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Speech at the start of the European University Institute's post-doctoral training programme in the social sciences

European University Institute, 4 October 2006

Dear Mr President,
Distinguished professors,
Dear post-doctoral fellows,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured by your invitation to participate in this conference that celebrates the launching of the European University Institute's post-doctoral training programme in the social sciences.

Since its inception in 1972, the Institute has brought together top-level social scientists, lawyers, economists and historians from across Europe and beyond. It has become a truly European institution which draws on the best of diverse European traditions. **The European Commission is proud to have been associated with the Institute over the past decades.**

The new post-doctoral programme that is formally inaugurated today puts the emphasis on training in pedagogical skills for tomorrow's university professors, helping post-doctoral fellows to move from research to teaching. This is an innovative programme and, again, I must salute the Institute for having created it.

I would like to reflect on how this new programme fits into the framework of the broader modernisation agenda which the European Union has identified for Europe's university sector. In the process I think that you – as future professors – might be interested in reflecting on what kind of universities you will be working in.

THE CHALLENGES

Everyone agrees that universities are important drivers of Europe's well-being and welfare. Their importance in this respect will become even greater in the future as Europe moves along the path it has chosen of being an economy and a society which is built on knowledge. Europe's leaders identified the creation of knowledge at the Lisbon Summit in March 2000 as the only way forward if Europe is to continue to be prosperous and to have the kind of society and social systems which our citizens want. Higher education should serve this ambition by being a mechanism for the transmission of knowledge and skills, a generator of the innovations on which Europe will compete and a forum in which we solve societal and cultural challenges. However, our higher education sector is too often not in a position to deliver its full potential because of the way it is structured, governed and funded. There are **significant performance gaps** with respect to other university systems around the world. Let me illustrate the point.

First, we fall well behind the United States and several Asian countries in terms of the numbers participating in higher education:

- The access rate for the EU-25 is on average just 56% of the young population (between 20-24), but in some member states it is as low as 29% . It is 81% in the United States and over 80% in South Korea.

Secondly, our universities have lost ground in research. We gain a much lower share of patents and Nobel prizes than the United States. The share of GDP which goes into university-based research is much lower here than in the US. And clearly the US is a more attractive research location – Europe’s multi-national companies perform much of their research through their North American subsidiaries.

Thirdly, there is a brain drain of Europe’s best and brightest students, academics and researchers who increasingly look across the Atlantic to raise their ambitions. Knowledge, talent and innovation flows from Europe to the United States.

Fourthly, the best-known global ranking of universities (made by Shanghai University) indicates that, within the world’s top 20, Europe is represented only by two institutions. Such rankings should certainly be taken with a grain of salt, but they tell a significant story nonetheless. They suggest that we need to step up our efforts to reach the highest levels of excellence, even if they also show that our strength in depth, with more than 200 European institutions within the world’s top 500 universities. We need to build on this.

The **main factors behind this European performance** are known:

- Fragmentation: our institutions remain too focused on national or regional objectives. Our economies and our enterprises have become global in their focus; our universities have not;
- Lack of specialisation: in Europe, we are good at providing education to a broad mass, but less good at meeting other more specialised objectives and at aspiring to excellence;

- Under-funding, both for education and research. The returns on investment in higher education are positive, for society, for individuals and for enterprise – greater investment into well-modernised universities from individuals, from business and, to a lesser extent, from government would be fully justified;
- There is a clear reluctance to build cooperation between universities and business, something which is key for research and innovation; and
- Insulation from the labour market: universities owe it to their students to provide them with the capacities to succeed in a challenging and changing labour market.

It's interesting to think about these issues in the context of this new training we are marking today. We should remember: post-docs are key to the future of our academic landscape. Due to the demographic structure of the current professorial staff, a major turnover in the ranks of professors will happen in the next decade. In the next 6 to 8 years two-thirds of all full professors will need to be replaced. For a middle-sized country like the Netherlands, this is the equivalent of 1600 full professors out of a total of 2500.

