

Distinguished guest,

First of all it is a great honour to talk here but it's even a bigger privilege for a student to start the part on the way forward and debate on the next decade of Higher Education with all of you. And on the other hand I think Ladislav was right in putting a student up front for the start of this second day. First of all because students are allowed to dream - much more than policy makers or institutional governors. And second of all because the future of our higher education really lies within the student body, the core of higher education : creating well-educated individuals that are active citizens in our knowledge society, through a flexible learning path that is adapted to their needs.

I want to talk to you about three developments today. We have been talking about the Bologna process yesterday, about student centred learning, and other topics. However I will point out some additional remarks on this extraordinary reform that is very likely to continue for the next decade. Secondly I want to address the developments on the EU level, and the goals set in the new EU2020 strategy earlier this year by the heads of state of the European Union. And finally I want to talk about a worrying overlapping tendency that we can and should not ignore these days : the marketisation and commodification of higher education and it's surrounding activities.

But before I start with any of those subjects I need to go back to the roots of this discussion and the roots of our gathering this week. Above all ideas, and as a first premise for another ten years of Bologna process, or higher education in general, mine and any discourse should be based upon the human right to education. As declared by and reaffirmed on countless occasions by state leaders throughout the globe, education, including Higher Education must remain an invaluable, unassailable right, applied universally without any distinction on ethnicity, colour, gender, belief, socio-economic origin or other character.

Far too much, and I'll get back to that in my last point, this basic premise is under pressure, and especially the universal right to education is challenged.

As David mentioned yesterday, the European Commission has two discourses about education : economic growth and social justice. In most of the cases though, when it comes to education in recent years the economic growth discourse prevails on the social justice discourse and although everyone now acknowledges the societal values of education, it seems not all of them seem to realize what is actually needed in order to enhance that societal value of education. In a maybe far fetched comparison I would compare it to charity : everyone agrees that the people in Haiti are suffering after the earthquake, but reaching for money in your pocket is a bit more difficult, especially when you don't have a personal benefit in the end.

And that is exactly where one of the core issues for higher education is situated : education and more in particular higher education is perceived as a way to evolve as a student for your own benefit but often the societal value is not recognized anymore, or is ignored as an excuse to withdraw from investment into it as a public.

In order to maintain and develop democracy, active citizenship and emancipation of individuals, education remains of key importance. Education allows citizens to be more sensitive to the democratic spirit and better skilled for participation in democratic processes in institutions. Besides education should function as an important force for the establishment of democracy and the resistance to undemocratic forces in society.

In many of the 'new democracies' in Eastern Europe, students have been in the front line for the battle against dictatorships and oppression of the people. ESU determinedly believes that it is important to maintain the political and social benefits of education in the future in order to promote the democratic spirit and to spread the influence of democracy in all levels of society.

These general considerations aside I want to go into structures a bit, and as said, I'll start off with the Bologna Process, or the European Higher Education Area as it should be described now, which was in a certain way able to maintain that value and has contributed more than ever before to a stronger position of our higher education in the European society and on the global

level. If we are to design the next years of higher education and its reforms the students ask nothing more from the Bologna Process **to stay on track**.

As I mentioned yesterday the values and the complete agenda behind the European Higher Education Area should be supported heavily. It is only sad that the signatory members are not able to stay on the track they promised to follow. They divert because of the national context, because of the economic downturn, because of institutional reluctance of implementation, or simply because of unwillingness to comply with what exactly they – or their predecessors - have assigned themselves to at a certain moment in time.

What is especially of concern for the next years of Higher Education reform is the paradigm change in interpreting the Bologna objectives. Slowly getting away from the value of European cooperation in the strict sense of intra-European trust building, the EHEA signatory countries have evolved to a more competitive state of mind, which is a bit comparable to friends becoming business partners. This is not entirely negative, as the implementation and Bologna agreements will be more realistic when working from a pragmatic background, but it can not conflict with the key values and objectives behind the process and the needs of higher education to truly influence and help societal development.

The main issue that we need to take into account in the next years and have been neglecting in the past is the social dimension of our education. We have not enough seen tremendous efforts to create more study places for socially or ethnically underrepresented groups. Not only the access is an issue, but in most of the higher education reforms of the past years we have seen a prioritization of research and development over student welfare and student support services, although a good researcher is born in a well-surrounded undergraduate and graduate study.

