or the labour market;
- G. whereas in the EU in 2010, unemployment of tertiary education graduates stood at 5.4 % compared with more than 15 % among those with only lower secondary education; whereas, on the other hand, it is taking longer and longer for the majority of those graduates to find secure employment;
- H. whereas over 60 % of university graduates are women, but the majority of senior positions in universities (e.g. postdoctoral positions and professorships) are still held by men;
- I. whereas only 13 % of institutions in the higher education sector are headed by women and only 9 % of universities have a female head of staff, and whereas women therefore have considerably less influence with regard to research decision-making;
- J. whereas 75 of the top 200 universities worldwide are to be found in the EU Member States;
- K. whereas only 200 of Europe's 4 000 higher education institutions rank among the top 500 in the world;
- L. whereas universities have been an important resource in Europe for almost a millennium, whereas the importance of their role in the progress of society should not be reduced to their contribution to the economy, and whereas their development should not depend solely on their ability to adapt to the economic needs of the current economic model;
- M. whereas equal access for all young people to higher education and training should be encouraged;
- N. whereas universities encourage individual autonomy and creativity and play a very

important role in the promotion of knowledge, and whereas the Member States should therefore make every effort to ensure that higher education is widely accessible without discrimination, particularly on social, economic, cultural, racial or political grounds;

- O. whereas education, especially higher and tertiary education, is responsible for shaping the attitudes and values that underlie civil society;
- P. whereas the national legislation of the respective Member States considers higher education to be a fundamental tool for determining the future of EU citizens;
- Q. whereas education is the responsibility of the Member States, and whereas it is important to ensure that higher education institutions receive financial support, first and foremost through the provision of adequate public funding;
- R. whereas the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is a significant development that could contribute to European integration while respecting the diversity of education in the various EU Member States and the goals of higher education in relation to society;
- S. whereas the European Union has an important role to play in strengthening this area while drawing on the efforts and cooperation of the Member States in this regard;

The changing role of higher education institutions

- 1. Calls on higher education institutions to integrate lifelong learning into their curricula, with the help of economic assistance and different study programmes, and to adapt to a student base that includes adults, elderly people, non-traditional learners, full-time students who have to work while studying and people with disabilities, and therefore calls on higher education institutions to implement programmes aimed at removing existing obstacles and barriers;
- 2. Invites higher education institutions to take into account the needs of professionals who need, as lifelong learners, to update and broaden their skills at regular intervals, including through the organisation and fine-tuning of update courses which are accessible to all social groups, close cooperation with employers and the development of courses which meet the needs of the labour market and which could facilitate a return to education for unemployed workers;
- 3. Calls on higher education institutions to uphold the spirit of autonomy in teaching and research while providing specific study programmes with the aim of meeting the needs of professionals who wish to update their skills;
- 4. Reiterates that higher education has the potential to promote social inclusion, social advancement and upward social mobility; calls, with respect for the principle of subsidiarity, on Member States, regional and local governments and higher education institutions to strengthen – inter alia through the development of adequate financial support schemes – their efforts to widen equitable access to studies for all, from early childhood to higher education, irrespective of sex, ethnicity, language, religion, disability or social background, and to fight all forms of discrimination, recognising

multiculturalism and multilingualism, including sign languages, as fundamental values of the EU that need to be fostered;

5. Calls on the Member States to pay increased attention to, and to support higher education institutions serving traditional national, ethnic or linguistic minorities, with a special focus on endangered cultures and languages;
6. Invites higher education institutions to encourage student participation in sports;
7. Underlines the complementary role of state, private and religious forms of higher education across Europe;
8. Emphasises the importance of promoting democratic values, while stressing the need to acquire a sound knowledge of European integration and ensuring that Europe's former totalitarian regimes are understood as part of its common history;
9. Also emphasises the need to continue traditional education in an academic spirit and not to permit the education system to be totally subordinated to the labour market, in view of the need to shape ethical and moral values among students at the same time as caring about academic progress;
10. Calls on the Member States and higher education institutions to establish a general framework – covering rules, responsibilities, political and educational objectives and the quality of, and priority given to, training and research – in which to promote best practices and respond to the challenges of the communication society;
11. Emphasises that academic staff and students, as well as their organisations and associations, need to be involved in the modernisation of higher education institutions; stresses that both excellence in research, in the broad sense of the term, and excellence in teaching and scientific achievement need to be rewarded, without thereby penalising those higher education institutions – for example humanities faculties – that do not fit into evaluation and performance criteria linked solely to the skills demanded by the market economy;

