

Opening addresses of the Bologna University Rector

“Inter-University Co-operation and the constitution of Virtual university Uniadrion”

1. The Initiative of the Universities of Ancona and Bologna: the reference to the “Ancona Charter” and the reasons of the commitment of the two Universities.

The “Ancona Charter” adopted by the Ancona Conference on “Security and Development in the Adriatic and Ionic Seas” (May 19-20, 2000) underlines the intention of the coastal Countries to strengthen both peace and security in the Adriatic-Ionic region through the development of the economy as well as the proper exploitation of the historical and cultural heritage. This general background was fully reflected in the conclusions of the Round Table on the University co-operation (one out of the four Round Tables organized within the Ancona Conference), jointly chaired by Greece and Italy. Those conclusions call for a high priority engagement along the following lines:

- the co-operation between the Universities and Research and Development Centers/Institutions to be considered as a basic factor in fostering the international relationships based on common historical and cultural roots,
- the development of a real “Information Society” and, at the same time, the protection/promotion of the artistic and cultural heritage in the Countries of the basin, representing the main sectors of co-operation among the Universities,
- the accomplishment of an informatic network connecting the different Universities, to be seen as the first step in the co-operation implementation.

The above mentioned conclusions fully reflect the spirit of the Ancona and Bologna Universities proposal, based on both general and specific reasons. With reference to the general motivations we can underline: a) the necessity of helping the development of a region which is of a major importance for the stabilization and the development in the central-southern Europe where highly dramatic events took place in the last decade b) the belief that the reference to common cultures and opportunities could represent a basic point for passing over the still present ethnic and religious conflicts c) the certainty that the Universities represent the first Institutions to be committed to foster the peaceful and development processes, not only because of their independence and autonomy, but also counting on their capability to establish the necessary relationships to operate with efficiency and timeliness in those Countries where the academic environment – by tradition and especially under the actual circumstances – represents the main competence pot and offers the possibility of establishing operative relations on a real time.

The specific motivations, on the other side, are directly connected to the typical “vocation” of the two Universities.

The traditional attitude of the Bologna University to develop the international relationships, as well as the high scientific expertise recognized in both the informatic technologies and the cultural heritage protection/promotion sectors, are the reasons of the interest the University announced to the General Direction for Cultural Promotion of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since the first starting of the Adriatic-Ionic Initiative. Also because of this reason the Ravenna Conference on the inter-University co-operation represents the first operative event scheduled after the Ancona Conference of May this year.

The Ancona University, on its side, is by tradition focused to establish stricter relations with the Countries of the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea along a number of programmatic lines: the scientific and technological research, the sustainable development, the fostering of the contacts

among the Adriatic-Ionic Cities, from Greece to Slovenia through Albania, FR of Yugoslavia and Croatia. An important tool helping the implementation of the related policies is recognized in: "Adriatico: on-line Journal for Cultural and Scientific Co-operation", jointly published through the servers of the Ancona University and the Italian Institute of Culture in New York.

2. The UNIADRION Network

The very first requirement to be met at the beginning of the inter-University co-operation is the availability of a tool capable of properly merging programmatic aspects and operative necessities. The difficulties normally faced by a major part of the Adriatic Countries, under both the logistic and the infrastructure related aspects, logically call for the necessity of designing an Adriatic-Ionic "Virtual University" (the UNIADRION) counting on a wide use of a fully "dedicated" telematic network. It has to be recognized that unique possibilities are offered by the telematic networks for properly implementing the activities along the line of the remote and virtual professional education: lectures on real time, virtual classrooms, admittance to recorded courses, extensive use of the new technologies for data implementation, storage and processing. A number of Italian Universities, Ancona and Bologna among them, count on an important expertise in that field; as a consequence it appears completely logic their offer to act as a reference point for the development, as a necessity step-by-step, and the management of the UNIADRION network. The two Universities jointly propose Ravenna as the official UNIADRION seat.

2.1. The programmatic guidelines

Defense and promotion of the cultural heritage, environment protection and sustainable development, relations between culture and economy: those are the main programmatic lines to be implemented by UNIADRION. It is important to stress that the virtual University approach itself allows to consider together all those aspects, only partially included in the conclusions of the Ancona Round Table but fully coherent as regards the proposed methodology and the general objective of promoting the proper development of the adriatic-ionic region, even accepting the need of a carefully graded pace.

With reference to those programmatic lines, four thematic sessions will be open this afternoon, aiming to identify agreed proposals and indicating priorities, financial/human necessities and implementation modalities.

Leaving to the four parallel session the duty to draw their conclusions, let me mention as one of the highest priorities the Project for the achievement of the historical-artistic Archives of the Adriatic-Ionic Region. The Project was indicated by the Ancona Round Table as one of the most important because of its capability of merging the promotional opportunities with the revaluation of the cultural heritage through the proper use of the new informatic technologies. For that reason, the Project can be considered as one of the most important example of the UNIADRION activities, focused to fully involve the partners and, at the same time, capable to find an direct way to let the public be aware about the obtained results. In addition this Project presents a major political appeal. A comprehensive work of unification and rearrangement of the historical Archives - which offer a documentary evidence of the common roots and, at the same time, underline the linking function assured by the Countries of the region in the course of many centuries – and the parallel activities on the side of both the professional education and the project proposals, represent a major contribution to the process of cultural and ideological rapprochement in these Countries.