As we have already discussed yesterday, education has traditionally been a tool for social mobility, but this tool faces serious problems in most of the higher education systems. In the vision of ESU the emancipator function of HE is extremely important in the fight against poverty. Thus we demand more

attention in the future to the problem of disproportional participation of people from lower social-economic background and migrants. Instead of having a European Higher Education Area built on drivers like international attractiveness and excellence, we should focus on accessibility and retention rates because enlightened societies should never tolerate obstacles for groups and individuals in the struggle against poverty.

Another objective of the Bologna Process is to have an actual European Area of exchange, an open-border system of education, which we undoubtedly support. However, the “utopia” of 20% mobile students by 2020 is lacking even the basic tools to start dreaming. While governments have agreed to this ambition, and as I’ll refer to later, while José Manuel Barroso wants to give the possibility to all young people to be mobile, the financing of study periods is declining and a teacher in English literature in Italy still won’t trust the quality of the same course taught by his counterpart in Germany.

Although the largest action for community cooperation in the European field of education has been within the field of mobility, through landmark programmes such as Erasmus and Tempus, only a vanishing small percentage of students today are actually mobile, and many of the more significant examples of mobility have involved developing countries being robbed of their best people, who left for better lives in more developed regions. Thus, at its best, mobility is a manifestation of personal independence, a tool for exchange of cultures and the personification of unlimited opportunity for the individual. At its worst, it is a tool used by rich countries to gather more highly skilled workforce from developing countries.

This form of brain gain with highly negative effects for the outgoing countries is unacceptable. A more constructive attitude of balanced mobility in a global context that rejects any form of brain drain is needed. Despite the efforts made, Europe is far from becoming an area where free mobility is the norm not the exception, and at least for the foreseeable future – taking into account the recent CHEPS study on student participation in the Erasmus programme - the various funding programmes and their design will continue to be the main driver of mobility.

Only with a true institutional commitment and with sufficient financial support through grants – not loans – a first realistic attempt to reach Utopia can be made. For this, governments indeed need some more financial freedom, but more can be done already by prioritizing expenditure. And next to that we need trust, trust between institutions and individual programme managers, rather than narrow-minded teachers and international offices that prevent students from getting their credits earned abroad recognized at home.

ESU hopes that the countries in the next few years could agree to a sort of Mobility Treaty, an agreement comparable to the CEEPUS scheme, in which countries open up and finance an equal number of study places for incoming students. This system of financing would be based on grant support, but adapted to the national context, as the national government is providing the support to incoming students. This would for example mean that an Albanian student in Norway would live and get support based on Norwegian standards and that a Norwegian student in Albania would also receive an Albanian grant to cover his study costs, realistically based on the study costs in the country. This system would avoid situations in which students studying abroad can't meet their actual living expenses from their study grant, and can be a tool to create easier recognition and less administrative and financial barriers like portability of grants. Rather than an unmanageable pan-European loan scheme for mobile students as promoted by the World Bank and picked up by the European Commission, students would not have to be afraid of the financial risk of going abroad, and would be able to benefit from a balanced opportunity to access education in another country.

But let's move on to the second part of my discourse today, which is focusing more on the European Union itself and its ambitions in terms of higher education reform in the next years. Although David rightfully mentioned that the EU has no or little legal competence on education, the increase in active participation on education by the European Commission cannot go unnoticed. The Lisbon Agenda initially decreased our sympathy towards this involvement, but the new EU2020 strategy shows some promising developments. The European heads of states were not only able to agree to

a 40% benchmark for tertiary education in Europe, but they seemingly also re-prioritised the knowledge society above the knowledge economy. Values such as equity, social cohesion and active citizenship are being promoted, and GDP percentages will now be invested in higher education as a way forward to tackle the current economic crisis.

But also here not all is as rosy as it seems. The Youth on the Move flagship initiative announced all young people should be able to be mobile, and the new set of Erasmus, LLP, Youth in Action and other programmes should support this ambition, together with a number of other ambitious projects to make students more mobile, active and in the end more skilled. But to start with, the newly proposed budget for 2011 does not match the ambitions that were recently agreed upon, it cuts funding rather than raising the financial support. And when we're talking about European finances and the budget that will soon be discussed for the next years of programmes, it is very questionable that without a serious turnaround in EU budget spending, any of the Youth on the Move objectives and the bigger EU2020 objective of a smarter Europe in 2020 will be achieved. The European Students' Union, as European citizens, being sons and daughters of -or being themselves - European tax payers, asks for more structural support for education and capacity building in underdeveloped regions, rather than for support of agricultural development, which – honestly – when you look at the net result of the investment in agriculture of the past years in mainly Italy, Portugal and Greece, has been a complete failure and waste of European tax payers money.

