



CRUI

Conferenza dei Rettori
delle Università Italiane

Conference of Italian University Rectors

Report on the State of Italian Universities 2004

Rome, September 21st, 2004

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Conference of Italian University Rectors*

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of Italian Universities
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In September of last year the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) held a day of reflection on the state of universities in Italy. That initiative, which was the first of its kind, met with general approval and achieved a notable resonance within public opinion. *The idea that motivated the CRUI in holding this day was the belief that the time had come for universities to adopt the neither easy nor usual task of a conversation and a direct dialogue with civil society, with students and with their families, with the exponents of learning, and with the world of companies.* That belief has become further strengthened by the fact that the need for dialogue with the various social interests has become even more compelling. However, this is a pathway of dialogue that universities have followed for some, and which is not without contradictions and uncertainties, forms of resistance and sudden moves forward, but which has by now become completely legitimate and defined at the level of its contents and its direction.

That day of September 2003 is also taking place this year, and there is the wish to transform it into a fixed appointment, into an event that becomes a kind of inaugural day for the public activities of universities. In any cultural system only occasions that are repeated take on a social relevance. The Christians knew this very well and associated each day of the year with a saint so that his or her name could form a part of the calendar! Well, with this appointment, which is taking place once again, we want *universities to form a part, from now onwards, of the 'calendar' of our country.*

It is for this reason that I thank and greet the authorities of government and the political world, parliamentary representatives, Italian and European rectors, deans, lecturers, and the technical-administrative staff, who are all taking part in this day. I extend a special greeting to students, who are the first category at whom this future that we intend to build with better universities – universities that are more competitive within the international context of knowledge – is aimed. I also extend a cordial greeting to the many representatives of the national media, whom I also thank for their constant work of providing information on universities and for the care with which they are following the work that surrounds this second report on the state of universities.

AUTONOMY: THE NORTH STAR

The pathway to which I referred, and which we are all following, has as its north star the concept of autonomy. This is the constitutional and functional principle of universities, but even prior to that it is their permanent constituent feature.

And the autonomy of universities – as we interpret it – cannot but be ‘autonomy in dialogue’ and autonomy that presents itself with independence and authoritativeness, with universities that open themselves to dialogue with the society that surrounds them and perform the function of institutions that are able to relate to society both at the level of service and, at the same time, performing the fundamental role of making proposals and providing propulsion: real dialogue outwards, therefore, is a challenge that universities frame in the first instance for themselves.

In presenting themselves to public opinion and the country, and in taking on the role of an interlocutor, universities must be able to present themselves with their own strong identity, an identity made up of difficult and problematic realities but also of challenges that have been met and projects for the future, of elements that are out of balance as well as negative aspects, but also exciting prospects that spring from their very essence and the sense of their mission.

This is a mission that is rich and detailed. *Universities must know how to respond promptly to the needs, in the short term as well, that society proposes.* And they must do so not only with teaching and research but also by contributing to the solution of fundamental problems concerned with the quality of life and by giving substance to a citizenship that is ethically based. We are dealing here with a responsibility towards society which universities must know how to shoulder and which principally involves transmitting the cultural heritage and creating new knowledge and professional skills and expertise.

Thus universities must teach, they must help to produce technologies and create the professional figures that are of use to the country. They must not only make a contribution to analysing society in a critical way but also help in solving its problems and improving its conditions.

For this reason, *universities should induce reflection within society itself and foresee its needs*, even those that are way off in the future but destined to emerge sooner or later.

Universities may, and at times have to, disappoint immediate expectations so as to respond to those that are more real in the future. This is the root of their inalienable autonomy, which is located in the heart of society but which remains morally and intellectually independent of every political authority and economic power. These are the final words of the Magna Carta of universities signed at Bologna in 1988. For that matter, it is too often forgotten that the ‘European’ university was born in our country and that the whole world has looked, and still looks, with admiration at the learning that originated, was cultivated, and developed in our universities, in the humanities, arts and political science and in the exact and life sciences as well.

