

Italian Presidency of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative

Round Table on Education and Inter-university Cooperation “Building the European Higher Education Area – A further step forward”

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Concluding Remarks

By the Chair, Prof. Pier Ugo Calzolari

Trying to deduce a short summary from such a rich collection of contributions, and the consequent debates, it's a really difficult, if not impossible, task. I could run the risk of moving in too many directions.

The European Higher Education Area is neither a mere fascinating expression nor a vague political concept born out of the fantasy of the European Commission. It is instead a precisely structured process, triggered by the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations and now entrusted by governments and institutions.

Somebody has reminded us that the Bologna Process is a dynamic, real and irreversible movement (*Dr. Per Nyborg*). It is indeed a process full of precise commitments and difficult tasks, both on the government and on the universities side. It offers extraordinary opportunities to our younger generations and, at the same time, it exposes our institutions to effective risks. Nevertheless we must face these risks.

Behind the EHEA we perceive the birth of a real, effective, severe European market of higher professions. I remember the issue of the interaction between education and trade emerging clearly in our discussion. In this new, open space the European youth are already wandering, migrating, looking for the best educational opportunities offered by the Universities. In this open space the best universities are already in hard competition. We have opened a large space to educational intervention with the hope that a self multiplying process could light up. At present I do not think that our expectations have been fulfilled. The process of tuning the national systems is slower than expected. Nothing has happened of the stormy phenomenon forecasted by some in the first place.

Many reasons for this have been detected and many of them have been brought up even today. I would like to contribute to this debate with some further issues.

In the first place I must mention the natural inertia of the academic world when faced with decisive change. In the second place we can't forget the financial difficulties who have cooled down most of the spontaneous enthusiasm. However I think that the road has been traced. Anyway there are some necessary steps that the Universities must take along this road.

The first step is the concentration of their normally scarce financial resources on few, specific research areas, in which they wish to get a position of excellence.

The second step is a strict consequence of the first. If you want to keep a position of excellence even in education, which is by nature a comprehensive field, you have to turn to the integration concept. This is the deep reason for the integrated curricula.

As a third issue we have to underline the evaluation of quality and its final and public evidence which is the accreditation of institutions. The subject of quality assurance and recognition becomes evident in this area (*Dr. Per Nyborg, Dr. Lewis Purser*). An important issue in this field is the creation of an independent body responsible for the quality assurance on the national level.

As you can see the process for building the EHEA is not a spontaneous self developing phenomenon. There are some pre-conditions that have to be fulfilled and one of these is certainly the improvement of the institutional government and management. The process needs real participation by the governments and the Universities. "It is time for the universities to take their responsibilities" (*Dr. Purser*). The birth of EUA is a fundamental step.

An essential problem has stemmed this morning: the dissemination of information, mainly in the eastern countries, about the events, the important meetings and the new achievements. A crucial role can be played by EUA in this field.

In Bologna Europe decided to start a long and difficult adventure. We have moved the first step and this reminds me of St. Denis. He was beheaded by the Romans in Montmartre. The legend tells us that he collected his head from the ground and walked to the site where the abbey was built. To the astonished people who cried miracle he told that the real wonder lied not in walking ten miles with his head chopped off. The real miracle was to have moved the first step.