More in detail Youth on the Move also mentions the development of the next modernization agenda by 2011, which will probably have a significant impact on the higher education reform in the next years. ESU hopes that this modernization agenda will be nothing like the previous one, and will take over the recent signals of treating education as a cornerstone of our society, rather than a mean to attract smarter workforce from overseas. We ask that the drafters of the new agenda take especially three things into account : student

participation, the social dimension and the regional imbalance in higher education.

While students and especially my predecessors have established a dialogue position in the Bologna Process and in most of the pan-European structures dealing with Higher Education, there is still no structural acceptance of student participation on the level of the EU institutions. The Commission usually tries to deal with education as with any other sector, taking into account the voice of employers and employees, but education can never fit under this simplified dialogue structure, and in this specific situation both teacher and student participation should be structurally aimed for.

As a second point the new modernization agenda should not aim solely at making our system more competitive and –pardon my words- American. A true modernization agenda, aiming at creating a stronger European welfare and a stronger European Higher Education should tackle the subject of the social dimension, and propose ways and priorities to enhance the access, progression and completion for students from various socio-economic backgrounds.

And lastly the modernization agenda should not treat Europe as one, until it has become one. Not only the Bologna process has a two-speed development but education and societal development in general suffers from great regional discrepancy. I'm not referring only to what Voldemar Tomusk once described as the misunderstood situation of Eastern Europe "Catching up with West", but more broadly there are great differences in student welfare, curriculum development, brain circulation and implementation of modernizing elements, such as mobility and social dimension, which should be balanced out in the next ten years. Globalisation is one of the key drivers of change in Higher Education, but we believe that there should be a harmony between regional development and internationalisation and therefore we encourage the modernization agenda to promote fostering an unselfish attitude towards brain mobility and to focus on social coherence and sustainability, rather than brain gain. The agenda should provide the necessary tools for inter-governmental solidarity to reach a

common status, rather than a patchwork of highs and lows as we're sadly seeing at the moment.

As a very last point I want to express one overarching concern which is the commodification and trade of education as were it a service, just like consultancy, food supply or transport. The financial crisis hasn't helped at all in this regard, but this evolution started long before the crisis and has not been condemned enough by the institutional leaders, and the governments. We rather see those institutional leaders and governments going to conferences and trying to be part of the money machine higher education has become.

Let me give an example from Kazakhstan, earlier this year, where, in the nice setting of this new Bologna signatory country, I overheard a representative of a British university that also offers accreditation services heavily debating with a German colleague from an accreditation agency why they charge at least 60.000 euro for an accreditation instead of 35.000 like the German agency. Or let me give the example of Ghent University from Belgium, opening up an office in Beijing to attract as many Chinese students as possible, that will pay high tuition fees to study in Belgium, unlike the Belgian students. In some countries these fees for non EEA students are even triple the amount of what a regular tuition fee would cost.

And nobody is protesting. Let alone that it is even noticed, by the majority of citizens in our society. Education has, of course without a lot of transparency, become a variety of parallel businesses : from accreditation, over access to education for international students and for local students, to quality assurance, business schools, student support services, etc.

This tendency towards treating education as a service, to the customer-student who will have to pay the market price for it, is what worries us the most of all. Even the Bolkestein directive of the European Union opens the possibility for at least private education to be considered as a service and to enjoy the free trade benefits of the European Union. Although a tradable good, nobody knows who assures the quality of that tradable good once it

starts travelling, given the fact that no barriers like national quality assurance regulations can be installed that might prevent the free trade of goods from other countries. Where does it stop? Where has the acknowledgment of the value of higher education for students and for a society gone to and why is there no higher pressure from experts, from governments to keep acknowledging this value, and to fight these dangerous evolutions?

Do we maybe enjoy the fact that education became a profitable occupation?
Do we silently ignore the billion euro machine we are creating?

Did we forget what education is meant to be for?

The students didn't, and the students already feel the impact of this change, not the least in their wallet.

So when Ladislav gives us the chance to open the debate on how the next ten years of higher education in Europe should look like, we want to take this opportunity to ask for a strong message against this systematic profit-seeking institutional expansion, and for a renewed ambition of treating education as a public good and a public responsibility.