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## Conclusions of the Presidency

### Meeting of the Directors General for Higher Education

13-14 September 2010

Château de Namur

Rue de l'Ermitage 1, 5000 Namur

THE BELGIAN PRESIDENCY,

At the meeting of the Directors General for Higher Education, held in Namur on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2010;

TAKING NOTE of the contribution of the European Commission and the international experts invited to the meeting;

TAKING NOTE of the discussion held during the thematic sessions as well as the dialogue with the European organisations representing the main stakeholders in higher education;

AND NOTING THAT

- (1) In the last two decades, higher education has rapidly become a core policy area. Higher education, through strong autonomous institutions, is expected to contribute to the social, cultural, economic and democratic development of a knowledge-based society, through the fulfilment of its three core missions: teaching, research and community engagement. Higher education is a public responsibility and therefore it is the role of governments to formulate higher education policies and, in particular, to determine the objectives and goals of higher education, as well as to shape the higher education system.
- (2) Higher education institutions should be both autonomous and accountable. This implies, in the interest of transparency, that they should be able to describe and explain their missions, profile and performances.
- (3) Quality assurance has rapidly emerged as an essential instrument for accountability. The primary responsibility lies with each institution. However, various national frameworks for external quality assurance have been rapidly developed, leading to a great variety of quality assurance processes. It is therefore difficult to provide transparent and comparable information on higher education.



## CONCLUDES THAT

- (1) In a context where higher education is increasingly becoming a global, European, national and regional priority, there is an urgent need for making the diversity of higher education more transparent.
- (2) Existing transparency tools and the current projects funded with the support from the European Commission, are essential drivers for the policy discussion and developments concerning transparency and diversity in higher education.
- (3) The transparency tools intend to reduce the asymmetry of information between institutions, governments and stakeholders. However, until now, they have been rather limited due to their one-dimensional nature and the lack of credible and comparable data indicators.
- (4) Higher education institutions should have the opportunity to describe, demonstrate and explain their strengths and their weaknesses. Through the provision of comparable and reliable information, transparency tools will allow institutions to further increase their excellence.
- (5) Multidimensional transparency tools that are currently developed, offer the opportunity to describe, inform and compare the different missions and roles of higher education institutions, considering the specificities of each system of higher education.
- (6) The involvement of institutions, students, employers and other stakeholders is essential if we want to develop meaningful and useful instruments.
- (7) So far, most of the debates have been focused on the strengths and weaknesses of transparency tools, and the possible revision of methodologies. Considerations of how transparency tools might interact with governmental and institutional policy-making needs to be given more attention.
- (8) Transparency tools are impacting upon higher education in various ways: governance, quality assurance, internationalisation, etc. Transparency tools have the potential to shift institutional policies, behaviours and strategies. Therefore, deliberative policy action should be taken.

## AND THEREFORE AGREES THAT

The Directors General for Higher Education, in cooperation with the stakeholders, should broaden the debate on transparency and explore the possibility to develop a common framework for transparency and accountability, in order to support higher education institutions in developing quality profiles.

