

**President Barroso, President Winckler, our hosts, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.**

**It is an honour to present to you the overall conclusions of the convention, building on the work of all the participants in both plenary sessions and working groups. We thank all the distinguished speakers and everyone – particularly our hosts in the universities of Lisbon and the staff of EUA – who have helped to make this convention such a success. I would in particular like to thank the chairs and rapporteurs of the working groups, who have made my task so easy.**

**A week ago, President Barroso, you and the heads of state and governments of the European Union celebrated in Berlin the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Rome which established the Union. I hope you will forgive me if, as an historian, I comment that the Union has achieved a great deal in its 50 years, but it is still a child compared to the European universities, which are at least 17 times as old. It is nearly 850 years since the Alma Mater Studiorum, the University of Bologna, received its charter from the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa.**

**We are the proud heirs of that tradition, but we also celebrate a recent and continuing period of immense change and development, which is not often appreciated by governments and the wider European public.**

I recall that, when I first began in 1988 to attend meetings of the then Conference of European Rectors, Europe was experiencing the first stirrings of the revolution which was to sweep away previous political regimes. The universities, which had always sought to preserve traditions of free enquiry, found themselves at the forefront of the reconstruction of societies and the effort to establish democracy in so many European countries. Like many other institutions, they experienced cataclysmic change in their leaders, their personnel and their objectives.

But this was immediately succeeded, in the 1990s, by another change which affected the whole of Europe, east to west, north to south; this was the growth of student numbers and, in the process, the transition from a university system catering to the elites towards a truly democratic, mass system of higher education.

Finally, from 1999 onwards, the universities embraced, in partnership with European governments, the Bologna process. This began with a reform of degree structures, but in less than eight years has led to immense changes to the curriculum and a new focus on learning outcomes and student-centred learning.

There have been other changes of great significance. The one that gives me the greatest pleasure is what I have called the “triumph of women”; in less than 30 years, we have overturned 3 millenia of discrimination in

higher education against women. Now, in almost every country represented at this convention, there are more women than men students. This is one response to a changing society; others include the increasing role of universities in regional development and an ever-greater emphasis on innovation and knowledge transfer. Now we face the challenges of a declining young population and the need to retrain and re-equip millions of the older generations.

Faced with this record of rapid and almost violent change, no-one can reasonably accuse the universities, or their staff, of being conservative or being slow to adapt to the new demands which society and the economy has made of them. The people who have been slow to change, indeed, have been governments and private industry who have retained an old-fashioned and out-of-date image of the modern European university. Too many ministers and leaders of industry still believe that the universities today are like the universities which they attended when they were young.

The modern university is not, as we say in England, an ivory tower. Instead, it is typically one of the largest employers in its city or region. It has strong links with other employers and regional governments. Its students – now in most systems between one-third and one-half of all young people – are embedded in their communities and are much in demand. Many universities are now heavily involved in lifelong as well as initial education and training. The creation and transmission of

knowledge, through research, teaching and direct links with industry, makes universities, as the European Commission and all national governments now recognise, central to the regeneration and growth of our economies. We should be, and we are, proud of what we have achieved. We know that you, President Barroso, and Commissioners Figel and Potocnik, know all this; now we want you to help us to communicate it to the wider European public.

In this convention, as well as celebrating change and success, we have been thinking through the consequences of all these changes and the new role which society wants – and we want – the universities of Europe to play.

In the time available, I can only pick out a few general themes from the wealth of recommendations and reflections which have come from our working groups. They will all be integrated into the Lisbon Declaration, which we will present to the ministers of the 46 countries of the Bologna process in London in May. This will look towards Europe's universities after 2010 and will emphasise the sub-title of this convention: Diversity with a common purpose.

My first theme is that of internationalisation. The first years of the Bologna process were necessarily inward-looking. But now we realise that the creation of the European Higher Education Area is one of the great success stories of Europe. It is watched with increasing interest –

sometimes with concern – throughout the world. It is, as our working group put it, a European trademark. The presence at our convention of the Chinese Minister of Higher Education – responsible for 23 million students - and of the President of the American Council of Education testifies to this. Europe is increasingly a magnet for foreign students and scholars; my own university, London Metropolitan, has students from 150 different countries. We must build on our success not only to repatriate Europeans to our universities – which Professor Kafatos emphasised as one aim of the European Research Council – but to make Europe the destination of choice for the most excellent researchers. This requires, of course, governmental action to adapt laws on immigration and visas and consistent and long-term support from the Commission and other agents. We are delighted at the invitation which we received on Thursday from Minister Zhang to develop collaboration between our Association and China and we hope for the assistance of the Commission in developing this proposal and other future proposals from other parts of the world. As this example shows, the work of universities is relevant to many aspects of the European Union and we are ready to play our part in working with the Commission on every aspect of its external policy, from development aid to competitiveness.

Research is my second general theme, because again the creation and dissemination of knowledge by universities in the service of science, the economy and public policy underpins so much of the work of European governments and the European Union. Because of the crucial

importance of research to Europe's future and position in the world, we look forward to the imminent re-launch of the European Research Area. We trust that the universities will be named as integral partners within the ERA and that we will play as central a role in the development of the institutions of the ERA – fostering both basic research and technology transfer - as we have done in the development of the European Research Council and Framework Programme 7. Such instruments are important components of the strategic plans which almost all universities have developed in the last ten years and of the strategic management of research which has followed.