Information about higher education institutions

12. Stresses that the quality and relevance of higher education are a core condition for taking full advantage of Europe's intellectual capital;
13. Proposes the introduction of clear and uniform criteria for the creation of pan-European rankings of higher education institutions, thereby allowing prospective students to make an informed choice of university and providing comprehensive information about the respective universities;
14. Encourages the Commission's initiative to launch, in cooperation with all the institutions, students and other stakeholders involved, a multi-dimensional tool for the differentiated classification and ranking of higher education institutions based on characteristics such as a long tradition of providing higher education in Europe, the quality of teaching, student support (i.e. scholarships, counselling, housing), physical and info-communication

accessibility, regional engagement and knowledge transfer; opposes, on the other hand, the establishment of a classification of higher education institutions on the basis of non-homogeneous performance indicators which do not take into account the diversity of educational pathways, programmes and linguistic diversity in European universities;

15. Also emphasises that this tool should not solely involve compiling conventional ranking tables and that specific characteristics of the relevant institutions should be afforded due attention in the results;
16. Suggests that consideration be given to instituting a unified mechanism for the monitoring and evaluation of compliance with academic standards by higher education institutions, both public and private;

Funding higher education systems

17. Stresses that higher education is a public good that fosters culture, diversity, democratic values and personal development and prepares students to become active citizens who will support European cohesion;
18. Insists once again that Member States should reach the target of investing 2 % of GDP in education;
19. Points out that mainly public and also private funding is of primary importance for the modernisation of higher education systems; emphasises that investment in higher education in Europe is crucial to overcoming the current economic crisis; calls on the Member States and higher education institutions to expand scholarship and funding programmes for those institutions and to develop innovative methods of funding mechanisms which can contribute to more efficient functioning of higher education institutions, complement public funding without increasing the pressure on households and make higher education accessible to all; expresses regret at the significant cutbacks to education budgets in several Member States, as well as the constant increase in education fees, which is leading to a significant increase in the number of vulnerable students;
20. Calls for the EU budget for 2014-2020 under the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund to include spending on higher education related to investments in university infrastructure and academic staff;

The transition from higher education to the labour market

21. Calls on higher education institutions to adapt to new challenges by creating new fields of study that reflect the needs of the labour market, taking into account the development of science and technology by maintaining an appropriate balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills;
22. Calls for the promotion of best practices that help higher education institutions to strengthen teaching and research in all subject areas through the inclusion of students and to provide additional key qualifications for the labour market, in order to facilitate young people's transition from higher education to the labour market;

23. Calls for higher education institutions to be opened up both to offer continuing vocational training and to create appropriate courses for workers who have not attained an upper secondary educational qualification, so as to tap into additional potential to achieve the quota of graduates;
24. Urges the Commission to present its proposal for a quality framework for traineeships, and emphasises the success of the 'Erasmus placements' that give students the opportunity to gain work experience abroad, and insists that this action be continued under the new programme and strengthened by means of suitable funding;
25. Calls on higher education institutions and institutions responsible for the education sector at regional, national and European level to monitor trends in labour market requirements in order to reflect more accurately future needs in terms of learning opportunities;
26. Highlights the need to track graduates' employment outcomes to measure how well higher education responds to labour market demands; welcomes, therefore, the Commission's commitment to improving the availability of such data, with the principal aim of providing students with the necessary information to guide their study choices, while at the same time giving higher education and research institutions the necessary information to identify and, subsequently, develop programmes of study covering both general knowledge and specific professional skills through lifelong learning, in ongoing dialogue with those involved in the production of knowledge but also with society as a whole and with the state;
27. Urges Member States to collect and publish statistical data regarding the correlation between different higher education degrees and employment opportunities;
28. Calls for the development of an international databank, similar to AlmaLaurea, which helps graduates to identify suitable job, training, study and research opportunities, removing economic obstacles through bursaries and student loans in order to ensure real equality among students, and thereby encouraging mobility and the matching of skills and jobs; reiterates the importance of proper communication in ensuring that this information is easily accessible to students, recent graduates, the unemployed, jobseekers and employers;
29. Considers youth guarantee schemes to be a valuable tool facilitating the transition from higher education to jobs, and calls on the Member States to incorporate such schemes into their national transition strategies;
30. Recalls the important role that the structural funds can play in this regard; welcomes the commitment made in the 'Youth Opportunities Initiative' communication (COM(2011)0933) to the full deployment of the resources available, and calls on higher education institutions and local authorities to use this opportunity in order to increase the provision of support and guidance for students entering the labour market;

