

Education Department

Higher Education and Research



MINISTERIAL MEETING, BOLOGNA PROCESS

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On behalf of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr. Walter Schwimmer, I am pleased to reconfirm the Council of Europe's commitment to the Bologna Process aiming to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010. In this way, the Council of Europe will, with all the participating countries and important partners help bring about the most important reform of higher education in Europe since the immediate aftermath of 1968.

As Ministers responsible for higher education, you will at the Berlin Higher Education Summit make decisions that will bring the Bologna Process an important step forward in terms of both content and geographical scope, based on our common heritage and values as transmitted by the European higher education community. In particular, the Council of Europe welcomes the decision you have just made to admit Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" to the Process. By the end of this year, the Council of Europe intends to organize a follow up conference focused on the four new countries just admitted.

We also welcome the proposal to broaden the geographical scope of the Bologna Process to the European Cultural Convention and to combine this geographical criterion with requirements for clear commitments as to the implementation of the Bologna goals. Three countries have already made such commitments, and I would in particular like to underline the importance of welcoming Russia to the Bologna Process at the end of this meeting. The Council of Europe will continue to support the efforts of Russia in implementing the Bologna Process, as exemplified by the follow up seminar to be held in Sankt Peterburg at the end of October.

The Council of Europe is fully prepared to continue to play an important role in carrying out your decisions and in forming the work programme of the Bologna Process through active participation in the Bologna follow-up structures. I firmly believe the participation of a pan-European intergovernmental organization will be a useful supplement to the expertise of the representatives of national Ministries in the follow-up structures.

The support of the Council of Europe for the Bologna Process has very recently also been expressed through the Parliamentary Assembly. On 8 September, the Assembly's Standing Committee considered a report on the Council of Europe contribution to the European Higher Education Area, penned by Senator Josep Varela i Serra, who is with us today, and unanimously adopted a recommendation to the Committee of Ministers "to study the means of enabling the

Council of Europe to step up its contribution to the establishment of the European Higher Education Area”.

In keeping with its fundamental values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the Council of Europe is committed to equal opportunities for higher education for all qualified candidates regardless of their gender, race, colour, disability, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status. The Council of Europe therefore believes that public authorities should play an important role in the provision of higher education as well as in devising the framework within which this provision is given. As a contribution to the reflection on the social dimension of higher education, the Council of Europe therefore intends to organize a major conference on the public responsibility for higher education. The conference will be held at Council of Europe Headquarters in Strasbourg in late spring or early autumn 2004, and I would very much welcome its inclusion in the official work programme of the Bologna Process 2003 - 2005.

Having in mind that new demands on and changes in European higher education systems should be followed with efficient and participative higher education governance, this is another key area to which the Council of Europe will contribute on the strength of years of experience from both intergovernmental and bilateral work. In this area, the Council of Europe will address a number of issues including the definition of institutional autonomy, student participation in higher education governance, the relationship between institutional self-governance and the participation of external stakeholders in the decision making of higher education institutions and the relationship between the central levels of the institution and the faculties.

On the basis of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and in cooperation with the European Commission and UNESCO, the Council of Europe will continue to develop policies and best practice to facilitate the recognition of higher education qualifications as well as qualifications giving access to higher education throughout the European Higher Education Area. The ENIC Network has approved a draft Recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees, which will be submitted to the Lisbon Recognition Convention for adoption in 2004, as well as a statement on its contribution to the Bologna Process.

On the basis of the pan-European platform offered by the European Cultural Convention, the Council of Europe is uniquely well placed to provide a bridge between the European Higher Education Area and the remaining countries of Europe. Over the past two years, the Council of Europe has presented the main policies of the Bologna process to important parts of the higher education communities of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, all of which have now applied for membership of the Bologna Process, as well as in Russia. The Council of Europe has also assisted with the revision of national legislation in these countries, underlining the importance of legislative reforms for the Bologna Process to reach its goals. The Council of Europe will continue to help implementing the policies that make up the backbone of the European Higher Education Area in those European countries that have not yet become a party to the Area, or that have joined only recently.

Not least, the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CD-ESR), through its double membership of government and academic representatives contributes significantly to the dialogue between policy makers in Ministries responsible for higher education and the higher education community.

The CD-ESR is well placed to give an impetus to what should be the ultimate goal of the Bologna Process:

a European Higher Education Area encompassing as much of Europe as possible and building on clear policies that will enhance the quality and attractiveness of higher education in Europe, stimulate the mobility of students, graduates and staff and guide public authorities and institutions in fulfilling the main purpose of higher education:

- preparation for the labour market
- preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- personal development;
- development and maintenance of an advanced knowledge base.

I wish the Berlin Higher Education Summit every success in its progress towards the European Higher Education Area and assure you of the full support of the Council of Europe in this endeavour.