

VIVIANE REDING

Forum "Culture, Cultural rights and Education in an Enlarged Europe"

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am grateful for this opportunity provided to me to share with you some thoughts concerning the future of Europe in education and culture in view of the enlargement of the Union.

The European Council in Copenhagen will take place in just a few weeks from now and we all know that it will mark a major step, if not the first one, towards the future of the Union and the reunification of the European continent.

Indeed, with the planned integration of 10 new members in 2004, the European Union is entering a genuinely new historical stage.

There is no doubt that this event will give it a new face by deeply modifying not only its geography, but also its policies and institutions.

The enlargement will unite 500 million Europeans. This is more than just an event of 2002: it is the result of 50 years of joint efforts of building Europe, a half century of peace and prosperity which made it possible to build up a Union of countries and citizens with democracy, freedom and the respect for human rights as its foundations.

This Union of 25+ will bring together a great wealth of languages, identities and cultures. It will also show greater social and economic disparities than is currently the case. It might even bring a change of paradigm: the human factor is going to be more important than the purely economic thinking. If you add to this globalisation, environmental issues and the cohesion and solidarity of peoples and regions, the new dimension of Europe becomes evident.

Our challenge is to build a Europe reaching beyond the sphere of economy to promote sustainable development as a means to meet citizens' expectations concerning quality of life and cultural and social diversity.

In all these aspects (Education, Training and Culture) have a decisive role to play because a powerful knowledge-based economy cannot develop without a high level of education, as social cohesion cannot exist without tolerance and respect for the culture of others.

Maybe the most widely shared and deepest imperative for European Education and Training systems in the "new age" is to acknowledge their new, "European" responsibility to those who study, teach and research.

In spite of diversity and nationally-based institutions, curricula and degrees, students and others learners in Europe need to be certain that the qualifications they acquire in one part of Europe opens them fair possibilities for further study and for work elsewhere, first and foremost within the European Union.

I am convinced that students and learners are increasingly aware of this and will therefore favour universities, curricula and degrees offering the highest acceptability beyond the country where they were awarded.

Could we really expect European degrees to be recognised at their real level all over the world as long as they are not easily recognised within Europe itself? This is a major issue in terms of quality, competitiveness and attractiveness of our systems and in my view a key determinant for the future of an enlarged Europe.

After this summary reference to the fundamental challenges ahead of us, I will now briefly review action and challenges in the areas of education, training and culture.

1. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In the perspective of the accession, candidate Countries have taken serious steps in order to reform their education and training systems as most of them had to radically adapt their systems to a

new environment and to a new societal paradigm based upon market economy and democratic society.

Enlargement has been a long process and a long way to go; during the last ten years, one can say that impressive results have been achieved:

The legal framework for whole educational systems has been changed in all countries:

- Participation in education has increased markedly
- Curricula for general education have been renovated
- Reforms have been introduced to give greater autonomy to schools
- Higher education has been revamped in the direction of the emerging European Higher Education Area called for in the Bologna and Prague declarations.

Yet, we all know that many substantial challenges remain to be overcome. But we do not forget that getting education and training into the European Project has been a long process.

The Treaty article on Vocational Training dates from the foundations of the Community 45 years ago; it's over 25 years since the first discussions on Educational co-operation at Community level; and nearly 10 since Maastricht, in 1993, put Education explicitly into the Treaty.

Slowly and determinedly, over the years, we have built up co-operation at European Union level in education and training. Our action programmes for mobility grew ambitious and successful: we have nothing to blush about there. Over a million students took part in the Erasmus programme since it started in 1987. Over two million children and young people took part in joint school projects agreed between 2,000 higher education establishments and 15,000 schools all over Europe (Comenius). We can all be proud of that even if we have not yet reached the 10% of university students studying abroad that President Delors was looking for.

During the first phase of the Leonardo da Vinci programme some 127,000 people from nearly 80,000 partner organisations took part in training through mobility. In Leonardo II nearly 35,000 people last year went for training in another Member State, and with this year's budget increase, I expect the figure to rise.

