

Ján Figel'—Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture, and Youth

## CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

### Bologna Policy Forum

Louvain-la-Neuve, 29 April 2009

Opening Address

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[Greetings]

It is a great pleasure for me to see that so many of you have accepted our hosts' invitation to participate in this Policy Forum. I congratulate the governments of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg on their initiative.

The global dimension of the Bologna Process has always mattered a great deal to the European Commission.

From the start, we've tried to show that international relations are one of the ingredients of the European Higher Education Area and that our efforts would gain strength if we keep constructive interactions with higher-education systems and institutions in other parts of the world.

The Bologna process is by no means a one-size-fits-all model for higher education; either in Europe or elsewhere. We have developed an interesting working method based on trust and dialogue between public authorities and stakeholders, notably academic institutions and students.

I believe we can usefully reflect on the rich experience we have garnered over the years in the course of our debate.

The Bologna reforms have helped put Europe's higher education on the global map. The adoption of the bachelor/master structure has made our study programmes more accessible and more attractive, including to non-European students. In addition, many programmes are now taught in English, particularly at master and doctoral level.

All these factors have helped European universities attract international students, teachers and researchers; they have also prepared their own graduates for a truly global environment.

The European Union has been supporting the external-dimension strategy of the Bologna Process in many ways.

The EU external-relations policy aims at establishing close cooperation with all the world's regions and in particular with the countries included in the European Neighbourhood Policy.

More specifically, our education and training policies cover a broad range of measures that promote capacity building in higher education—and the Tempus programme is a notable example with an annual budget of about €60 million.

We also keep excellent relations with our worldwide partners through bilateral cooperation programmes: I can mention our agreements with the US and Canada, EDULINK for Africa, and ALFA for Latin America. And last year, we have launched a new multilateral framework to support cooperation in post-secondary education with industrialised countries.

Of special importance in this context is Erasmus Mundus; Europe's flagship programme for worldwide academic cooperation.

Its European Masters Courses and scholarships have greatly improved the attractiveness of 'destination Europe' and have stimulated the free circulation of talent and brainpower between the EU and the rest of the world. And starting this year, Erasmus Mundus has been extended to cover doctoral programmes.

But academia is also about research. Here, Marie Curie Actions offer opportunities to individual researchers to participate in international research teams. Funding is available for researchers to move both within Europe and internationally.

More generally, the EU has worked hard to promote Europe's universities worldwide; one recent example is the Global Promotion Project, which is part of Erasmus Mundus.

With the Global Promotion Project we intend to project an accurate and positive image of European higher education beyond our borders.

To do this, we have launched the Study in Europe<sup>1</sup> website, we organise fairs and information campaigns, and we are introducing European education advisers in other parts of the world.

I believe that this effort is bearing fruits. During my term as Commissioner for education and culture, I have visited many partner countries, and I have often noted a keen interest in our higher-education reforms, in our unique brand of policy dialogue, and—above all—in the Bologna Process.

Our project called Tuning Educational Structures in Europe is a good example of the interest our policies are raising.

The project evolved from an initiative taken by a group of European professors back in 2001. Its original intent was to complement the structural changes of Bologna with agreements on the content and outcomes of study programmes.

In the last few years, Tuning has been taken up in Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Latin America. Tuning USA was launched earlier this month, and more countries have expressed interest in the Tuning approach.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to close on a note of hope and optimism. Given the context that I have just sketched for you, I think the time is ripe for Europe's higher-education community and its partners around the world to engage in serious dialogue on matters of mutual interest.

Today's Policy Forum is a step in the right direction. My hope is that it will be a *first* step as well. I believe that—with enough willingness and determination—our meeting today may be remembered as the beginning of a lasting and fruitful process of cooperation.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.study-in-europe.org>