The difficult pathway of dialogue coincides, therefore, with a precise commitment: to open themselves to society at the level of proposals universities must improve themselves, they must correct their errors, they must overcome certain internal failings that are evident, they must be able to develop their approaches with consistency, constancy and credibility, and they must show that they can nourish in a reasoned and constant rather than episodic and transitory way their own vocation to growth and change.

This second university day conserves the same unaltered spirit and rationale of the first: namely, to be an occasion for dialogue and proposals, a place for assessment, and a moment for reflection on the project that universities propose for themselves to achieve the growth of the common good of our society.

In conformity with this spirit, my paper will also be marked by this duality of perspectives: the first part will be dedicated to an assessment, to illustrating our ‘context’ – what we are and what we see happening; the second part is concerned with formulating, promoting and announcing a project, with projecting ourselves into the future, to outline, with courage and ambition, the horizons of a journey that from henceforth we want to strive to carry forward.

The first part is not a sterile lament, just as the second part is not the illustrating of an unreal dream.

One is dealing with the different sides of the same coin that well represent the specific face of every human activity, and every university activity in particular. Like Janus, with his two faces, we look at what we have been and what we are with one part of ourselves; with the same part, turned towards the future, we project for ourselves and for our young people a time which, through our commitment and our endeavour, we will make better than the present.

If we ask ourselves about our present it is because we want to progress and improve, grow in quality and the acknowledgement of our authoritativeness. If we turn to the future, it is to give a meaning and legitimation to what we are, to what we do, and to what we ask for: *the present and the future, therefore, linked together by a single red line of tradition and renewal.*

Our relationship with the past is more complex in character. We come from a tradition that knew how to be noble and high, in relation to which we feel that we are children, and responsible. But we also know that today's university is not the university of our mentors, of our grandfathers and our fathers: it is no longer the university that we have today because there is no longer that small bourgeoisie that gave rise to the development of the Humboldt-inspired kind of university; that university no longer exists because society is no longer the rural society or scarcely industrialised one that until a few decades ago characterised Italy; that university no longer exists because our students are not from a narrow and limited elite; that university no longer exists because our professors, having abandoned their robes of 'barons', are nearer to everyday life. Our past, therefore, is no longer contemporary.

Today's university can no longer continue to be the university of the past: it must renew itself and express that high scholarly and moral lecture that comes from our ancestors in modern terms. In a single word, it must retrieve its contemporary character.

Lucidity and responsibility are required: it would be sterile to propose again criticisms and models marked by time; it would be fertile to retrieve their spirit and renew them; it would be foolish to place in the inkwell of corrosive criticism the goose feather of 'laudator temporis acti'; it is morally incumbent upon us to engage in the daily hardship of that work that is involved in growth.

The present and the future are thus our arms and our eyes directed towards the university of the future, towards the project of the future of our institutions. The past is our soul: a sort of secular religious feeling that compels us to raise higher the bar of our daily experience.

THE CRUI: THE CHOSEN HEADQUARTERS OF UNIVERSITIES

At this appointment, at which the autonomy of universities takes form in its national expression and this with its strong identity, it is not this or that university, this or that local reality, that speaks: it is the CRUI that makes itself the interpreter and promoter of this identity. Indeed, the CRUI is not an association to represent special and sectional interests, given that it does not represent rectors individually or collectively. It does not have the character of a trade union. It does not have aspirations to hegemony. It is nobody's opposite party.

The Conference of Rectors is the headquarters of the institutional representation of Italian universities; a place of synthesis as regards their multiple identity; a body that promotes the constant drawing up and up-dating of the statute of freedom and the growth of studies; an environment of constructive dialectics where projects that arise out of the fabric of universities that reflect on their condition take shape and become proposals.

