Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR)
Bureau
Strasbourg, 6-7 December 2007
6 December – 9h00-around 18h00
7 December – 8h30-13h00

Room G 04 (new building of the Council of Europe)

The University between Humanism and Market: Redefining its values and functions for the 21st century
Report and Conclusions of the Conference
by Kathia Serrano-Velarde

Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport
(Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education/Higher Education and
Research Division)

ITEM 7

Council of Europe Conference
New Challenges to Higher Education
Managing the Complexities of a Globalised Society

Strasbourg, 20-21 November 2007

Report by the General Rapporteur
Kathia Serrano-Velarde

1)   Introduction

1.1)   The context of the conference

The Conference "New Challenges to Higher Education – Managing the Complexities of a Globalised Society" held at the Council of Europe (COE) headquarters from 20-21 November 2007 constituted the launching event of the Council's new flagship project in higher education entitled "The University Between Humanism and Market – Redefining its Values and Functions for the 21st Century". The new programme of the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR) envisages a succession of three phases focusing on the following key questions:

- What are the main challenges facing higher education and, in a broader sense, modern societies?
- What kind of higher education is needed to respond to these challenges?
- How should higher education be organized?

This new project of the CDESR stands for a renewal in the art of Council of Europe policy-making. Previous projects have been reorganised around major topics, thus leading to synergies. Hence the title of this conference was deliberately chosen to be broad, in

order to invite open and comprehensive discussion of the future of European universities, generating new input of ideas.

Indeed, the aim of this project is to take account of and critically discuss the full range of roles and functions higher education performs in modern societies. While it fully recognizes the importance of higher education to economic development, the project seeks to look beyond current policy debates and their excessive emphasis on economic issues. Rather, the goal is to reflect upon the missions and values of European higher education that are frequently overlooked in the political discussions and on the reform agenda. The flagship project also mirrors the new priorities of the overall Council of Europe agenda, which, since the Warsaw Summit 2005 confirmed the promotion of intercultural dialogue as one of its key political objectives (Council of Europe 2005a and b).

Consequently, the new flagship project is to develop a fresh and novel reflection on policy issues. Most importantly, it will outline an action plan that will shape the future outlook of the Council's political activities in the realm of higher education. With regard to this challenging agenda, the Director of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education, Gabriele Mazza, explicitly referred to the difficulties encountered by the CDESR in the conceptualisation and ratification of its new action programme by the committee of ministers and stated the need of proving the critics wrong. The CDESR thus addresses not only new policy topics, but also a new and broader audience. Furthermore, it faces the political pressure of demonstrating the interest of the academic and political community for substantial questions in education politics.

Without a doubt, the vivacity and productivity of the debates showed that there is an interest in a broad questioning of higher education values and missions all over Europe. Indeed, the excellent quality of the organisation, the contributions and the discussions confirmed that the CDESR has the experience and the know-how to make such an ambitious political endeavour work. Nevertheless, the careful observer might want to ask if the overarching framework of this conference and its generic outline does not lack somewhat in precision with regard to previous CDESR work in higher education policies (i.e. qualification frameworks, quality assurance). As to this point, the conference demonstrated - and this was remarked on on several occasions - a further need for structuration which certainly can be attributed to the novelty of the topic. Even though this first event can be considered a first and general brainstorming, enabling the

programme coordinators to identify the key questions of the debate, the challenge remains to structure future conferences and discussions so as to ensure the outcome of solid policy results. The conclusions of this conference will, to this effect, serve as working base to devise future CDESR activities within the framework of the flagship programme.

1.2)   The key issues under discussion

The objective of the first project phase was to identify challenges to which higher education institutions and actors are supposed to respond:

- *"What are the challenges to societal sustainability modern societies and individuals have to cope with?*
- *What is the contribution of higher education to societal sustainability and what should it look like?*
- *What kind of challenges does higher education face in modern societies? How does it cope with them?*
- *What kind of knowledge/values does it require to enable people to take action in modern societies, at individual level and at the level of societies?*
- *How should higher education institutions proceed in the transmission of these forms of knowledge?"* (CDESR 2007)

One of the main outcomes of this conference was, however, to draw the attention to the way risks and challenges are perceived and subsequently acted upon by policy makers, higher education leaders, academics and students. In fact, the conference challenged the very understanding of globalisation as a solely economic phenomenon by underlining the multidimensionality, multiplicity and complexity of global trends to which no humanist or market interpretation of university action can live up to.