Ladies and Gentlemen, when I received my current portfolio, I have to say that I was very impressed with what had already been done. Everywhere I went I could feel people's enthusiasm, I could feel that they wanted to contribute to building Europe and that they expected Europe to do more for education and training. So I said to myself: "We have to reinforce what we have, we have to make it better!" And I have launched a series of new and ambitious projects designed to make the most of the opportunities we now have. For instance in the technology and information society fields, through the e-learning initiative, which I am sure, you all know. But also by injecting as much ambition as possible in an EU approach to Lifelong learning or to the definition of the objectives to be achieved in a co-ordinated way by our education systems.

But you are certainly right, if you think that we may not have achieved enough. After all, there are still big problems in the field of education and training. The Commission itself has said so:

There are 150 million people within the Union today who have not reached upper secondary education

- Less than one person in ten takes part in life long learning
- And nearly one in five young people who drop out of school takes no further education or training.

Also the comparison with some of our big competitors such as the US or Japan shows that we still have some way to go. In Europe as a whole we may be better at maths than the US, as shown by the PISA survey, but we still have a long way to catch up on Japan. It is the same with reading. It took the EU nearly 20 years to reduce the gap in the average years of schooling from 70 % of USA level in 1971 to 87 % in 1999. In the same time, the outflow of qualified people to the USA continues. All this even though we spend on education and training as much public money 5.2 % of our GDP - than the USA and substantially more than Japan - which spends only 3.5 %. Private investments in education, training and research are however much higher in both Japan and the USA, and the same also applies to research and development expenditures. The Lisbon Council called for a

substantial increase in the per capita investment in education and training, and the Commission is currently finalising a Communication emphasising the importance of achieving this goal, if we want to make the Union competitive in the knowledge based economy and society.

Obviously, the first responsibility for education and training policies is, and will remain, with the Member States. It is well understood that Europe's role in education and training matters is to support, not to dictate. Subsidiarity is a sound principle, which should be maintained. But it should be applied wisely and not in a way depriving us of the European added value, which, isolated national or regional efforts, could ever produce. This is especially true at a time when Europe is more and more confronted with the challenge of globalisation.

I am happy to note that I am not alone in this conviction. The European Council in Lisbon, two years ago, was a watershed. It recognised the important role of Education and Training as an integral part of economic and social policies - as an instrument for strengthening Europe's competitive power in the world - but also for ensuring the cohesion of our societies and the full development of its peoples in the personal, societal and economic developments, which the first decade of the new millennium will bring us all.

The following European Councils made further steps towards the emancipation of education and training policies. And the Heads of State called for big efforts in order to ensure that European Education systems will be a world quality reference by 2010. Thus, beyond the success of our programmes, we have launched ourselves into a policy co-operation in the strict sense for the first time.

2. THE "KNOWLEDGE EUROPE" WHY?

I see four groups of reasons for creating this Knowledge Europe:

First, reasons connected to society and civilisation

- I believe that through the Union can we preserve our diversity, our different cultures and identities. This may seem paradoxical, but given the standardisation which globalisation brings in its wake children all over the world drink the same Coke, eat at the same Macdonald's, watch the same Disney television, move between the same PlayStation programs and the same Game Boy cassettes Europe provides a structure within which our diversity can survive. But that structure itself needs support from education and training and from a specifically European model where quality, openness, equity, mobility, recognition are not just abstracts, but realities. Only in this way, will we have a Europe based on mutual trust between countries and between people, where the values underlying the European construction tolerance, democracy, and active citizenship can flourish in ways that respond to what people really want.

Secondly, there are economic reasons:

- Today, the most significant investments that our countries make are those in intelligence and knowledge, investments which encourage imagination, creativity the "little grey cells". Knowledge industries already account for over 50% of the GDP of most industrialised countries, and investment in knowledge is estimated to produce between a third and a half of economic growth.
- So investing in knowledge means investing in jobs for tomorrow. That is what the Lisbon European Council was telling us when it underlined how important education and training were for Europe's future. Today's investments in knowledge define our future competitiveness, our ability to create and maintain jobs, and thereby, the internal cohesion within our societies.

Thirdly, there are the issues of consistency.