Gender balance in higher education

31. Notes that there are still gender disparities in European education systems even though almost all countries have now implemented policies to combat them, and that such

disparities influence both performance at school and study and career choices, and have a negative effect on economic growth and on the welfare state;

32. Highlights the fact that many female students attending vocational or secondary schools still choose careers which reflect traditional gender roles; notes, therefore, that better vocational guidance is needed in order to combat persistent stereotypes;
33. Points out that, because their higher education qualifications are not marketable enough, women are more often overqualified and underpaid for their jobs and often end up unemployed or in casual jobs, a situation which further disadvantages them on the labour market at the start of their careers, fuelling the cycle of pay inequality;
34. Recalls that, across the Member States, there are still very few initiatives in place to provide information about gender equality and promote gender equality in education; suggests that teachers should receive specific training on equality between men and women;
35. Points out that the sharing of domestic and family responsibilities between women and men is a sine qua non for the advancement and achievement of equality between women and men; calls on universities and higher education institutions to recognise that women learners may have specific additional responsibilities outside of learning, such as caring for young children or elderly relatives; stresses the need for universities to supply parents – especially women – with a sufficient quantity of high-quality, affordable and accessible childcare, including community centres, so as to facilitate their equal participation in studies and research; also encourages the introduction of a greater variety of study modes, such as part-time and distance learning, and, in this connection, reminds the Member States and the EU institutions to increase the level of financial support for lifelong learning in order to enable women to continue their studies, to re-enter the workforce and to balance their professional and personal responsibilities;

Engaged higher education institutions

36. Encourages higher education institutions to engage more intensively with their regions and establish dynamic collaborative actions with regional governments, local councils, public bodies, non-governmental organisations and small and medium-sized enterprises to enhance regional development; points out that this should also strengthen interaction between higher education institutions and employers;
37. Calls on the Member States and their central and regional authorities to include and support higher education institutions in cross-border cooperation;
38. Encourages the Member States to intensify the interaction between the sides of the knowledge triangle (education, research, innovation) as a key element for growth and job creation;
39. Points out that the development of higher education curricula and research programmes should remain a task for universities, taking into account the needs of the labour market as regards employability;