For we lecturers, for students and for the administrative staff, universities are our life. We feel that we can legitimately express our opinion and our thoughts about universities; formulate proposals but also point out problems and difficulties; utilise our experience to help these complex machines to function better and with greater credibility. The CRUI intends, indeed, to provide an answer to this natural need.

TOO MUCH 'WORK IN PROGRESS'

When reference is made to universities, a metaphor is increasingly employed, a metaphor that is perhaps abused but one that is extremely expressive: the metaphor of 'work in progress'.

The events of recent years – and also what has happened in recent months – demonstrate that universities have become work that has no end and that what should be seen as a provisional state of things is in fact being transformed into a definitive condition.

But it is not sufficient to point out this fact: we should strive to explain the forms of this peculiar state of affairs.

Is it only worry about the new, the emphasis on the 'great reform', that leads politics to constant upheavals and changes? Or does this desire for change really derive from the perception of one of the many emergencies in Italy? And is there not perhaps some even deeper reason?

In reality, if one looks at the substance of the phenomena involved, one understands that the reasons for this continual concern for renewal are more deeply rooted. They do not come so much from what is tactically convenient for one or other part of the political world, but are in reality the fruit of an objective need. It should indeed be said that when it comes to this need the relevant choices are not always taken.

*The renewal of university structures and their fundamental systems of organisation respond to a real need of our society. However, sufficient rationalisation has not yet taken place. Our society is looking, albeit in a confused way, for a new balance. It needs to plan its own future, to have a horizon of reference and of hope. There are problems that have become by now of a planetary dimension: peace, the co-existence of different faiths and cultures, hunger, justice, health, and respect for more balanced economic relationships between States – problems that ask to be solved for young people and with young people. In order to provide solutions to these problems we believe that *the fundamental capital is knowledge and that the**

most remunerative investment today is the education and training of young men and young women: the primacy of human capital over material capital and the capital of commodities.

It is natural that this search for the new, this aspiration to that balance and hope is manifested, first of all, in universities. The selection of knowledge, the measuring of formation, the link between technical learning and maturation, the structure of the world of work and its organisation, the role and the function of intellectuals, the relationship between learning and companies, critical awareness and the growth of knowledge, research and its monitoring: each of these thematic indices evokes entire libraries of debates and problems of very great topical relevance. And, at the same time, each of these subjects has a direct bearing on universities, their organisation, their functions, and their mission.

It is no accident that the attention of legislators and public political debate has fallen on universities.

However, the measures that have been taken, however penetrating they may have been, have been largely incomplete, and to such an extent that we *are still discussing a strategic plan that in reality lacks significant parts and whose unity and harmony one can only perceive with difficulty.*

And in order to act in an effective way on a sector that is so complex, producing real changes, we should first adopt a reform that is broadly based and shared.

For too long universities have been abandoned to themselves. Their self-referential character, for which they have often rightly been rebuked, has frequently been the response, of a 'self-immune' character, of bodies that encountered only deafness and distance in their institutional interlocutors.

Today we must seize the opportunity for change, we cannot and we do not want to flee from the responsibility to make proposals and the duty to engage in constructive criticism.

But before engaging in dialogue with the proposals that come to us from

parliament and the government, allow me to comment on the great work that the CRUI has carried out over the last year, not so much and not solely in expressing critical judgements but in the drawing up of projects, documents and proposals: the material that we offer you on this occasion bears very ample testimony to this. Thus, that period when we, in universities, were merely the bearers of complaints is finally behind us, and the era of proposals has arrived.

JURIDICAL STATUS, A LAW AND THE REFORM

Many measures are presently being discussed. The government's Bill on the reform of the juridical status of lecturers is certainly one of the most important.

This is – and the point should be made immediately – a title that is deceptive. If one really wants to reform the juridical status of lecturers, at the center of the project and as its essential aspect should be *a redefinition of the whole system of the condition of lecturers themselves, their status, their prerogatives, their rights and their duties*.

These are very sensitive subjects.