- In a Knowledge society, the creation, transmission and use of new knowledge has to be supported by consistency between policies on education, on training, on research and on innovation. Each of these policies has its own roots, its own history, its own ways of doing

things. They don't necessarily fit together easily. But they have a natural synergy, which we have to take advantage of, and they can create leverages, which lead all the component parts to function more effectively. All together, they are the whole foundation of the Knowledge Society. That's why the Commission, proposed an integrated strategy combining all relevant parts of education, training, research and innovation.

And finally, there are policy reasons as well.

- Our business is to make Europe more than an abstract concept something that has a daily reality. (The success of the "Euro" is a shining example.) In the same way, education and training have to become European realities, because they touch more than 100 million young and older people every day as pupils, trainees, teachers and millions more as parents. European action in Education and Training makes Europe a reality for young people in quite a different way to what they see on the television or read about in the press.
- There are also other, inter-governmental processes in education such as the Bologna process leading to convergence in higher education, which builds on Community policies. There would be no Bologna process if there had been no ERASMUS.
- Thirdly, people construct their identities, their personalities, as they go through education and training which means that education and training are the structural route that society uses to pass on common values, to promote active citizenship and intercultural tolerance. Europe needs to be present in this process.
- Enlargement will make education and training more important, not less important. Cultural diversity will increase. Linguistic diversity will increase. Building the knowledge Society is the way both to respond to the increased diversity which enlargement brings, but also to sustain and protect it.
- Finally, maybe the most compelling reason for moving forward is that in spite of diversity and nationally-based systems and degrees, students in Europe need to be assured that the qualifications they acquire in one part of the Union opens them doors everywhere else for further study as well as for work. I am convinced that students will increasingly demand this kind of degree, and so will institutions and systems which are in the best position to have their qualifications recognised outside of their quarter of Europe.

Faced with this galaxy of arguments, I don't believe we have a choice. We have to press on with building a Knowledge Europe, in the interests of everyone; and everyone has to contribute.

3. THE PROCESS

- Since Lisbon in March 2000, Education and Training have moved a pace. A year later, all countries signed up to a series of common, concrete objectives to achieve by 2010:
- Higher quality in all aspects of education and training: Europe should become a world benchmark for the quality of education and training it delivers;
- Better access, for everyone, whatever their age, to education and training;
- Greater openness of education and training to the world, and greater compatibility between systems in the EU so that people can move more easily between them.

Let me stress the importance and the unprecedented nature, of these objectives. They are common to all our countries, and reflect their awareness that they face the same problems and challenges, and want to achieve the same results. They are concrete objectives and they require us to make comparisons between our systems, to test and evaluate how different countries react to the same difficulties, to measure progress towards our common objectives.

This has considerably raised the profile of education and training on the wider political scene as well as created new expectations we have to meet.

In fact, we have to leave our good intentions behind and move on to action:

We have taken concrete steps to remove obstacles to mobility....And we are well aware that lifelong learning is not just confined to formal education and training systems and employability, but also covers active citizenship, social inclusion, and personal development.

In the perspective of the enlargement, all countries joining the European Union as new Member States in the course of the decade, have been invited to join the Work programme on objectives.

I should however stress that these associated countries already participate in the Leonardo da Vinci and Socrates programmes, as well as in the full range of EU research activities. To a considerable extent, the enlargement has been anticipated in the areas of Education, Training and Research, as well as in those of Culture and Youth.

Moreover, in the field of higher education, the Jean Monnet Project was opened to all candidate countries from the start of the academic year 2001/2002 and allowed the launching of 68 Jean Monnet Chairs and 6 European Centres of Excellence. Thus, across the candidate countries, over 100 universities are now participating in the Jean Monnet Project, providing the necessary training required for the preparation of these countries for their accession to the European Union.

4. EXTERNAL ACTION

There is a further reason why I believe that we should be bold in developing Knowledge Europe, and that's the EU's position in the world. The EU must develop its co-operation with third countries. It should promote itself as a World-Wide centre of excellence for study and training, as well as for scientific and technological research. By doing so it should become more attractive to students, professors and researchers from all over the world.

