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**Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research
(CDESR)
6th plenary session
Strasbourg, 20 - 21 September 2007
Room 5 – 09.30 hours**

THE UNIVERSITY BETWEEN HUMANISM AND MARKET

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 6

ACTION

The plenary session is invited to take note of the programme of the first conference, to be held on 20–21 November 2007, and to advise the Bureau and the Secretariat on the further work on the project.

BACKGROUND

At its 2006 plenary session, the CDESR approved the proposal for a new project on “The University between humanism and market: redefining its values and functions for the 21st century”. The appropriation for this project in the 2007 budget is €44 600, which is marginally less than had been proposed. However, this should not affect the first year of the project. At its meetings on 7–8 February and 30–31 May 2007, the CDESR Bureau conducted an in-depth discussion of the project, in particular with a view to reassessing the articulation and time table of this project. The Bureau also decided that it would oversee the project directly and draw on additional expertise as needed, and it decided to hold the first conference of the new project on 20 – 21 November 2007.

The present document aims to outline the project as it now stands after the Bureau’s discussion. It builds on two previous documents:

- CDESR (2006) 9 of 15 August 2006, which was submitted to the 2006 CDESR plenary, and which outlines the full project proposal;
- CDESR-BU (2007) 2 of 10 January 2007, which was submitted to the CDESR Bureau in February 2007, and which suggests a revised sequence and timetable of the different components of the project.

As both documents are extensive, the present document does not seek to repeat the material already submitted and to present a full project description. Instead, it seems to articulate and provide a summary of the revised project model discussed by the Bureau.

A PROJECT IN THREE PHASES

As in the previous drafts, it is envisaged that the project be carried out in three phases. However, the profile and articulation of the three phases have been revised, essentially to provide answers to three key questions:

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

The present document will seek to outline each of the three questions in some more detail, but without pretending to be anywhere near complete in either outlining the issues or in seeking the answers. Indeed, if this document were to seek to do so, it would seek to preempt the project as such. In particular, the description of phases 2 and, above all, 3 has been kept short for this reason.

The challenges

It is a truism to say that modern societies are complex, that they are characterized by rapid change, and that education is a key factor in the success *of* modern societies – no society can succeed without well educated citizens – as well as in success *in* modern societies – no individual citizens can fully succeed in modern society without education. These truisms are nevertheless a useful starting point for our considerations.

Modern societies are characterized by technological sophistication, by high levels of achievement, by great opportunities for many of their citizens in terms of self-fulfilment, material wealth, mobility and influence over their own lives. One or two generations ago, as well as a century ago, these opportunities may well have been the aspects that would have been most readily referred to if citizens were asked to describe their societies and not least their expectations of the future. Today, however, there is an awareness not only of great opportunities, but also of great threats: to the environment, to material well being, to personal and societal security, to social cohesion, to values, convictions and beliefs and not least to the *status quo*. Few will today think of the development of their societies in terms of uninterrupted, linear improvement, and some will undoubtedly emphasize what they perceive as negative tendencies. Many, however, will have outlooks that may be characterized as “cautiously optimistic” or “cautiously pessimistic”. In other words, most people will be aware of opportunities as well as of threats, and even though they may emphasize the former or the latter, they will seek to strike some kind of balance between the two.

Without pretending to present a full list of the challenges our societies will face over the coming decades, it will be difficult to avoid the following.

The sustainability of our societies is in question. In environmental terms, this has been brought home forcefully by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change¹ – in particular in its latest report submitted in early 2007 - as well as, to a larger public, by Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth*. Over the past decade or so, a consensus has been emerging that climate change is a real threat, that it is at least partially the work of human beings, and that there is still time to redress the balance if our societies take decisive action. Taking action requires an ability not only to face painful choices and to consider long term benefits against short term sacrifice, but also an ability to analyze highly complex data, to act on complex issues on the basis of expert advice and often also on the basis of incomplete information, and to weigh benefits in one area against disadvantages in another.