40. Welcomes the Commission's support for 'Knowledge Alliances' and 'Sector Skills Alliances' in which higher education institutions exchange information with businesses while developing curricula to address skills shortages; calls upon businesses and entrepreneurs, including small and medium-sized enterprises, actively to develop partnerships with higher education institutions by providing high-quality internships for students and lecturers and capitalising on lecturers' general transferable skills; reiterates, however, that higher education institutions produce cultural content which translates not only into vocational skills but also into general knowledge, in terms of intellectual experience of reality and of the common values by which people live;
41. Calls for a commitment to more flexible and innovative learning approaches and to delivery methods which are always centred on students' needs;
42. Notes the need for cross-border higher education institutions and enterprises to cooperate in practical programmes and in shaping students' future careers by identifying the specific development pathways, expectations and challenges that will await them in the labour market;
43. Emphasises the usefulness of developing mechanisms and management strategies that facilitate the transfer of innovative ideas and research results into society and business and allow society and businesses to provide input to higher education regarding current and expected needs for skills and innovations, taking into account best practices from all over the world; points out that such a connection is likely to favour financially only those research and higher education institutions that specialise in innovation and technology at the expense of education linked purely to the humanities;
44. Reaffirms the value of democratic governance as a fundamental way to ensure academic freedom and promote active participation by all actors in the life of a higher education institution;
45. Emphasises that transparency, equal distribution of rights and obligations between the relevant cooperation partners and higher education institutions, and a balanced principle of representation must be observed in the context of cooperation, so as to ensure that higher education institutions are enabled to organise and develop themselves independently as public amenities in accordance with academic principles;
46. Also emphasises that the principle of democracy and self-governance among higher education institutions and their staff and students should be respected and maintained in all collaborative projects;
47. Demands, therefore, that higher education institutions and their various bodies be required to disclose cooperative agreements with third parties;
48. Emphasises the importance of cooperation between higher education institutions and NGOs and the European voluntary sector, in order to promote active citizenship and involve students in active participation through working for the NGO sector;
49. Underlines the importance of sport in the education process; calls on Member States to support and encourage sport among students and to increase support for grassroots sport

programmes;

50. Points out that the extent and intensity of collaboration between higher education institutions and their partners in business and society vary strongly across Member States, institutions and academic disciplines;
51. Stresses that continuous investment in the link between education, culture, research and innovation is necessary; stresses the importance of further supporting and developing the European Institute for Innovation and Technology with its knowledge and innovation communities;
52. Emphasises the importance of culture in higher education and calls for the inclusion of special criteria for the humanities in both innovation and research;
53. Emphasises the need to engage higher education institutions and provide support for student initiatives, as well as assisting in the coordination of such activities among other higher education institutions, enterprises and local authorities from various Member States;

Mutual recognition of qualifications

54. Acknowledges the richness inherent in the wide variety of higher education institutions in Europe; calls on the Member States and these institutions to develop clear, integrated pathways that allow learners to progress from other types of education into higher education and to change between different tracks and types of institutions;
55. Emphasises, however, the need to maintain the diversity of educational pathways and programmes, teaching methods and university systems in the EU; takes the view that it is consequently necessary to develop a national qualification framework, while at the same time promoting the mutual recognition of degrees and qualifications across all Member States;
56. Urges all EU countries to implement the national qualification frameworks linked to the EHEA Qualifications Framework and to develop, and provide financial support for, mutual recognition;
57. Points out that student mobility, and above all study at other universities under the Erasmus Programme, contributes to the exchange of good practice and thus to the modernisation of higher education; notes, therefore, the need for the home university to recognise qualifications acquired while studying at other universities;
58. Supports the Commission's proposal to improve recognition of study undertaken abroad, by consolidating the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS); calls for additional efforts on the part of the EU and its Member States to ensure more effective recognition and greater harmonisation of academic qualifications as well;

Enhancing mobility in the EHEA and beyond

59. Reiterates that higher education is a common European public good and that Member

States, regional governments, local authorities and the EU share a common responsibility in developing and strengthening the EHEA, the European Research Area (ERA) and the Bologna Process;