It was clear to me that it would not suffice to conclude a number of co-operation agreements. An essential question to be answered before was to find out what Europe could offer. In the field of higher education we will encourage European Masters, joint degrees delivered by co-operating universities in different countries offering joint curricula. We are examining how we could combine this with an exchange programme between Europe and the rest of the world offering grants and scholarships to students, professors and researchers (Erasmus World initiative). Let's not forget that the attractiveness of the United States to "brains" from all over the world is not only a matter of academic excellence. Europe has nothing to be ashamed of in this respect. But has it been pro-active enough in offering interesting and attractive perspectives? Asking the question is giving the answer: we need to do more in this area.

In the Cultural field, 2002 has been a very interesting year of debates and reflection for us, and 2003 should even be more exciting!

Like for Education, it is also with the Maastricht treaty that the role of culture was given an official place in European integration. Ten years after, what has been achieved and what is going on?

One of our current policy priorities is the Convention on the future of Europe and the conditions under which the Union's responsibility for culture can be consolidated. To my mind, it is not a matter of calling into question the subsidiary nature of our responsibilities but of giving them the means to be exercised in the current decision-making procedure (as foreseen in Article 151(5)), which combines co-decision, and unanimity does not make this practicable.

Beyond the question of the legal basis and procedural issues, what needs to be reaffirmed, on the eve of enlargement, is the role of culture in the development of a European identity without which the Union would be doomed to be nothing more than a vast free trade area.

In ten years, a number of programmes of varying duration and purpose have served as the basis for Community support for cultural co-operation. Within these frameworks, the EU supported over 3000 cultural projects, coming from all over Europe. The latest programme to date, the "Culture 2000" framework programme (2000-2004), is more ambitious than its first generation predecessors (Kaleidoscope, Ariane, Raphael) even if it should be noticed that the budget devoted to this programme represents only 0.03% of the total Community budget.

But it should also be noticed that the part indirectly devoted to culture through various other European programmes and policies (audio-visual, research, information society, Structural Funds, education, external relations, etc.) represents more than 0.7 % of the total annual budget.

"Culture 2000", is now involving cultural operators from 28 countries and supporting every year more than 200 co-operation projects: these are artistic and cultural projects that have a European dimension, both in the conceptual stage and in the organisation of and participation in the project. The activities supported include festivals, co-productions, Masterclasses, European capitals for culture, the European Heritage days, various European prizes, exhibitions, artistic creations, tours, translations, conferences...etc... They involve hundreds of cultural operators in various cultural and artistic fields.

"Culture 2000" is an instrument to promote the intercultural dialogue, a priority for the Commission. The 11th of September 2001 and the international climate that has prevailed since then, have shown more than ever the importance and urgency of developing an approach that places the search for better mutual understanding between cultures at the heart of EU action.

Cultural dialogue and co-operation are a powerful way to build bridges between people, far beyond the cultural area itself. We need that in Europe, more than ever. And we need this approach also for the intercultural dialogue between Europe and continents. Our education initiatives (cf. Tempus, Alban) and our youth-actions (Euro-Med) lead the way in this direction.

5. CONCLUSIONS

At Lisbon, the Heads of State and Government brought education and training policy out of the cellar where they had been confined for thirty years, and presented them with the challenges they have to face in view of the knowledge society, globalisation and enlargement. Member States, the European Parliament and the Commission have responded properly to these challenges.

President Prodi remarked that "Education, training and research are really the key to economic renewal, to sustainable growth and new jobs. There can be no "knowledge society" without knowledge.

All Europeans have inherited the same history. All Europeans share the same values. At the time of enlargement, we have to show that we are worthy of this history and these values in order to build together the house of Europe. A House we can all be proud of and where we feel at home.

We have 15 years of success with our action programmes behind us. The time is now ripe for us to be more ambitious, to take on a policy dimension in our work, to contribute to the up-grading of education and training as they are actually delivered to millions of people across the Union and beyond.

The goal is to become a Knowledge Society in all regions of the enlarged Europe while retaining our distinct and individual cultures.

The Lisbon target is within reach. It will be good for Europe. At home and at world-level. And it will be an efficient means, in order to create this "Europe of the citizens" which we all want to achieve.