Unfortunately, very little of this is to be found in the Bill that is now being discussed: that is why I made reference to a deceptive title.

I do not want today to list the large and detailed criticisms that have been formulated in our official documents. I would only like to dwell on three aspects which I really see as central for the future organisation of the teaching body and its potential for development.

MORE YOUNG PEOPLE IN UNIVERSITIES

The proposal of the government envisages the organisation of university lecturers into two levels, with the present position of 'researchers' destined for extinction. These last would be replaced with non-tenure contracts. Well, this loses all value if it is not linked to the need to assure the educational and university research system the highest contribution of trained young people who are strongly

motivated and of high quality, of a level comparable to that of the other advanced countries of the world.

This is an objective that should be set not with abstract parameters but by matching it to Italian realities as they really are.

First of all, it is not the fault of the 'researchers' if their juridical status has never been defined (by now almost twenty-five years have gone by) and thus the indispensable work of research and lecturing that they have already engaged in should have all the recognition possible. I would like to add that the figure of the non-tenured researcher could be acceptable solely if the remuneration received was near or comparable to that of similar European figures taken as a model. And if for these figures there was a real possibility, after their qualifications and experience had developed, of competing to be appointed to tenured positions.

If such is not the case, *and today we know that such guarantees do not exist because of the grave lack of resources*, one cannot see how the envisaged contracts will be able to counter the tendency, which is already under way, of the distancing of the most talented young people from university research, especially in those sectors where external pulls, from companies or foreign universities or research centers, are at their strongest.

APPOINTMENT COMPETITIONS: CHANGE IS URGENT

Another key aspect of the government's proposal on the juridical status of lecturers involves appointment competitions. The new forms of recruitment, whose introduction is now envisaged, are based upon unified procedures of scholarly suitability at a national level and upon successive comparative assessments of those who are suitable at the level of individual universities.

The CRUI agrees on the need for change: on the condition, however, that at a practical level the number of people deemed suitable is linked to the requests made by universities and also, when the occasion arises, broadened at the level of sectors, and in addition that precise guarantees are provided regarding an

effective ability to meet the deadlines for applications and the time periods envisaged for the procedures involved, which, to achieve this, should be decentralised.

With regard to appointment examinations, it would also be advisable to begin with *the distinction between recruitment and career advancement*. One really cannot understand why, if our mechanisms are not presently compatible with those of other countries, we do not seek to harmonise them, adopting as a basis research activity and introducing a severe assessment as regards activity engaged in when it comes to promotions. For that matter, this would probably be the best antidote to the manifestation of those *phenomena involving distortion in the processes of these appointment competitions, which, on this occasion as well, we strongly and openly condemn*.

The government's project also affects the juridical status and the conditions of employment of university lecturers in other and decisive respects.

One of the principal innovations is the idea of structuring the economic remuneration of newly appointed lecturers or lecturers who are already employed and decide to opt for the new system. The new salary is to be made up of a fixed part (equal for everyone to that received by full-time lecturers) and a possible variable part to be negotiated at a local level and to be covered by the budget of the local university.

In principle, we are not opposed to this proposal. However, the CRUI believes that a system such as that suggested in this Bill must be placed within a revision of the way in which universities are funded, to which I will refer later on in this report, and once the forms and limits to the discretionary powers that the individual universities can exercise have been defined. Such a *definition of rules* is indispensable if we want to avoid internal and external influences on universities that could turn out to be improper and distorting.

FULL TIME AND PART TIME

In the measure being discussed there is the abolition, for that matter, of the distinction between full time and part time, with external activity being limited solely by the criterion of compatibility with the obligation of not engaging in competition with the university. To us it appears that in eliminating the point of reference of full time, *without clearly defining the duties and the rights of lecturers, one could very much weaken their relationship with their university*, with a consequent distancing of research and jobs from universities as well. And this precisely at a moment when we are beginning to secure in a more sensitive way the results of the efforts made to develop within the university system the capacity to call upon external resources, which, in recent years, have increased notably.

