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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

**on the Council Resolution of 23 November 2007 on Modernising Universities for
Europe's competitiveness in a global knowledge economy**

{SEC(2008 2719)}

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1. BACKGROUND

This Report and the accompanying Commission Staff Working Paper have been written in response to a request of the Council formulated in the Council Resolution of 23 November 2007 on modernising universities for Europe's competitiveness in a global knowledge economy. The Council invited the Commission to "support the Member States with regard to the modernisation agenda, and in particular to:

- (1) Identify, in consultation with the relevant higher education and research stakeholders, as well as national authorities, possible measures to address the challenges and obstacles that universities in the European Union face in realising their modernisation and in fully contributing to the goals of the Lisbon agenda;
- (2) Facilitate mutual learning, in the context of the Lisbon Agenda, in particular within the Education and Training 2010 work programme and the follow-up of the Green Paper on the ERA, as well as through encouraging partnerships between universities and industry/private sector;
- (3) Identify possible measures to address the obstacles to the mobility of students, teachers and researchers across Europe and in particular to the mutual recognition of credits and diplomas² and promote the exchange of good practices in this regard;
- (4) Monitor and assess the impact of, in liaison with national programme structures:
 - the social background of students participating in Erasmus,
 - the contribution of Erasmus to the modernisation agenda,
 - the contribution of Erasmus Mundus to the international attractiveness of European Universities.

While the Report focuses principally on the mobility aspects of the Council Resolution, it also provides an update of the state of play as regards the modernisation of European universities. It outlines the work undertaken by the Commission in response to this request and sets out the main conclusions from this work. The associated Commission Staff Working Paper outlines the findings in greater detail.

¹ <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st16/st16096-re01.en07.pdf>

² The recognition of professional qualifications of teachers and researchers is already covered by Directive 2005/36/EC of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications. This Directive simplifies modernises and consolidates 15 existing Directives adopted between 1975 and 1999. It had to be implemented in Member States by 20 October 2007.

2. WORK UNDERTAKEN AND MAIN FINDINGS

The Commission has been working with Member States and the higher education sector to identify the modernisation agenda for universities covering their three missions (education, research and innovation) and to support its implementation through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), Expert Groups and Studies (involving dialogue among clusters of policy makers and experts, peer-learning activities, indicators, benchmarks, reports and analyses), by taking specific initiatives (Quality Assurance, ECTS, EQF, EIT³, Data Collection on universities etc.) and by supporting the initiatives of others (pilot projects, associations, networks etc.) through the Lifelong Learning Programme and the 7th EU Framework Programme for Research.

2.1. Addressing the Challenges and Obstacles that Universities face regarding Modernisation

The main challenges and obstacles regarding the modernisation of higher education were set out in the Commission's 2006 Communication⁴ which suggested nine areas to be addressed related to university governance, mobility, autonomy and accountability, partnerships with the business community, enhance inter-disciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity in the training and research agendas, knowledge interaction with society, the reward of excellence, curricula and funding. Member States broadly endorsed the analysis and agreed to report on their implementation of the modernisation agenda in their reports under the Education and Training Agenda 2010 (E&T 2010). These reports, which are part of the Lisbon reporting exercise, as well studies and surveys show that although progress is being made in all nine areas, a lot remains to be done. The Commission will continue its dialogue with national authorities and stakeholders on how best to advance the modernisation agenda.

2.2. Facilitating mutual learning within the Education and Training 2010 work programme and the follow-up to the Green paper on the European Research Area and through encouraging partnerships between universities and industry.

The Commission has taken several initiatives to facilitate mutual learning and apply the OMC to the reform of higher education, such as the Cluster on the Modernisation of Higher Education, the launch of the CREST Working Group on mutual learning on approaches to improve the excellence of research in universities, the annual Report on progress towards the Lisbon objectives for education and training, including a number of indicators and benchmarks, several expert groups to look at various aspects related to the research mission of universities in the context of ERA (single labour market for researchers, strengthening university-based research, external research funding and financial management, methodologies for assessing university-based research), and the University-Business Forum, launched in February 2008 and through the implementation of targeted Marie Curie Actions under the

³ ECTS: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System; EQF: European Qualifications Framework; EIT: European Institute of Innovation and Technology

⁴ "Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research, Innovation", COM(2006) 208

People Programme of FP7. The results of these initiatives show that the concept of mutual learning works. Full details on the various initiatives are given in the staff working paper.

2.3. Addressing obstacles to the mobility of students, teachers and researchers

The Commission established in December 2007 a High Level Expert Forum on Mobility to explore how the EU can, building on the success to date of the Erasmus programme, further expand mobility not only within the university sector but also among young people more generally, for example among young entrepreneurs and artists and in sectors such as vocational training.

In July 2008 the Forum presented its findings and recommendations. To make mobility the rule and no longer the exception, the Forum suggests setting both medium and long term mobility targets. Concerted action of the EU, Member States and all other stake holders is needed to further increase mobility. Funding for EU mobility programmes needs to be increased and Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus should complement each other.

As a follow-up of the Green Paper "The European Research Area: New Perspectives"⁵ the Commission adopted in May 2008 the Communication "Better careers and more mobility: a European Partnership for Researchers"⁶, to make rapid and measurable progress towards making Europe a more attractive place for entering and pursuing a research career, addressing four key areas: i) open recruitment and portability of grants, ii) social security and supplementary pensions rights, iii) attractive employment and working conditions and iv) enhancing the training, skills and experience of European researchers.

The Commission launched in June 2008 the new portal EURAXESS⁷ to provide a single access point to information and support services for researchers moving and pursuing research careers in other Member States.

