

SPEECH TO THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS' EUROPEAN MEETING ON "A NEW HUMANISM FOR EUROPE: THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES"

Closing session

Roma, June 24, 2007

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Your Eminences, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you today on behalf of the Council of Europe. There are several reasons for this pleasure: that of being in one of the world's great cities, with a unique combination of tradition and contemporary presence; that of having an opportunity to discuss fascinating topics over several days; and not least the very real pleasure that an international civil servant like myself takes in discussion with the most important people in higher education: teachers and students.

Yet, more than anything, it gives me great pleasure to address issues of higher education policy at a meeting here in Roma, just over a year after the Bologna conference on "The Cultural Heritage and Academic Values of the European University and the Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area" organized by the Congregation for Catholic Education in April 2006, with the participation of the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES.

Like last year's conference, the consideration of "A New Humanism for Europe: the Role of Universities" in which we have been engaged over the past few days is vital because it deals with the very essence of higher education: our purposes and our values.

As some of you will know, I am engaged in the Bologna Process. I firmly believe that the Bologna Process has been a success so far. The reforms of the Bologna Process are far reaching, and they are important. Carrying them out has not been easy, it has sometimes required political courage and it has taken an effort to build agreement around key policies and goals in each country. Goals reached give cause for satisfaction, but they are also the stuff of which new challenges are made.

The Bologna Process is nearing the point in 2010 at which it will become the European Higher Education Area. By that time, I hope and believe we will have carried out the structural reforms that have been a hallmark of the Bologna Process so far: the three tier degree structure, quality assurance and qualifications frameworks.

These reforms are important because the attractiveness of Europe will increasingly depend on the quality and relevance of our teaching, learning and research. These are

conditions *sine qua non*: we cannot build a successful higher education area on anything less than top quality education and research. Quality development is and should be a key concern of every teacher, student, administrator and policy maker. Quality development is the prerequisite for quality assurance, and it is not a spectator sport.

Nevertheless, structural reform, however needed, cannot by itself make the European Higher Education Area, nor can they alone ensure good quality. Structures are to higher education what churches are to Christians: essential, but also devoid of meaning unless they are filled with faith and spirit. Discussing higher education and speaking only about structures is like discussing the Church without speaking of God.

Our greatest challenge is therefore, I believe, to articulate a clearer vision of why higher education is crucial to our future. Preparation for the labor market *is* important, and it is what both academic and political leaders tend to talk about. However, let us *also* talk about higher education in preparation for democratic citizenship, personal development and the development of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

Not least, let us consider these four major purposes of higher education as *complementary* rather than as *contradictory*. Our graduates must be able to tackle the big issues as well as the bottom line. European higher education will be admired not only for its value *added* but also for the values *embedded* in it and *transmitted* through it. Training develops technical skills and know *how*, while education should also develop attitudes, a sense of values and know *why*.

Our higher education will be admired for the subject specific skills it provides as well as for the generic competences that enable higher education graduates to put issues into context. Our graduates, whatever their field, must be able to challenge preconceived assumptions with a critical mind – critical *and* constructive. They must be able to communicate with people from other backgrounds, linguistically and culturally. Higher education is successful only where knowledge is accompanied by understanding, creativity and the ability to act.

Not least, higher education must teach us to cope with paradoxes, and one of the great paradoxes of our societies is that while we have more highly trained specialists than ever before, we seem to have fewer intellectuals. This is potentially dangerous. Knowing how to push a button is one thing, understanding the ethical and moral consequences of doing so is quite another.

Another paradox is that we want to be attractive to others, yet apparently not so attractive that others will want to live with us and not only visit. As Europeans, we celebrate the hyphenated Americans, yet we too often frown upon the hyphenated Europeans. This is perhaps a fundamental problem of our societies, but it is a particularly serious one for universities, which are international by definition. The knowledge and understanding that universities develop know no national boundaries, and the community of scholars is an international one. Developing the European Higher Education Area without looking beyond our borders would be as meaningless as developing higher education solely

within the confines of national borders. Therefore, I am happy that Ministers in London adopted a strategy for the Bologna Process in a global context.

Just as it is impossible to elaborate effective higher education policies within the confines of a single country, it is impossible to do so without reference to other areas of public policy. One obvious case in point is money: European universities are mainly financed by public funds, but few can survive – or at least satisfy their academic ambitions – without also seeking funds elsewhere. This is a triple challenge to governments. Firstly, in finding the means to increase public funding for higher education and thus demonstrate its importance. Secondly, in establishing frameworks that will encourage funding of higher education from other sources. Thirdly, in resisting the temptation to use funding from other sources as an excuse to cut public funding.

At a broader level, however, the link between higher education policies and other areas of public policy raise the issue of the public responsibility for higher education and research. This is a cornerstone of the European Higher Education Area. For the public responsibility to be a reality, however, we must look at how it is exercised in modern societies. We must look at the public responsibility for laying down the framework within which all higher education, public and private, will be provided. We must look at the public responsibility for ensuring equal opportunity to higher education. We must look at the public responsibility for financing higher education as well as for actual provision. The Council of Europe has undertaken important work in this field, and our Committee of Ministers last month adopted a Recommendation on the Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research. This is a significant recommendation, but the public responsibility for higher education must remain a key topic of the European Higher Education Area beyond 2010.

As academics, we must remind ourselves constantly that while there is a public responsibility *for* higher education, there is also a public responsibility *of* higher education, and contributing to building a sustainable democratic culture built on sound values is at the heart of this responsibility.

I do not believe that the proverbial ivory tower has ever been an apt metaphor for universities. If it had been, universities would not have survived – with the Church and Parliament – for centuries to become one of the oldest living institutions of European societies, nor would they have become what in modern terminology would probably be labeled as a successful export product.

Nevertheless, it cannot hurt to remind ourselves that the higher education community must pursue its research and teaching in all areas of importance to sustaining our societies. That includes the ethics, values and principles on which we found our societies as well as the mechanisms that make them work.

Too often we talk about the “society surrounding higher education” and forget that this is not an ocean surrounding an island. It is the very society of which higher education is a part. With this larger society, the higher education community must engage. Members

of the academic community must engage *with* and *in* society as citizens, and universities must do so institutionally. Higher education and research have a lot to contribute, and we should not wait to be asked. We live in an age where the claims for public funding and public attention increase, as do the demands for performance. Higher education leaders must recognize that contributing to the economy is important, but they must define a playing field that is much broader than that. Higher education must contribute to society and not just the part of it that can be counted in dollars and Euros.

Higher education must engage with local society, to improve the opportunity of those living in its immediate neighborhood as well as further afield to share the benefits of higher education. At local, national and global level, academics – as individuals and also as a community and institutionally – must engage in public debate and in public service. To those of us who share the faith that has been so vividly present during these days, this is a double duty: as academics and as Christians. In the age of the sound bite, we must also drive home the importance of institutions that by definition take a longer view.

In conclusion, higher education and research should play a key role in developing the kind of society we would like to leave to future generations – societies that are sustainable environmentally and politically, socially and ethically, economically and culturally. The European Higher Education Area must meet the test not only of workable structures, but also of a workable and inspiring vision of the contribution of higher education to a society based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law and proficient in intercultural dialogue; a Europe coherent enough to be strong and diverse enough to be interesting; a Europe unafraid to engage with the broader world.

Ultimately, higher education must inspire and prepare us to do *well*, but also to do *good*.