But beyond what has just been said – which is of by no means small account – an even more substantial point conditions any assessment of the government's project: the absolute lack of connections with the question, which is central and which is now more than ever before on the agenda, of the funding of universities. *This law is not funded.*

Lastly, I would like to make a final observation on method: the plan must be supported by the large-scale involvement of the various parties as regards ends and approaches. Above all, it must be shared. Let us hope that there is no desire to succumb to the easy temptation to flee from an *indispensable, albeit arduous, work of enrichment, broadening, and modification*: this alone can permit such an ambitious plan as the reform of the juridical status of lecturers is to really advance.

THE SYSTEM OF FUNDING

The revising of the funding of the university system is a relevant problem and is another example of 'unfinished business'. I would like to express in relation to this subject, above all else, a rebellion.

I rebel, indeed, against that commonplace that holds that universities are exclusively a place where one engages in the easy appointment of personnel. Almost

as if one were dealing with one of the many large carriages that lead to an extension of the boundaries of public expenditure through the employment of labour of no utility and very low productivity. This does not correspond in the least to the reality of our universities.

The second commonplace is that universities are seen, because of their forms of expenditure, as a kind of uncontrollable reality. According to this criticism, universities are placed on a par, and this is no accident, with all the autonomous centres of expenditure and those bodies in which decisions about expenditure are taken in situations involving independence from central requests and requirements. Well, financial autonomy is the necessary feature of every form of autonomy that wishes to be really such.

Is this perhaps a condition of privileges? I do not think so because the financial autonomy of universities has its rationale in the need to give universities the possibility of developing according to diversified models. This practice is as relevant as that practice which requires universities to be flexible in relation to the evolution of knowledge and the requirements of the forces of production and the local areas.

Let this be well understood: *universities do not intend to fail in their responsibility as public bodies and thus they do not want to withdraw from the need to create efficient systems for the control of expenditure.* This is also a question of great ethical significance. For example, although on the one hand universities consider the halt to appointments of people who have won job competitions unacceptable because this damages their autonomy, on the other hand, they are ready to contain their own freedom of action within reasonable limits established by laws and regulations.

*With Minister Moratti and the MIUR, the CRUI has drawn up and agreed upon a project involving the modernisation of the system of funding (which we hope will be adopted by the government and parliament) which, although it conserves the freedom to determine the allocation of resources on the part of individual universities, also envisages the *planning* of objectives that are consistent with the*

strategies indicated by the government and parliament, as well as resources, including, obviously enough, those for the staff and personnel of every university, the assessment of the results of its activities, the *allocation of funds on the basis of this assessment* in growing proportions to the total, *a plan for the funding* of universities by the state which will raise, within five years time, the resources for the system at least to the European average in terms of GDP.

However, I must observe that *the parameters that measure these investments in higher education and research locate our country on the bottom rungs of the European ladder*: from the number of students for each lecturer to the number of researchers, and from the funds for administration and buildings (for which a planned policy for a number of years and finally suited to a modern country is increasingly necessary) to residential halls for students. In the same way, our country is the one with the lowest numbers of graduates.

We are confident that this series of changes to the system of funding of universities will take place without further delay, and this because we believe that it has been finally understood that when priorities are decided upon it will be necessary *to invest in education and research*, being aware that these long-term investments render more than those others which appear – and I emphasize the word ‘appear’ – to produce an immediate visible return. *To meet the crisis we need to graft on short and long-term mechanisms that prevent a return of that crisis*. Universities will then be able to, and must, develop farsighted capacities for planning, which are today hindered by a reliance on state resources that are in large part absorbed by current expenditure.

Great attention must also be paid to *the right to study*: the social policy of a modern democratic state should be experienced by young people in the first and credible way specifically within the community that we want, and which, and this is not accident, we term educational.