The participants clearly agreed that there was the risk that a one sided view of problems will lead to one sided and short sighted solutions. Accordingly, adopting a **differentiated approach** to the perception of global trends, but also the claim for a broad **inclusion of stakeholders and civil society** in the discussion, conceptualisation and application of solutions is essential. In addition, a balance between omnipresent short term decisions and necessary **long term reflections** needs to be struck.

1.3)   The context of this report

The very aim of this report is threefold. First of all, we shall proceed to a review and systematic analysis of the main lines of argumentation brought forward during the conference. Secondly, we will try to draw a link between what has been discussed during these two days and the overall outline of the new Council of Europe project, i.e. to redefine the values and functions of a university trapped between an original humanist interpretation of its missions and omnipresent market forces. Thirdly, we will introduce follow up conclusions enclosing the major points raised within the framework of the launching conference. The conclusions will subsequently serve as working basis for the conceptual elaboration and organisation of the next conference of this project.

2)   Humanist and market responses to global challenges

2.1)   Humanist and market interpretations of higher education reality

Indeed, the juxtaposition of the terms humanism and market is referring to the well known paradigm of tradition vs. modernity, old vs. new, stagnation vs. progress. The European university finds itself confronted with the need and, most importantly, the claim for reorientation. This is not a new situation as universities have always reacted to environmental pressures for change, and successfully so as they are among the oldest organisations in the world (Durkheim 1990). Thus we might want to ask on what grounds we urge, today, for a reorientation of this prestigious and long standing institution:

- What makes the specificity of this situation with regard to historical precedence?
- How far should change go?
- Are the core missions of higher education under discussion or are we rather talking about a reorganisation of the academic project so as to enable higher education institutions to better perform their core functions?

The observation that higher education institutions are trapped between a humanist and a market definition of their activities drags our attention to the normative side of higher education reforms and onto the slippery slope of wishful thinking: What kind of higher education do we wish for our society? What kind of society do we wish for in general (Sjur Bergan, 21.11.2007)? This point has been raised several times in the discussion and is most vital to our understanding of the strategic options university leaders, policy

makers, academics and students are facing. What we wish for makes us hypersensitive to some phenomena and blind to others. It acts as a lens through which we see the world, in this context the challenges to higher education, and serves as framework within which we select solutions. Hence, not only do our expectations have an impact on our understanding of the world (and the challenges linked to it) but our way to perceive challenges has direct effects on the decisions we take.

This conference can be considered as a stepping stone to a hopefully critical, constructive and inspiring discussion on the future of European higher education institutions based on a comprehensive understanding of the global challenges they face.

2.2)   The missions of higher education: A brief history of ideas

Historically, the prime functions of higher education institutions towards society were:

- the transmission of knowledge to the younger generation,
- the advancement of fundamental knowledge
- and the qualification as well as the socialization of the political and economic elite of the nation state.

If these were the generic missions of the university, their execution was subject to great variation – a variation which can be traced back to contextual specificities in handling accountability and sharing responsibility between higher education institutions, stakeholders and the state (Neave 2000, Weber/Bergan 2005).

We are living at a time when the assumptions about the scope, the organisation and the execution of these missions are being reconsidered in the light of global trends. The conference participants identified the following challenges as having direct and profound effects on the way higher education is being organised, and voiced the need for a critical analysis and discussion of either one of them:

- international market trends,
- migration,
- technological change,
- environmental threats
- and global threats to the security of societies (i.e. terrorism).

On the basis of this statement, we thus appeal for the consideration of the following questions to the conceptualisation and organisation of future conferences and discussion forums:

- What kinds of challenges need reaction on behalf of the higher education institutions?
- How should an active response to these challenges look like?
- How can higher education become active (again) in the way the future of societies is being shaped?

With regard to these questions, let us go back to our metaphor of a university torn between humanism and market, as suggested by the outline of the flagship project. We shall argue that both humanist and market philosophies can be understood as an interpretative foil against which global challenges are perceived, as well as a repertoire of ready made solutions: A one sided view of either challenges or solutions could induce great shortcomings in the way the complexity and diversity of global phenomena are being handled.