60. Stresses that greater coordination among Member States in the field of higher education – including through strong financial and political support for agreements on common core curricula and well-defined learning outcomes – is a prerequisite for achieving the goals of employability and growth in Europe; calls on the Member States to step up cooperation between their relevant ministries in order to update existing curricula to meet the needs of the labour market;
61. Points out the need for collaboration between the EHEA and the ERA as a means to support university research programmes in both science and the humanities;
62. Demands that the attractiveness of the EHEA and the ERA for students and researchers from all over the world be promoted and that collaboration with non-EU countries in educational matters and issues relating to mobility at staff and student level be strengthened, in particular with the countries which are covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) or which directly border the EU, in order to turn the EHEA into a magnet for training and knowledge that is both macroregional and global, particularly in relation to exchange and professional training programmes;
63. Asks the Commission to propose the creation of Euro-Mediterranean Erasmus and Leonardi da Vinci programmes, aimed at promoting transnational mobility among students from both sides of the Mediterranean;
64. Calls for the opening of mobility, exchange, research and work experience programmes to students from countries affiliated to the Eastern Partnership;
65. Recalls the importance of mobility among both students and teachers and, in this connection, invites the Commission to make progress on the EU Visa Code;
66. Recalls the target whereby 20 % of Europe's graduates should be mobile by 2020, and emphasises the importance of language skills as a prerequisite for increased mobility within the EHEA and employability;
67. Supports the reinforcement of language and sign language teaching – and of the teaching and development of local and regional languages – within the EHEA as a prerequisite for the development of true European citizenship based on multiculturalism and linguistic pluralism;
68. Emphasises the need for the higher education system in each Member State to provide higher-quality teaching so that increased mobility opportunities for students do not go hand in hand with a worsening of the ‘brain drain’, which is now a genuine social problem in some Member States;
69. Points out that the persistent disparities between western and central-eastern European higher education systems must be addressed through real integration measures, with a view to encouraging and supporting cross-border collaboration between higher education

institutions; calls on the Commission, therefore, to develop a strategy and draw up a professional financial action plan for reducing these significant regional disparities;

70. Calls on the Member States, the EU and European higher education systems to evaluate the possibility of promoting, within the study cycle, a compulsory training period at a university in a Member State other than the one to which the student is affiliated;
71. Reiterates the principle that loan schemes cannot substitute the grant systems put in place to support access to education for all students regardless of their social background;
72. Asks the Commission for further clarification of the proposal to create a financial instrument to help students secure funding for a Masters degree outside their home Member State, regardless of their social background and financial situation; demands fair and transparent access to the scheme throughout the Member States;
73. Endorses the Commission's proposal to increase the EU budget available for education, training, research and youth in the next multiannual financial framework, thereby complementing the action taken by the Member States , given that investment in education, training and research is key to attaining the Europe 2020 targets and achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe;

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74. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Europe has around 19 million students and more than 4000 higher education institutions, but while highly skilled workers will be needed in 35 % of all jobs by 2020, currently only 26 % of the workforce has high-level qualifications. Responsibility for higher education rests mainly with Member States and higher education institutions themselves. EU actions (such as the Erasmus student grant to study abroad) complement and coordinate Member States' efforts. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area make up the framework for an EU higher education policy.

The Commission communication

The Commission Communication “Supporting growth and jobs - an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems” identifies challenges Member States and higher education institutions need to meet, e.g. raising the number of graduates, widening access to higher education, adjusting curricula to meet labour market needs and strengthening knowledge transfer from universities to business. The Commission also proposes an Erasmus Masters Degree Mobility Scheme. The Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) will provide a European-level student loan guarantee facility, underwriting loans from banks to study for a Masters' degree abroad: at a cost of around €100 million per year, this will enable an additional 55 000 students to complete a Masters Degree abroad.

Widening access to higher education

Given the challenges that European societies face, it is crucial that higher education institutions remain well-funded even while societies have to deal with the current economic crisis. In order to meet future skills demands, more people have to complete higher education, and workers have continuously to update their skills and knowledge while at work. The process of widening access to higher education for people from all social backgrounds has already begun. Consequently, higher education institutions have to deal with rising numbers of students and a changing student base that now also includes lifelong learners. Moreover, higher education institutions need to take into account the needs of students from a variety of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

Higher education institutions therefore have to adapt their curricula and teaching methods to rising student numbers and students with different needs. This process puts considerable strain on students and on the staff of higher education institutions. Both groups must be actively involved in modernising higher education in Europe, and staff should be rewarded for excellence in teaching as well as in research. The quality of teaching in higher education is a central aspect that prospective students consider when they decide where to pursue their education. Therefore, its inclusion - among other factors, such as research performance, regional involvement of higher education institutions and knowledge transfer - in rankings, as proposed by the Commission in the new ranking tool “U-Multirank” will be very useful to prospective students.