Sustainability does not only have an environmental aspect, however. Societies must also be sustainable economically, socially, politically and culturally, and they must be all of these at the same time. A society sustainable environmentally and in terms of overall economic indicators, but not in terms of social cohesion because of gross inequalities in the distribution of opportunities and wealth would not be sustainable in the long term. Similarly, a society may be environmentally sustainable without being economically or socially sustainable, or *vice versa*, or it may be all of these without being politically or culturally sustainable. In all cases, the end result is unlikely to be overall sustainability. These diverse aspects of

¹ <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

sustainability further underscore the need for societies and their members to be able to deal with highly complex situations and choices. Only exceptionally will the issues that face us be ones of a straightforward relationship between cause and effect.

Whereas previous generations were often faced with technological limitations, present day limitations are frequently of a different order. Technological developments provide us with possibilities to undertake actions that may be technologically feasible but that raise serious ethical concerns or that would be too costly in economic, environmental or social terms. In this context, it may be worth recalling that deciding whether a given possibility is too costly involves not only a purely economic consideration – “do we have the funds needed?” – but issues of priorities and relative merit – “is it more important to invest our funds in this than in other undertakings?” – and in the impact of actions in non-economic terms – “it may be economically profitable to invest in a new factory in city A, but is it defensible in terms of the impact on the environment?”. These kinds of considerations require an ability among decision makers, economic actors and voters to assess complex arguments and to make a decision on the basis of an overall assessment of advantages and disadvantages. This again requires decision makers, economic actors and voters who are not simply well trained in a specific discipline, but who are well educated in the true, holistic sense of the term.

Thus, the first phase of the project will seek to answer questions and issues such as:

- 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?

What education is needed?

In seeking to answer, in the second phase of the project, the question of what higher education is needed, it may be useful to take as a starting point the hypothesis formulated by the Chilean sociologist Eugenio Tironi: the answer to the question “what education do we need?” is to be found in the answer to the question “what kind of society do we want?”².

In other words, in seeking to rise to the challenges that will be defined in the first phase of the project, we must also include considerations of values and priorities. Again, this will require considering complex and often difficult priorities in which not all options that would be desirable will necessarily be feasible, and not all options that may be possible will

² Eugenio Tironi: *El sueño chileno. Comunidad, familia y nación en el bicentenario* (Santiago de Chile 2005: Taurus)

necessarily be desirable. This also underlines the point that defining the kind of higher education we will need in the future is not simply a matter of identifying the trends and developments to which higher education must respond, but also of identifying how higher education may influence our societies in order to help them develop towards the kind of societies we would want for our children.

Again, the kind of education we will need is not a question of identifying the single most important factor for the development of our societies and then gear our education system to meeting it. It is not a question only of economic performance, only of social cohesion, only of environmentally sound practice or only of democratic participation. The education we need must include and balance all of these as well as many other factors. In short, it must encompass the four major purposes of higher education identified through the Council of Europe's work on the public responsibility for higher education and research, all of which are fundamental:

- preparation for the labour market;
- preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- personal development;
- the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base³.

This also implies that the answer to the question “what education do we need?” is not to be found solely in the identification of a set of specialities (such as more information technology specialists, more petroleum engineers, more accountants, more general education teachers or more nurses). It is also not to suggest the opposite: that our societies will not need specialized competence in a wide range of areas.

Rather, higher education must provide both specialized and general knowledge, or in more technical terms: subject specific as well as generic competence. This is a strong feature of the TUNING project⁴, and generic competences include:

- Ability to analyze and synthesize;
- Ability to organize and plan;
- Oral and written communication in one's native language;
- Knowledge of a second language;
- Computing skills;
- Information management skills (ability to retrieve and analyze information from different sources);

³ See the draft Recommendation on the Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research approved by the CDESR in September 2006. At the time of writing, the draft Recommendation is still before the Committee of Ministers.

⁴ The project Tuning Educational Structures in Europe is managed by the Universities of Deusto and Groningen, see <http://www.relint.deusto.es/TuningProject/index.htm> or <http://www.let.rug.nl/TuningProject/index.htm>. For the purposes of this document, the final report of the first phase of the project is particularly relevant, cf. http://www.relint.deusto.es/TUNINGProject/documentos/Tuning_phase1/Tuning_phase1_full_document.pdf

- Problem solving;
- Decision making;
- Critical and self critical abilities;
- Teamwork;
- Interpersonal skills;
- Ability to work in an interdisciplinary team;
- Ability to communicate with experts in other fields;
- Appreciation of diversity and multiculturality;
- Ethical commitment.

