

Access to Success Dissemination Conference

28 September 2010

Speech of Jean-Marc Rapp, EUA President

I would like to welcome you on this special occasion, on behalf of the European University Association (EUA) and the consortium of the project “Access to Success: Fostering Trust and Exchange between Europe and Africa”.

I would like to use the opportunity to speak to you here to explain why the Access to Success project and the resulting white paper are important to EUA, to the European Universities that EUA represents, and to the future development of European higher education.

Over the past years, EUA has witnessed steep growth, both in size and scope, and today its members are over 800 universities and 34 national rectors’ conferences in 46 European countries. In addition, EUA collaborates closely with a wide range of partners in Europe, but also in other parts of the world.

The European University Association is one of the most active non-governmental organisations contributing to the development of the European Knowledge Area. It is a consultative member of the Bologna Process, working in conjunction with national governments to consolidate the European higher education area. It also works closely with the European Commission where universities are involved in building the European Research Area.

EUA’s strength results from its ability to bridge European level policy and institutional practice: The Salzburg principles for Doctoral Education, the notion of quality culture, and the Lifelong learning charter – just to give some examples - have been developed by EUA, in close cooperation with its members and partners. They have been formative both for Europe’s higher education systems, and for guiding individual universities in strategic reform.

EUA has a clear focus on European higher education, but as a part of its mission, it has developed over the past years what we call “global dialogue”. Our Prague Declaration of 2009 on the role of higher education in solving the financial crisis, also stresses the importance of *‘enhancing global collaboration, partnership and presence beyond Europe as a priority for an ever greater number of universities with diverse missions, to ensure strategic presence and promote a more international outlook among students and staff alike, and, in particular in times of global financial crisis, to demonstrate active solidarity and cooperation.’*

In fact, the present Access to Success Project, which has been funded by the European Commission’s Erasmus Mundus programme, is a very good example of EUA’s commitment to international cooperation:

It has been conceived and implemented together with our partners, the Association of African Universities, the European Students’ Union and the European Access Network and our members, the rectors’ conferences of Norway and Belgium (Flanders). The project has brought together EUA’s university members with their homologues from Africa, and also with representatives from governments and donor organisations – to enable mutual learning, exchange of experience and the transfer of best practices, and to develop the knowledge base for an informed policy dialogue with governments. The project – as all projects that EUA undertakes - was to render immediate benefit to universities, but also to contribute to policy development.

It was important for us to demonstrate that at a time when global competition in higher education is on the rise, the imperative is to promote Europe as an attractive and strategic partner, sensitive to

the realities of braindrain. The goal has been to build awareness and mutual understanding, to lay ground for enhanced cooperation, and to promote cooperation that is mutually beneficial.

In this regard, the project has focussed on issues such as access and retention of students and staff, student and staff mobility, but also on how cooperation is organised and financed. It emphasised the crucial importance of North-South university partnerships both for academic capacity building and institutional development, and also for research, and wider socio-economic development.

The white paper aims at capturing the results of the work that partners and participants have undertaken jointly over the past 2 years. It arrives at a time when universities are increasingly prioritising global partnership as a strategic response to the demands that societies and economies are placing on them; it examines the evolving and increasingly important overlap between the 'internationalisation' agenda of universities, and their role as actors in development cooperation. It stimulates reflection on the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, a relatively new political framework with great potential for higher education actors, and more broadly on the Millenium Development Goals, which were as you know just recently discussed in New York last week.

In closing I would like to make three points, that you find reflected in the present white paper – but I would like to address them from the European perspective:

- The first one is directed to the higher education community, but also to Ministries of Education and of Development: The internationalisation of higher education receives a lot of attention nowadays, and Europe is no exception in this regard, in particular as higher education sectors are undergoing major reforms. Internationalisation can mean many things, from recruiting international students and staff, to building global research collaboration, to renewing curricula in order for them to be more globally relevant. The point that I want to make here is: that we must ensure that North-South HE relations, and more generally development cooperation, become an important and well-visible strand of European internationalisation.
This is not only important for the credibility of our international engagement, but also crucial for our own research and innovation agenda, and to support our mission in educating global citizens. In brief, it will help us to avoid the over commercialisation and marketisation of higher education, and instead enable us to talk to partners about mutually acceptable and beneficial conditions for exchange and collaboration. The fact that the Erasmus Mundus Programme, which is dedicated to enhancing the attractiveness of Europe as a study destination has supported this project, underlines the importance that internationalisation of European higher education should be characterised by responsibility and partnership.
- My second point is on the European dimension of international higher education cooperation, and also on development cooperation. The achievement of the European Dimension in higher education has proven that we can be at the same time competitors and co-operators. Currently, our impression is that this works only inside Europe and as soon as we transcend our borders, we fall back into national logic. I believe that we could do much better - and the discussion that took place during this project seems to confirm this – if we Europeans would work closer together and would share and exchange more. This point not only relevant to universities, but also and in particular to governments and donor agencies, which provide the funding for activities and generally also set the rules and regulations for these activities. As the financial crisis demands careful spending, one of its more positive impacts could indeed be to encourage pooling of funding and resources between institutions and donors from different European countries.
- My last point addresses the Africa-Europe Strategic Partnership. Prior to the Access to Success project, EUA had very little idea of the nature of this political framework. In addition, during the project, it became clear that EUA's members and our partner universities in Africa

were either unaware of its existence and/or confused as to how they could benefit from it and contribute to it. We think, and this is a key issue in the White paper, that the role that the university sector could play in this partnership - with regards to the development of tertiary level teaching, research and services for broader social benefit - is still underestimated. Therefore we propose to the governments of both regions, to the African Union Commission and the European Union Commission, a strategic and focussed discussion on this issue in the interests of all.

In closing I would like to thank the VLIR-UOS that helped us to prepare this event today, Prof. Temmerman and the Belgian Senate not only for hosting us, but also for being with us here today and sharing our interest on the issue. Last but not least it is the occasion to thank our members and partners, for the excellent cooperation, and all of you for coming.

I hope that you will find the white paper useful for your work, and that you will voice your opinions today as we debate this important topic.

Thank you.