So Europe needs to be “Producing” the next generation of professors with a sufficiently good doctoral training. Here, Europe does seem to be on the right track. The annual output in Europe increased from 45.000 in 1996 to 75.000 in 2003. Unfortunately, Europe is losing many of its home-grown doctors. In a recent article, the American weekly *TIME* estimates that 400.000 scientific researchers of European origin now work and live in the United States via the brain drain I referred to earlier. Only 13% of these intend to return. It is clear that a special effort needs to be made to stop this brain-drain. The new member states are even more vulnerable. Since academic salaries are in no way competitive with what is offered in the United States or Western Europe, it is

important that a special effort is made to provide the kind of conditions that will keep their young doctors in Europe and provide incentives for the return of those who do go to the United States.

The attractiveness of the United States can, at least in part, be explained by its continent-wide and flexible “education job market”, in combination with well-established post-doctoral programmes. In comparison, Europe still has a long way to go. The obstacles resulting from the fragmentation and compartmentalization of our “education job market” are further complicated by cultural and linguistic diversities.

RESPONSES TO THE CHALLENGES

When looking for responses to the challenges facing us, I think we can learn from the **experience of the European University Institute**. By operating at the European level, and by concentrating on research, the Institute is a truly European centre of training and research in the social sciences, law, economics and history. It has overcome two of the problems mentioned earlier - fragmentation and the lack of specialisation. Your approach within the social sciences carries many echoes of the approach which we are suggesting for the future of Europe’s universities.

And so I would now like to **summarise the European-level agenda for higher education**. All suggestions and ideas which I will outline should be understood in the light of subsidiarity – it is for the member states to plan and implement their education policy; the Commission facilitates reflection, mutual learning and seeks to stimulate Member States to ensure that important strategic issues get the policy focus that they deserve. In this way, in a communication on modernising universities last May, the Commission identified seven points:

1) Break down the barriers around universities in Europe

We aim to ensure that by 2010 the core Bologna reforms, which will create greater comparability across systems, should be fully achieved. Building on this, by 2015 at least one third of all MA graduates and one fifth of BA graduates should have spent at least one term abroad – the Union’s programmes to support mobility such as Erasmus will help. It is also essential that recognition of qualifications obtained in another member state be made simpler and quicker. This is why we have proposed on a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. Europeans too often face obstacles when they move from one country to another to learn or work, or when they want add to their earlier education. The European Qualifications Framework will provide a common language to describe qualifications which will help member states, employers and individuals to compare qualifications across diverse systems and so to promote mobility for learning or working.

2) Provide the right skills and competencies for the labour market

Higher education institutions should feel responsible for the integration of their graduates in the labour market. Preparing graduates to enter the specific labour market for professors is one aspect of this agenda, one addressed by the new training programme we are celebrating today: there seems to me to be no contradiction between a university’s commitment to the development of knowledge and a determination to equip its graduates with what they will need to succeed in the world of work.

3) Reduce the funding gap/make funding work harder in education and research

Resources per student available to universities have declined over recent decades. This is unsustainable. We suggest that member states should adopt the target that – by 2010 – the total funding for a modernised higher education sector (not for the status quo) should not be less than 2 % of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), compared to 2.7% in the United States (0.9 % from public sources; 1.8 % private). Note that I refer to total funding and not to public funding only. There is a strong case for ensuring that the extra funds come from business and from private sources – this, most probably, would mean from fees paid by students.

4) Create real autonomy and accountability for universities

Our idea is that governments should provide strategic direction for the higher education sector as a whole, setting policies for access, diversity and funding. Within this, universities should then have the freedom and responsibility to develop different profiles, missions and strategies, always accepting that they are fully accountable to society for their results and cost-efficiency.