Higher education and the labour market

Higher education institutions should provide people with the skills and knowledge needed for tomorrow's labour markets. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the skills taught are truly relevant to the realities of the labour market and enable graduates to gain employment in a field for which their degree has prepared them. Monitoring graduates' employment outcomes, and improving the quality and availability of internationally comparative data on graduates, as proposed by the Commission will help higher education institutions better to fulfil their function and adapt curricula to labour market needs. Moreover, businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises, should tell higher education institutions clearly what kind of skills they look for in employees. The Commission's initiative to support Knowledge Alliance and Sector Skills Alliances will facilitate this dialogue between business and higher education institutions to improve curricula. For students, quality traineeships can be a way to gain entrance to the labour market and see how they can apply their skills and knowledge in practice. The Commission's intention to propose a quality framework for traineeships is important to ensure that trainees gain relevant experience and enjoy good conditions during their time in a business.

Engaged institutions

Higher education institutions need to become “engaged” with external partners, such as regional and local councils, communities and businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises, in order to promote social, cultural and economic development in their regions. Such close-knit structures and established cooperation can facilitate an effective transfer of knowledge and innovation from higher education institutions to businesses. Currently, however, such cooperation does not take place in all Member States, and while some higher education institutions and disciplines excel at regional engagement and knowledge transfer, others do not become engaged in that way at all. Therefore, an exchange of best practices in this area should be encouraged.

Mobility in the European Higher Education Area

Mobility in the EHEA is successfully supported by the Erasmus programme: the budget increase foreseen for this successful programme, and the proposed introduction of the Erasmus Masters Degree Mobility Scheme, are both very welcome. Still, mobility in the EHEA sometimes also has unintended consequences: on the one hand, an influx of students from other Member States, particularly in some disciplines e.g. medicine; on the other, a “brain drain” as able students leave home to study abroad, sometimes not returning after they have completed their studies.

As disparities between Western and Central-Eastern European higher education institutions continue, it is also very important to bring about a real integration of these institutions, to facilitate their development help them modernise. Therefore, a professional and financial action plan from the Commission aiding and promoting such development would be welcome.

We also need to acknowledge the fact that both Member States' and the EU are responsible for developing and strengthening the EHEA. A joint effort is needed to build a system of higher education institutions that is inclusive, offering equal opportunities and up-to-date and innovative knowledge and skills, obstacles-free mobility and a balanced and efficient collaboration among all stakeholders.

In the present, difficult, circumstances, our main goal in trying to modernise our higher education systems must be to stop them falling behind higher education elsewhere in the world. It is a sobering fact that only 200 of our 4 000 higher education institutions rank among the top 500 of the world - and, of these, few from Central-Eastern Europe: European higher education must do better. More generally, improvements throughout higher education are necessary if we are to maintain, and perhaps even raise, Europe's global competitiveness.

28.2.2012

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

for the Committee on Culture and Education

on modernising Europe's higher education systems
(2011/2294(INI))

Rapporteur: Andrea Češková

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality calls on the Committee on Culture and Education, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas over 60 % of university graduates are women, but the majority of senior positions in universities (e.g. postdoctoral positions and professorships) are still held by men; whereas only 13 % of institutions in the higher education sector are headed by women and only 9 % of universities have a female head of staff, and whereas women therefore have considerably less influence with regard to research decision-making,
- B. whereas 35 % of all jobs in the EU will require high-level qualifications by 2020, while only 26 % of the workforce currently has a higher education qualification,
- C. whereas only 30.15 % of all students in mathematics, science and technology (MST) subjects are female, and whereas largely female-dominated fields include education and training, health and welfare, humanities and the arts,
- D. whereas the development of a critical mass of women in the decision-making process remains vastly inadequate,
- E. whereas there is a disturbingly low proportion of women on decision-making boards relating to research, with only 25 % of the members of the European Research Council (ECR) being women; whereas 1 700 projects – representing some EUR 2.5 billion in grants – have been selected to receive funding from the ERC since its establishment in 2007, and whereas almost 90 % of those grants went to male candidates,
- F. whereas the EU 2020 strategy outlines the need for smart growth in the EU and highlights

the importance of R&D and innovation policy, yet the number of women graduating in STEM subjects remains low, with only 20 % of engineering graduates being women,