Both 'market and humanism' represent, as we said, ways of interpreting reality. They project visions of how universities should perform their tasks. Both visions have their specific views on universities' responsibility to society and inspire the action of decision-makers. On the one hand we have the vision of an egalitarian and free community of learners and researchers involved in a perpetual quest for the truth and engaged in never ending loops of self questioning, introspection and critical discussions. Thus, the university becomes a place of absolute freedom, a vacuum of constraints in which students (and teachers) can proceed to the perfection of their individual talents and become the kind of persons they are predestined to be, i.e. the kind of political and economic elite the nation state is aiming for. Whatever the time it takes, whatever the costs, it is the moral duty of the state to cover the bill for the socialisation and qualification of its "finest" citizens (Humboldt 1910, Rothblatt/Wittrock 1993). On the other hand, we are confronted with the urgent observation that knowledge is vital to the welfare of a country. This vision of what has been termed "entrepreneurial university" (Clark 1998) or "academic capitalism" (Slaughter 1997) stipulates a surprisingly concrete project for the realisation of an efficient and performing knowledge enterprise generating increasing output with decreasing input. Within this university model, higher education

institutions release massive numbers of qualified and flexible graduates on the supposedly dynamic labour market and act as innovation plant to industrial production.

As the reader might have gathered from our slightly caricatured description, it is our very understanding that both visions have grave shortcomings that render their truthful application a nightmare to policy makers, university leaders, academics and students.

2.3)   Reorganising the university business: Economic responses to global challenges

Yet, the second type of vision has gained more and more supporters among the European political elite, not least because of the prominent knowledge policies of the European Union Lisbon agenda and its goal to make *"Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy of the world"* (Council of the European Union 2000). Indeed, the market interpretation of higher education business seems to provide a better bearing for tackling challenges that trespass national borders. According to this new paradigm, universities can no longer live under the protection and patronage of the nation state and must find within themselves the means of managing their tasks in a globalised society: *"higher education institutions have stopped to be part of the welfare system to become active in the welfare of society"* (Radu Damian, 20.11.2007).

This evolution needs to be seen against the backdrop of economic stagnation, financial cuts in public funding and state governance critique. Within this interpretative framework, higher education is thought of a as market of competing organisations, academics are considered to be entrepreneurs, students to be both clients and products of a new service sector. What might sound like an ideological statement bears, however, interesting meanings with regards to issues of protection of public as well as private interests (in this vein, often referred to as consumer protection) (quality assurance), employability (qualification frameworks, learning outcomes) and student mobility (ECTS[1], Diploma Supplement). As Edmund Cane reminded us, the economic appreciation of higher education has undoubtedly led to political and academic efforts for the realisation of so called '(market) transparency'. The idea to evaluate the quality of a certain production process in order to assure transnational comparability has for instance been vital to the success of the Bologna agenda and definitely needs to be furthered.

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[1] European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

We thus witness a redefinition of the place of universities in society from being an instrument for political integration within the nation state to becoming part of the production process of a transnational region.

Again, universities are engaged in an overall modernisation process. And this time again, the path of modernisation is paved with specific risks. If the risk entailed in the humanist inspired modernisation process came out to be the growing discrepancy between academic life and the necessities of economic and political governance (i.e. the so called 'ivory tower' phenomenon), the risks attached to the market interpretation of modernisation are the negation of the social and human factor entailed in higher education (i.e. the intrinsic motivations of academics and students, the economic uninterestedness of basic research and the transmission of universal and democratic values). Is it realistic to consider higher education a perfectly rational process with a straightforward input-output correlation? Is it possible to say that academics, who mostly have been socialised in the humanistic paradigm, are abruptly turning into *homo economicus*, their students into utility maximizers? We dare say that the market interpretation of higher education, however pragmatic and straight forward it might appear, especially in the shape of elegant reform agenda, could prove as far from the ways of the world as the humanistic one.

Finally, the participants challenged the idea that most change has to be real-time, dynamic and quick and that institutions of international calibre, such as higher education institutions, have to perform accordingly. Indeed, promoting long term visions and critical introspections could prove highly constructive in an age where time horizons are shrinking and simple solutions are being advantaged.

3)   Conclusions of the conference

3.1)   The main points of the contributions

The conference had the great merit of relativising the power of market forces and of showing that global challenges were not only economic by nature, but that the answers currently remained phrased in economic terms. Thus, Peter Scott called for a differentiated response to a complex and diverse panorama of challenges. Higher education should not only embrace the economic credo of competitiveness and efficiency, but also address the public and collectivist values of global social movements as well as

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react to the sensitive issues of cultural cleavages and conflicts. This way, universities will become the subjects and not only the objects of global challenges.

Caryn McTighe Musil stated the necessity of carrying out a policy debate on the values of cultural difference, diversity and their contribution to personal, societal and democratic development. She made an inspiring account of the dynamising effects the critical discussion on the values of cultural diversity and inclusion had on policy-making in the United States and explained that these topics lead to passionate debates on how to make traditional values such as "intercultural dialogue" work for decision makers.