While this list, which borrows heavily from the TUNING project, does not pretend to be complete, it is intended to illustrate the varieties of generic competences. It should also be noted that the list omits a consideration of the level required for the various generic competences as well as of what competences at what level should be required for holders of different degrees. Is there a link between the level of generic competences and the level of the qualifications, and should generic competences be defined differently for various profiles so that e.g. engineers and teachers have different generic competences?

Organizing higher education to meet the needs

The third phase of the project should explore how higher education could be organized to meet the needs defined in the first two phases. The term “organization” is intended in a broad sense to denote the arrangements that will enable higher education systems and institutions to face the challenges. This may include changes in teaching and learning methodology, institutional arrangements and systems, and it may also include making better use of existing arrangements, such as exploring the possibilities qualifications frameworks and credit systems offer for making use of a variety of learning paths, including in lifelong learning arrangements. It should build on the work undertaken by the CDESR to define the public responsibility for higher education and research, and should also put this into the context of university autonomy.

This phase of the project should consider policy recommendations to all levels.

ORGANIZING THE THREE PHASES OF THE PROJECT

Each phase of the project will be centred around a major conference open to all States party to the Europe Cultural Convention as well as to other delegations and observers to the CDESR and other interested parties, upon invitation. The first conference will be held on 20-21 November 2007 at Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg. The conferences of the second and third phases should be held in 2008 and 2009, and it could be envisaged to have these conferences somewhat earlier in the respective years. It should be kept in mind, however, that the 2009 ministerial conference of the Bologna Process will be held on 28-29 April in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve. The option of having a fourth, final conference could be considered. It could also be considered holding one or more of the conferences in member states, subject to invitations and some financial support.

The conferences will be prepared by the CDESR Bureau, which oversees the project, and the Bureau may wish to associate one or more experts with the preparation of a given conference. The conference in 2008 and 2009 could be informed by a background study, to be commissioned from an expert, and rely on a combination of plenary presentations, group discussions and possibly a round table debate. In addition to the background study, the speakers would be expected to contribute an article on the basis of their presentation, and each conference should lead to a publication in the Council of Europe Higher Education Series. The Bureau may, however, wish to consider whether it is feasible to commission a background study in time for the launching conference.

The programme of the launching conference will be found in the Appendix.

APPENDIX

NEW CHALLENGES TO EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION – MANAGING THE COMPLEXITIES OF A GLOBALISED SOCIETY

LAUNCHING CONFERENCE OF THE CDESR PROJECT 'THE UNIVERSITY BETWEEN HUMANISM AND MARKET: REDEFINING ITS VALUES AND FUNCTIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY'

Council of Europe Headquarters, Strasbourg

Draft programme

20 – 21 November 2007

Tuesday 20 November

08 30 Registration of participants

09 00 Opening of the conference

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe or his representative

Chair of the CDESR

09 30 Can European Higher Education Meet Global Challenges?

Professor Sir Peter Scott, Vice-Chancellor, Kingston University

Discussion

10 40 Coffee Break

11 10 Reinventing European Higher Education in Light of Technological Change

Professor Mario Calderini, Politecnico di Torino

Discussion

12 20 Introduction to the Parallel Sessions

12 30 Lunch

14 00 Parallel Sessions (organised as parallel panel discussions involving stakeholders)

- How to promote societal sustainability through higher education?
- Intercultural dialogue and social cohesion: Higher education facing cultural diversity
- Dealing with scientific progress and environmental threats in higher education

16 00 Coffee Break

16 30 Creating a Vision of Higher Education for a Country in Transition

Dr. Genc Pollo, Minister of Education of Albania

17 30 END

21 November

09 00 New Challenges to European Higher Education – Managing the Complexities of a Globalised Society

Round Table

10 30 Coffee Break

11 00 Promoting Universal Values in the Face of Societal Change

Dr. Caryn McTighe Musil, Association of American Colleges and Universities

12 00 Conclusions and Recommendations by the General Rapporteur in a Plenary Session

12 30 Closing of the Conference