1. Calls on universities, the EU institutions and the Member States to encourage young women to study subjects in which women are still underrepresented, especially science, technology, IT, engineering and mathematics, which provide the basis for high-level, low-carbon skills; stresses that stereotypes about these professions have to be addressed, for example by informing young women in particular about their possibilities of becoming researchers and about the opportunities available in the research field, including applied research, as that should liberate untapped talent;
2. Calls on secondary schools and universities to offer specific orientation courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, in order to inform women and encourage them to study and embark on careers in fields in which men are overrepresented;
3. Notes that there are still gender disparities in European education systems even though almost all countries have now implemented policies to combat them, and that such disparities influence both performance at school and study and career choices, and have a negative effect on economic growth and on the welfare state;
4. Calls on universities and higher education institutions to support and encourage gender studies at both undergraduate and postgraduate level;
5. Calls on the Member States and higher education institutions to introduce special programmes and funds, mentoring schemes and community projects to increase young women's level of training and their participation in research and development, the IT sector and the green economy, and notes that optimal use should be made of role models and pathfinders as a means to inform and advise women students concerning their career choices;
6. Points out that the sharing of domestic and family responsibilities between women and men is a sine qua non for the advancement and achievement of equality between women and men; calls on universities and higher education institutions to recognise that women learners may have specific additional responsibilities outside of learning, such as caring for young children or elderly relatives; stresses the need for universities to supply parents – especially women – with a sufficient quantity of high-quality, affordable and accessible childcare, including community centres, so as to facilitate their equal participation in studies and research; also encourages the introduction of a greater variety of study modes, such as part-time and distance learning, and, in this connection, reminds the Member States and the EU institutions to increase the level of financial support for lifelong learning in order to enable women to continue their studies, to re-enter the workforce and to balance their professional and personal responsibilities;
7. Takes the view that, in order to achieve effective gender equality in education, it is essential to eliminate the remaining stereotypes by promoting assertive policies which foster equality between men and women;
8. Calls on the Member States to follow the good example of the so-called 'third-age' or 'third-generation' universities and encourage women to enrol;

9. Considers it necessary to address the scarcity of women in senior public research and teaching positions, as women's participation in science and technology can help to increase innovation and the quality and competitiveness of scientific and industrial research and needs to be promoted; points out that women are far more likely than their male counterparts to take career breaks in order to have a family, and therefore calls on universities and research institutes to provide suitable measures to enable them to balance an academic career with family life (childcare, flexible leave, etc.);
10. Also considers it necessary to review the criteria for promotion to senior research-oriented positions (e.g. professorships) in order to include a strong gender perspective and address the lack of women in such posts;
11. Recalls that, across the Member States, there are still very few initiatives in place to provide information about gender equality and promote gender equality in education; suggests that teachers should receive specific training on equality between men and women;
12. Considers it necessary for higher and further education institutions to review their internal processes with a view to recruiting and promoting the best people, including a significant proportion of women;
13. Encourages the Member States and higher education institutions to increase the number of female professors and researchers in science, and to initiate mass-media information campaigns to address the issue of underrepresentation of women in MST subjects;
14. Highlights the fact that many female students attending vocational or secondary schools still choose careers which reflect traditional gender roles; notes, therefore, that better vocational guidance is needed in order to combat persistent stereotypes;
15. Encourages universities, higher education institutions and research institutes to adopt and enforce equality strategies in their organisations and to conduct gender impact assessments as part of their decision-making processes; recalls that these institutions are likewise required to ensure equal treatment of, and equal opportunities for, women and men both at work and in education; stresses that, to this end, measures should be adopted to prevent all kinds of discrimination, so as to enable women to achieve better positions in the private and public sectors; encourages women to participate in university/private sector partnerships and co-operation arrangements, e.g. through start-ups or spin-offs;
16. Emphasises that in order to fight gender inequality – which still exists in the education sector – effectively, it is essential to encourage political cooperation between Member States by promoting the exchange of good practices and guaranteeing specific funding programmes;
17. Calls on universities and higher education institutions to increase the representation of women on decision-making boards relating to research, with a view to encouraging more women to work in higher education;
18. Urges all the Bologna Process countries to implement national qualification frameworks and to develop mutual recognition and provide financial support for it;