Radu Damian and Edmund Cane[2], in their vital contributions on higher education reforms in transition countries, underlined the dramatic role of higher education institutions, academics and most importantly, students played in the articulation and diffusion of democratic values.

Mario Calderini questioned the simplistic vision of integrating higher education institutions in a linear and homogeneous production cycle of innovation, drawing our attention on the possible monopolisation of innovation research in Europe by a small number of research institutions. He also stressed the need for a careful action plan for the organisation of innovation and technology research, especially with regard to funding issues and study curricula, in European technical universities.

Questioning the European Union policy paradigm of enrolling higher education institutions to the economic production of member states has also been one of the key issues in the panel discussion. The round table discussion assembled Andris Barblan (Magna Charta Observatory), Stef Beek (European Student Union), Radu Damian (chair of the CDESR) and Pavel Zgaga (University of Ljubljana), who, under the chairmanship of Germain Dondelinger (member of the Bureau of the CDESR) did not only discuss the interaction of higher education with the political and industrial world, but also engaged into a profound and differentiated reflection on the notion of personal development. This key concept of the so called *"Bildungsideal"* (Andris Barblan, 21.11.2007) is experiencing, nowadays, a constant tension between universal and humanistic values on the one hand, and the reform driven necessity to formulate concrete learning outcomes on the other.

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[2] Speaking on behalf of Genc Pollo, Minister of Education of Albania, who was prevented from speaking at the conference by urgent legislative matters.

Last but not least, we would like to applaud the very rich and vital contributions of the participants who willingly engaged in the discussion and provided a solid base on which to structure the conclusions of this report.

3.2)   Explanatory comments on the conclusions

The conclusions of the conference take into account three major issues raised in the debates and the contributions:

- First of all, the recommendations should take note of the complexity of global challenges and their economic, social and cultural dimensions.
- Secondly, these recommendations should not only address policy makers and university leaders, but also academics and students as the ones who shape and enact academic life. Their political participation and cohesiveness is vital to the success of higher education institutions and their core missions in a global and complex environment. It is in this context that we can situate the claim for participation, open dialogue and civic engagement that have been formulated throughout the conference (Kohler/Huber 2006).
- Thirdly, the recommendations should support higher education institutions in their efforts to be responsive to external demands while attributing them the means of mastering their fate, accomplishing their core functions and shelter them from too great an influence of external interests. Indeed it should provide them with sufficient means to make them develop their own vision and values of what their roles and functions are and how they respond to global challenges, regardless of market expectations.

3.3)   Conclusions by the General Rapporteur

The 10 conclusions are organised in three sub sets, each of them responding to one particular aspect of the conference:

- **Dealing with complexity:** Key concepts to the realisation of an inclusive debate

- **Dealing with cultural diversity:** Fostering intercultural dialogue

- **Taking action in a complex and globalised world:** Civic engagement and social responsibility

They are neither comprehensive, nor do they mirror the richness and complexity of the discussions held within the framework of this conference. Rather, they should be seen as discussion and working base for the structuration of future debates and policy outcomes.

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Key conclusions

Strasbourg, 20-21 November 2007

1) **Dealing with complexity:**
   Key concepts for an inclusive debate

- Encouraging decision makers and stakeholders to **take due account of the complexity of global challenges** to higher education and their economic, political, social and cultural dimensions.

- Engage **decision makers, stakeholders and civic society** in an **open debate** on the nature of global challenges and the response required on behalf of higher education.

- Need for **open, critical and differentiated discussions** of higher education in the **media.**

- How to organise **higher education budgets** in order to deal with the complexity of a global environment (diversification etc.)?

2)   **Dealing with cultural diversity:**
      Fostering intercultural dialogue

- **Diversification** of the student body and the academic staff, the curriculum, the study contents and steering devices (such as quality assurance).

- Fostering **intercultural dialogue** within higher education and engage in a common and dynamic effort to define a concrete and long term **action plan** to this effect.

- Work on the **definition and application** of intercultural and interdisciplinary competences and qualifications (especially with regard to language policies in academia).

3)   **Taking action in a complex and globalised world:**
      Civic engagement and social responsibility

- Considering higher education institutions as **platform and opportunity structure where ideas and opinions can and should be exchanged**, attitudes be developed and action should be taken for the preservation of democracy.

- How can **institutional autonomy** best be preserved in a society characterized by the increasing interdependence of actors from the public and the private sectors?

- **Supporting (interdisciplinary) research** into the roles and the functions of higher education in modern societies and its contribution to social cohesion and intercultural dialogue.

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