The Commission also continues to address the question whether the structural changes induced by the Bologna Process hamper mobility. The limited data available seem to suggest that the introduction of three cycle structures may lead to a temporary stagnation or reduction of student mobility during a phase of adaptation but that the Bologna structures do not in principle pose an obstacle to mobility. The results of a study on transnational mobility currently under preparation by the German national agency for the Erasmus programme are expected for November 2008 and will shed additional light on this issue.⁸

⁵ COM(2007) 161 "The European research Area: New perspectives"

⁶ COM (2008) 317 final "Better careers and more mobility: a European Partnership for researchers"

⁷ www.ec.europa.eu/euraxess

⁸ German Academic Exchange Service DAAD, see www.daad.de

2.4. The impact of Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus

2.4.1. *Social background of Students participating in Erasmus*

A survey⁹ suggests that Erasmus programme participants are broadly representative of the student population and do not come from a more privileged background than other students. This would entail that Erasmus in effect helps students from less affluent families to study abroad in a way that would not otherwise be possible. Furthermore, the survey evidence suggests that Erasmus has succeeded in attracting slightly more students of this type between 2000 and 2005. An important issue is the role played by income-related supplements offered by certain Member states and regions. The Commission will follow closely further developments in this area.

2.4.2. *The contribution of Erasmus to the Modernisation Agenda*

A very recent study¹⁰ shows that Erasmus has had a considerable impact on the modernisation of European universities, notably in the areas of internationalisation, curricular innovation and quality assurance. All the activities supported by Erasmus in these three areas are also an integral part of the Bologna Process towards the European Higher Education Area. Moreover, they contribute to achieving the objectives of the Education and Training 2010 agenda within the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. The Commission attaches growing importance to measures and initiatives that increase the transparency of the mission and performance of universities by making them comparable.

2.4.3. *The Contribution of Erasmus Mundus to the International attractiveness of European Universities*

The Interim Evaluation of Erasmus Mundus¹¹ showed that the programme has enhanced the international attractiveness of European universities in various ways, e.g. through the promotion of the development of joint, double and multiple degrees and by promoting academic excellence in European higher education. The recommendations of the Interim Evaluation have been taken into consideration in drafting the future Erasmus Mundus Programme (Erasmus Mundus II), to start in 2009. As part of the programme, the Commission has supported the Global Promotion Project which aims at marketing Europe as an attractive study destination to students from around the world. The website www.study-in-europe.org, part of the Global Promotion Project, went online in May 2008.

⁹ Manuel Souto Otero and Andrew McCoshan, Survey of the Socio-Economic Background of ERASMUS students, Final Report, DG EQC 01/05, 2006

Schnitzer, Klaus und Middendorff, Elke, EUROSTUDENT 2005. Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe 2005

¹⁰ Impact of ERASMUS on European Higher Education: quality, openness and internationalisation - preliminary conclusions. August 2008, CHEPS, INCHER-Kassel and ECOTEC

¹¹ Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services LLP, Interim Evaluation of Erasmus Mundus, Final Report, June 2007, see http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/news_en.html

3. OPERATIONAL CONCLUSIONS

The OMC has already yielded good results in the implementation of the modernisation agenda of universities to improve the delivery of their interlinked missions of education, research and innovation. The Commission will continue to work with Member States and the higher education sector to overcome remaining obstacles and to develop innovative approaches. It is currently in the process of updating the strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training for the period after 2010.

The Commission will also contribute to the success of the Bologna Process and will make use of the Erasmus Programme/LLP, the 7th Framework programme for Research, the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme, as well as the Structural Funds and EIB loans to promote the modernisation of European higher education.

New action is envisaged in the following fields:

Mobility

The Commission will explore all options to boost substantially student and staff mobility in Europe and in this regard, explore with Member States and other actors how to give an appropriate follow-up to the recommendations of the High Level Expert Forum on Mobility. This includes the possibility of developing a European student lending facility in cooperation with the European Investment Bank. The Commission proposes to publish in June 2009 a Green Paper as a follow up to the High Level Forum and the policy discussion planned during the French Presidency, which will outline ways in which learning mobility – not just in Erasmus but in all forms of learning – can be expanded to become a norm and not an exception.

As regards researchers, efforts to enhance their mobility (geographical and sectoral) will be intensified in close cooperation with Member States in the context of the implementation of the recent Commission's Communication on the European Partnership for researchers as mentioned above.

New Skills for New Jobs

The Commission will support initiatives which help to define new skills for new jobs for a series of professional areas, building on the work done in the field of learning outcomes and competences for higher education (EQF, Bologna Qualifications Framework¹², Tuning Educational Structures in Europe¹³). This should help to develop the reflection on how universities can provide the right mix of skills and competencies for the labour market, which was one of the objectives mapped out in the 2006 communication on university modernisation.

¹² <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/QF-EHEA-May2005.pdf>

¹³ <http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>

University-Business cooperation

The Commission will continue to develop the Forum for University-Business cooperation launched in February 2008 with forthcoming events in Autumn 2008 and Spring 2009. It will publish a Communication on University-Business cooperation in 2009

Transparency in higher education performance

The Commission is supporting a feasibility study for creating a European University Data Collection to develop a set of comparable data allowing international benchmarks of universities for which first results are expected by 2009, and contributes to the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) by OECD.

The Commission will support initiatives with a global outreach to develop more robust and reliable methods for the classification and performance assessment of universities covering their different missions.

Conclusion

Through these initiatives and also through its programmes and continued policy dialogue with all stakeholders the Commission will continue to assist Member States and universities to achieve the reform objectives described in the Council Resolution of 23 November 2007.