19. Recalls the Commission's announcement of 1 March 2011 that it intends to propose European legislation in 2012 which will include binding targets aimed at increasing the representation of each sex to at least 40%, if companies do not voluntarily increase the proportion of women on their decision-making bodies by 5 % per year to achieve female representation of 30 % by 2015 and 40 % by 2020;
20. Recognises that women still face barriers to reaching the highest level in the context of postgraduate education and research; calls, therefore, on the Member States and on universities to design and implement national strategies to ensure women's participation in that area;
21. Calls for further government support to put in place measures aimed at opening up access to students from underrepresented groups and lower socio-economic backgrounds, as well as to immigrants and minorities;
22. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to set up programmes designed to coach and support young women scientists in relation to participation in research programmes and the submission of grant applications, in order to help them to stay in academia and research;
23. Reiterates that the gender pay gap is still a huge concern and notes that it is a fact that women have fewer resources during their working lives and find it more difficult to access finance in retirement, and that in the field of higher education women researchers and professors are paid less than their male counterparts at the same level; notes that women are consequently more affected than men by all forms of poverty, including in-work poverty; calls, therefore, for a system of equal remuneration for equivalent research positions, since the gender pay gap is a cost that neither the individual Member States nor the EU as a whole can afford;
24. Criticises the fact that the Commission's agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems is gender-blind, and that gender mainstreaming is basically non-existent;
25. Calls on the Member States to introduce a requirement for gender-balanced research teams as an eligibility criterion for state-funded research projects;
26. Points out that, because their higher education qualifications are not marketable enough, women are more often overqualified and underpaid for their jobs and often end up unemployed or in casual jobs, a situation which further disadvantages them on the labour market at the start of their careers, fuelling the cycle of pay inequality;
27. Stresses that improving the labour-market participation of young women has a very positive impact on competitiveness and growth, as well as ensuring the economic independence of women during the early and later stages of their lives;
28. Encourages higher education institutions to include a gender dimension in higher education curricula, given that such a dimension is still largely absent.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	27.2.2012
Result of final vote	+: 29 -: 1 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Regina Bastos, Edit Bauer, Andrea Češková, Edite Estrela, Iratxe García Pérez, Sophia in 't Veld, Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, Silvana Koch-Mehrin, Constance Le Grip, Astrid Lulling, Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, Siiri Oviir, Raül Romeva i Rueda, Joanna Senyszyn, Joanna Katarzyna Skrzydlewska, Britta Thomsen, Angelika Werthmann, Marina Yannakoudakis, Anna Záborská, Inês Cristina Zuber
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Kent Johansson, Christa Klaß, Kartika Tamara Liotard, Ana Miranda, Mariya Nedelcheva, Katarína Nevedřalová, Antigoni Papadopoulou, Sirpa Pietikäinen

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	29.2.2012
Result of final vote	+: 25 -: 2 0: 2
Members present for the final vote	Malika Benarab-Attou, Lothar Bisky, Piotr Borys, Jean-Marie Cavada, Silvia Costa, Lorenzo Fontana, Mary Honeyball, Petra Kammerevert, Emma McClarkin, Emilio Menéndez del Valle, Marek Henryk Migalski, Katarína Neveďalová, Gianni Pittella, Marie-Thérèse Sanchez-Schmid, Marietje Schaake, Marco Scurria, Emil Stoyanov, Hannu Takkula, László Tőkés, Helga Trüpel, Gianni Vattimo, Marie-Christine Vergiat, Milan Zver
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Heinz K. Becker, Nadja Hirsch, Seán Kelly, Iosif Matula, Georgios Papanikolaou, Olga Sehnalová, Rui Tavares