5) Develop research and innovation capacities at universities

We suggest that member states develop new models for governing their research activities. Universities should build lasting partnerships with the business community. We need to create a good interaction within universities between the three sides of the knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation.

In this context, I would like to say a few words on the Commission plan for the creation of a European Institute of Technology. In February 2005, President Barroso presented this idea as part of the mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy. The Institute should be a flagship for excellence in higher education, research and innovation and in ensuring the interaction between these fields. It

should serve three important objectives. First, it will pool excellent institutions and talented people to achieve the critical mass needed to be amongst the best in the world. Second, it should provide an attractive context for cooperation between academia and enterprises. Third, it should act as a model for change, exemplifying the benefits of a modern, flexible structure. This is important as newly emerging inter-disciplinary fields require new dynamic and flexible working and governance models. The Commission will publish its formal proposal for the EIT next week so you will certainly hear more of this idea soon.

6) Acknowledge and reward excellence at the highest level

I consider that we should work for enhanced support at European level to develop excellence at graduate/doctoral schools. Competition for excellence in the research field should be strengthened through the European Research Council. I can add that the Commission is also planning to re-launch the idea of a “European Doctorate” label for programmes with a distinctive European outlook.

7) Build-up an attractive image of European universities in the world

Improving the image of European higher education and research around the world requires a serious marketing effort. Member states could certainly do more; the Commission can help via programmes such as Erasmus Mundus. This programme is intended to strengthen European co-operation and international links by supporting high-quality European Masters Courses, by enabling students and scholars from around the world to engage in study at European universities, as well as by encouraging the moves by European students and scholars towards third countries. Erasmus Mundus is a major success. The

European Commission has selected, for the 2006-2007 academic year, 1.377 students and 231 university teachers to participate in the programme.

I would summarise that the core of our agenda is to restore the quest for excellence to the centre of the university agenda. Your post-doctoral training programme constitutes a concrete, good example in this regard.

The new programme has an important **added value in comparison with existing post-doctoral programmes** in Europe. Those are generally focussed on perfecting the research skills and research activities of the young academic. Of course, the research aspect is crucial for an academic career. However, the new post-doctoral training programme launched today is significant in that – in addition – it makes a concrete link to the professorial labour market and has a special emphasis on preparing for an academic “métier” by focussing on teaching skills.

I believe that the European University Institute is making a major contribution to building the European University Area: graduates of the programme will be truly prepared to teach anywhere in Europe, not just their country of origin. Furthermore, the existence of this programme is likely to assist the re-integration of Europeans who have obtained their Ph.D.s in the United States. I hope there are some returnees among us today.

Furthermore, concentrating as it does on the social sciences, this initiative will address a range of academic disciplines which are most directly linked to the future of European integration and the European Union. It is relevant to explicitly mention here the operational objectives of the Jean Monnet Programme, as those will be the guiding principles for our future support to educational activities in the area of European integration. They are:

- (a) to stimulate excellence in teaching, research and reflection in European integration studies in higher education institutions within and outside the Community;
- (b) to enhance knowledge and awareness among specialist academics and among European citizens generally of issues relating to European integration;
- (c) to support key European institutions dealing with issues relating to European integration – in this context, the new legal basis explicitly mentions Community support for the European University Institute.

The Institute will remain a major partner of the European Commission in the implementation of these objectives. In the current, sometimes difficult, context of European integration, I am counting on you to fully play your role as providers of occasionally critical, but always accurate, knowledge on the European Union. This is important, not only in the old and new member states, but in countries around the world if our European venture is to be understood.

In conclusion, I am convinced that the new post-doctoral centre can make an important contribution to the Commission's objectives both in modernising the university landscape and in the context of the new Jean Monnet Programme. Your post-doc scheme has all the means to bring together sufficient critical mass and creating the necessary synergies to produce top-level results. As such, the programme will help to start the necessary “brain-gain”, to ensure that you, professors of tomorrow, can thrive in the ever-changing universities of tomorrow.

Thank you.

