

Update for the Bologna Follow-Up Group Meeting Copenhagen (DK), 18-19 January 2012

During the past weeks, EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education) has elaborated a **work plan for 2012**. In this process there was an input from our five thematic working groups (Mobility and International Openness, Qualification Frameworks and Student-Centred Learning, Lifelong Learning and Employability, Quality Assurance and Transparency Tools, Profile of professional higher education & Innovation), resulting into policy papers which reflect the position of our membership on the main priority areas in the EHEA. In 2012 our focus as a members organization will be the implementation of the above action lines in the higher education institutions and the organisation of members' capacity building activities based on them. In future EURASHE aims at actively supporting programmes and institutions with a professional orientation to target precise operational objectives in the above priority areas.

In line with this development, EURASHE's President Prof. Andreas G. Orphanides launched on behalf of EURASHE at the recent *European Quality Assurance Forum* (Antwerp, November 2011) a proposal that **"European Commission develops an action program on Quality Assurance and Transparency Tools (TT) in Higher Education"**. Following this, in a letter to the EC addressed to Commissioner Mrs Androulla Vassiliou, EURASHE's President elaborated the proposal as follows:

"EURASHE officially proposes that the European Commission develops, establishes, implements and finances a thorough action program on Quality Assurance and Transparency Tools (TT) in Higher Education, based on similar principles and mechanisms of the existing ERASMUS program. This action program would encourage, lead and support HE Institutions (with the possibility of involvement of QA agencies as well) to formulate bilateral agreements in order to:

1. cooperate in the area of QA and TT;
2. share views and practices in QA and TT;
3. share QA and TT tools, instruments, services, etc., reducing so and saving on costs pertaining to internal QA, as well as to preparing for the external QA;
4. withstand and resist to external pressures or interventions that may be detrimental to their quality and QA practices.

This action program on QA and TT proposed by EURASHE, may function either as an autonomous one, or be a major part of the unified framework of such programs to be in effect as of 2014, or be developed and be implemented in any other way compatible with the future overall planning and actions of the European Commission."

EURASHE's next full scale event is our **22nd Annual Conference** which will be hosted by the **Banku Augstskola** (BA School of Banking and Finance, BSF) in Riga (Latvia) on **10th-11th May 2012**. The conference will address two themes which will top the future agenda for European professional higher education, namely *lifelong learning* and the *welfare society*. The latter is in line with the 2012 European Commission's theme of 'Active Ageing'. On this occasion the results of the **FLLLEX project**¹

¹ This is a project initiated and supported by EURASHE, which aims at identifying challenges and implications of the incorporation of Lifelong Learning into European Higher Education institutions. Learn more on www.flllex.eu.

will be presented, in particular the instrument which has been developed in order to implement Lifelong Learning strategies in higher education institutions. The second track, which examines the effects of the ageing society on welfare provisions, and the readiness of professional higher education to tackle this issue, will be provided by the Danish university colleges, members of EURASHE. The 'Leuven' BFUG chair Frank Vandenbroucke is scheduled to hold the keynote speech, linking the two themes from the perspective of a former Minister of Education, Employment and of Social Affairs. Ministers of Latvia and Cyprus (the latter holding the next EU Presidency in 2012) have expressed their support for this overarching theme.

In terms of current projects, among the many initiated by EURASHE, a special mention of the **CaribErasmus project**² in preparation of the next Bologna Policy Forum in Bucharest (April 2012). Two of the planned three 'regional' seminars entitled "Europe-Caribbean Academic Cooperation and Mobility: Challenges and Opportunities" have already been taken place (Dominican Republic, October 2011 and Trinidad and Tobago, November 2011). The third and last seminar will be held in Cuba, February 2012. The objectives of these events are to promote **mobility** opportunities offered to Caribbean students and researchers by the Erasmus Mundus programme; to discuss the main **barriers to Europe-Caribbean academic cooperation and mobility** and **advance** on possible shared **solutions**. Picking up on the results produced by each seminar, a **Green Paper** will be drafted to stimulate consultation and reflection among relevant stakeholders, in particular decision-makers in the field of Higher Education from Europe and the Caribbean, on strategies to enhance cooperation between the two regions in the field of HE. The paper will be validated in the **policy awareness-raising seminar** scheduled in Brussels in June 2012. Some of the first **outcomes** of the project, including the first results of the survey on the opinions of Caribbean students and researchers about European higher education, are already available on the project website (www.cariberasmus.eu).

² The CaribErasmus project aims to foster cooperation among European and Caribbean higher education institutions in a structured and sustainable perspective (www.cariberasmus.eu).