My third theme is quality. We sometimes feel as if governments believe that they must impose high quality and quality improvement on their universities. Not so. Quality in teaching and research – and in all the services which we provide to students and the community – is fundamental to our work and to our belief in ourselves. We are therefore proud that, in so many European countries, quality assessment and improvement systems are being developed in a partnership between governments and universities. Assessments demonstrate, time after time, the high quality of our work but they must also recognise diversity and encourage, rather than constrain, innovation and creativity in teaching and learning. The new European Register of quality assurance agencies, which we expect ministers to approve in May has been developed by an innovative partnership between stakeholders; it is an

important building block in this area. It is also an essential component of the global attractiveness of European higher education.

My fourth theme also requires some building blocks to be put in place by European governments. You would expect me to say that universities need funding which will match the expectations that Europe has for our work. We applaud the efforts to raise the proportion of European GDP that is devoted to higher education and research towards internationally competitive levels. But there is something more. Universities need space to manage and develop. They need to be able to determine their diverse places within a common purpose. Micro-management or over-regulation, both of which we can still see in our systems, are the enemies of innovation and efficiency. There are still far too many countries in Europe where the minister, or ministry, thinks that it knows best. University leaders want to be able to manage their resources; they are frustrated when they cannot control the pay of their staff or the use of their buildings, or when they do not even know how much their operations cost. This is a terrible misuse of the time and energy of intelligent and highly motivated people. It is frankly insulting to us when we are told that we must be careful of public money; of course we must – and of course, as responsible citizens we want to be so. But governments or Commission auditors will not get the best out of us by keeping from us the information that we need or by treating us as naughty children. We must particularly ensure that the European Research Council is not stifled by unnecessary bureaucracy.

Fifth and finally, I return to the theme of continuing change. The Bologna process has shown that universities can embrace change, that they are inventive and innovative – even when governments fail to provide the resources which are needed. We look forward, after 2010, to continuing the Bologna process and to focussing on areas which still need change. I single out, in this respect, lifelong learning and widening participation. The Europe of Knowledge cannot rely just on increasing the proportion of young people going to university, essential though that is. We must recognise that – because our systems in the past were so elitist, because society excluded so many people from the benefits of higher education which we in this audience were fortunate enough to enjoy – we have wasted or stunted the potential of generations of older people. Some universities find it easier to deal with bright young minds, but others – and here I stress again our theme of diversity with a common purpose – accept that the older generations also deserve a chance to learn and to contribute. So Bologna must continue and with it an increased focus on its social objectives and on lifelong learning. We are glad that Commissioner Figel mentioned both of these aims when he spoke to us and we applaud and support the dream of European higher education which he set out. But lifelong learning, in particular, requires the creation of a consistent and unified European policy framework.

So what do we need to do together to put these aspirations, these dreams, into reality.

**First, we must dispel the myths that still surround higher education and explain clearly what it is that the modern European university now does. Universities can change and change quickly, they are responsive, they are hungry to do better for themselves, their students and their societies.**

**One pervasive myth is that universities are somehow averse to working with industry, whether in research or in helping students to prepare for the labour market. This is an implication of some recent documents from the European Commission that have called for this reason for the modernisation of Europe's universities. The reverse is the case, as Richard Lambert, former editor of the Financial Times, found when he studied university-industry relations in the UK. He concluded that universities were keen and eager to work with industry, but it was industry in the UK, by contrast to the US, which did not know how to use the universities effectively. This is one among a number of reasons why overall expenditure on research and higher education in Europe lags so far behind the United States.**

**Of course we do not believe that all is well. Whatever we may feel about league tables of the best world universities, it is disturbing – and a collective failure – that so few European universities appear at the head of such tables. This is not a myth, but a real failure of collective European resolve. It cannot however be solved by concentrating**

resources on just a few institutions; it requires governments to have the courage to set their universities free.

We need the autonomy, and the financial resources, to get on with the job. We do not need minute regulation, control of our curricula and academic programmes, directives from capital cities about our finances and use of buildings, constant and suspicious inspection of the quality of our work. European governments cannot simultaneously demand change and modernisation and, in the same breath, restrict the funds which they allocate to higher education and research and also deny universities the freedom to raise the extra funds that they need from students or industry.

We welcome, President Barroso, the personal interest which you have shown in these issues and the collective support that the European Union has given, through the framework programmes, the Socrates-Erasmus programmes, Tempus, the European Research Council and many other actions, to higher education and research both within and outside the Union. We hope that the European Institute of Technology will make a similar contribution. I am sure that you recognise that, even if the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area are formally established in 2010, there will still be much, much more that we can do together, both within and outside Europe.

**At the centre of the Lisbon declaration will be a grand claim. It is that Europe's universities, which have for over 850 years championed enquiry, fostered a civilised and tolerant culture and prepared young people for their role in society and the economy, now recognise and welcome the even wider role that they are expected to perform. It is sometimes perplexing to us that we are expected to do so many different things, and to do all of them well, but that is the nature of institutions which are central to what Europe has been and to what Europe will become. If I may be forgiven one reference to a great Englishman and a great European, Winston Churchill, we can echo his words: "Give us the tools and we will finish the job."**