2.2. The instruments for the Network commitment and implementation

The new telematic technologies (representing the peculiar feature of the UNIADRION Network) and their proper use are, at the same time, the expected result and the necessary tool to get the result

itself. In general it can be foreseen the identification of a number of focal points, at least one in each Country of the region, fully equipped with the needed hardware and operative software. In particular the availability of bi-direction channels will be required, the number of which will be decided as a function of the Network loading and of the amount of the available resources. It goes without saying, however, that the virtual relationships among the users cannot be sufficient even if necessary. The Ancona Charter itself underlines the importance of establishing direct contacts among the partners. This calls for the necessity of integrating the telematic tools with more conventional interactive modalities to be identified and developed within the UNIADRION system.. In particular it can be foreseen:

- the identification of the best procedures to foster the mobility of experts and young researchers, having well in mind the similar experiences offered by other programmes (Socrates, Erasmus, etc.),
- the organization of of Seminars, Meetings, specialized Workshops, Masters and post-graduate Courses open to the participants coming from the different Adriatic-Ionic Countries,
- the preparation, at least up to the feasibility level, of selected regional and multi-lateral Projects to be further developed counting on the support of both national and international Institutions.

Again our Universities are ready to contribute to the Project definition and implementation through their well tested technical structures. More generally we count on the expertise and the financial support of all the committed Institutions: the European Union, the national and local governments, Universities and R&D Centers, the professional Associations, the Chambers of Commerce. It is also to be hoped that the bilateral/multilateral scientific co-operations with the Adriatic-ionic Countries (promoted by both the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the University and the S&T Research) could assure an important added value to the proposed Program, thus increasing the probability of success.

2.3. The Network government and management.

Taking into account well established similar experiences, it can be foreseen the presence of the following government and management Organs:

- The General Assembly, with the presence of two representative members of each associated University (one out of them will be the Rector or his delegate). Within the Assembly members the President is elected and his mandate is properly defined.
- The Executive Committee with a limited number (say six, two or three out of them being Italian) of selected members, not necessarily belonging to the General Assembly. .One of the Committee member will be nominated as the President of this body, with the duty of representing officially the Network and of keeping all the necessary contacts with the Executive Secretariat of the Adriatic-Ionic Initiative, should it be created in Ancona as it was proposed..

The criterion of alternating the Chairmanship will be normally followed. However, it appears suitable that in the first operative phase the President of the Executive Committee – to be seen as the main government Organ - be Italian. This means, as a necessity, to identify the President of the General Assembly Committee within the members representing the Countries of the eastern shore.

3. The decision-share criterion

The proposal of the Rectors of the Ancona and Bologna Universities has to be understood as an “open” one in the broader meaning of the word. This implies that all the programmatic and operative aspects require to be pre-examined, evaluated and agreed. by the Universities of all the Countries fully committed to the implementation of the Program. As a consequence the agreement between the Ancona and Bologna Universities represents just a first, necessary step for identifying a

reasonable and organic proposal open to be either integrated or modified, By passing, the same approach was followed by our Universities during the preparatory contacts with the competent Ministries, in the preparatory phase of this meeting. The outcome of this logic is clear: since now and for the coming months a comprehensive general discussion will take place, with the aim of increasing the common consent and of collecting all the relevant contributions. In this process an important role will be plaid by the CRUI (Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane); in addition, the different connections established between the Italian Universities and those of the other Countries of the basin will be properly activated.

4. Conclusive remarks

Coherently with the Ancona Conference conclusions, the proposal presented here by our two Universities identifies high priority programmatic lines to be implemented through a number of thematic networks with the duty of identifying and proposing to the UNIADRION Network the activities needed to achieve the expected results, to take over the operative responsibilities (both direct and indirect), to monitor the work in progress, to identify and promote the possible needed corrective measures. The key point of the Program as a whole remains the UNIADRION Network, to be considered as the melting pot of the programmatic and operative highline, normally implemented by the thematic networks themselves.

Of a major importance will be the connection between UNIADRION and the physical network (Internet, as an example): practically. the real success of the cooperative initiatives will depend on the operative capacity of this network. The expertise of our Universities and also the possibility of counting on the support of a few high performance operative structures (CINECA representing a typical example of them) allow us to be optimistic about the possibility to obtain good and visible short-term results.

All that being said, we are fully aware that the outcome (quantitative and qualitative) of this Program will depend on the amount of the committed resources, the financial ones clearly included. Our Universities will take their responsibilities. Human capital mobility and development, professional and specialized Schools, building site related Schools, post-graduated Courses and Masters, Research doctorates, Exhibitions and Workshops, Program promotion through the more advanced informative techniques: we are ready to be fully committed on those institutional duties. We also are ready to take direct financial engagements, should they be compatible with our limited resources, but it is out of doubt that such a wide initiative cannot be carried out without the full and constant support of both the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the University and S&T Research.

A very last comment that is, at the same time, a kind of foresight. This important joint venture between Italy and the other Countries of the Adriatic and Ionic basin will more and more draw the attention of the European Union, already shown during the recent regional Summit in Zagabria (23-24 November this year), on the development prospects in central-eastern Europe. The idea of identifying an Adriatic-Ionic Euro-Region will be for sure carefully examined by the Union, in the more general frame of the regional development of this part of Europe, to be considered of a major and increasing importance in the short-medium term. No doubt that the inter-University co-operation in the Countries of the basin represents a first important step on that way. Therefore the UNIADRION take-off can be properly considered as a kind of starting mechanism of a more general process which could generate a new Euro-Region with similar development opportunities and unified through its common cultural background.

Ravenna, Dec. 15th, 2000