THE 'REFORM OF THE REFORM' AND OURSELVES

The direction in which the 'reform of the reform' of the system of studies, even in its most recent version, is moving is not clear. And one cannot understand the real needs from which this modification springs and is justified or manage to understand the nature of the transitory regime.

This should be said despite the fact that the last reform, which was launched after strong criticisms on the part of the academic community and the CRUI, corrected by no means few of the contents with which it had been presented during its first stage.

Our observations, like our proposals, are known within the academic community since they have also been the subject of detailed dialogue and discussion. However, I would like to recall what they are.

The CRUI has repeatedly stated, listening as it does to the voice of the academic community, that *it is not advisable to intervene in relation to a reform that has just been passed and which is still at a stage of partial implementation*, and whose complete results and data are not known.

However, the data that are presently available are positive: the percentage of students abandoning their studies is today 39% of the total students who have enrolled compared to a figure of 70% three years ago; the number of those about to graduate has increased; the number of graduates has risen by 15% in the last year, as has, in a marked way, the number of enrolled students at universities amongst the nineteen year old age band, of foreign students and those engaged in traineeships. But beyond these significant data, the position of the CRUI is to allow the protagonists and categories to adapt to the new rules, interpret them, interact with each other, so as to outline practices, which may also be original when compared to the 'intentions of the legislators': in simple terms, the reform should be given time to produce its effects which will then be effectively assessed. Otherwise, the risk is that we will work in the dark or be like Penelope and her tapestry. Here, perhaps not everyone remembers that this famous tapestry was in reality a *funeral* shroud for the elderly Laertes!

The modifications made by the Ministry confirm in substantial terms the approach of the previous reform. And specifically for this reason, it appears to us to be opportune to emphasise that *it would be preferable to limit the interventions of a normative character and instead to support universities in the difficult process of the application of the reform, to begin with, and then its assessment.* In addition, they should be supported in the drawing up of courses of study and the use of the credit system, above all because with these practices we *have witnessed within universities the manifestation of distorting phenomena*, not least because of concessions to the claims of specific disciplines and the dictates of self-reference. All of this has led to excess in the number of proposals that have been activated as regards the teaching supply, with gratuitous duplications and insufficient attention being paid to the needs of society. It should, however, be said that in an autonomous way universities are proceeding to a correction of these distortions.

The requests of the CRUI, the CUN and the Committee of Presidents of the Conferences of Deans have jointly embraced this approach.

The modifications made to the most recent project of reform are not confined to understandable clarifications at the level of names but deal to the full with the question of the structure of courses of study. On the one hand, in fact, they propose in the first instance emphasis on *flexibility* by reducing the number of the obligatory credits fixed by the Ministry; on the other, however, they allow during the stage of successive decrees, for a not well defined quantity of cases, a possible notable increase in such credits and *thus injury to the autonomy of universities*. This is even more serious because it takes place within the context of *an absence of a defined and shared framework of degree classes and the former specialist degree* which should have formed part of the proposals to modify the D.M. 509/99.

All of this will provoke concern amongst lecturers and disorientation amongst students and their families, and will help to increase the perception on the part of the various parties involved of *a deleterious confusion in the university system*. This is a system that for years has been suffocated by a lack of resources and chaos at

the level of laws and regulations, by reforms that have perennially 'cost nothing' from the point of view of the central government but which have been of great impact and organisational cost in the daily realities of universities, where the large number of those who work in this area encounter by no means few difficulties in shouldering the responsibilities that autonomy in relation to teaching specifically envisages.

From an international point of view, it is clear that when the unity of the model for studies is broken, thereby increasing not only the levels but also the pathways and the rationales of the creation of qualifications, *we enter into contradiction with the creation of a European area of higher education*, which has halted at the system designed by the Bologna model and its subsequent up-datings.

THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS UNIVERSITIES: CONTRADICTION IN ADIECTO

Universitas is a noun that does not tolerate the juxtaposition of adjectives; in its absoluteness, which is also generality, lie its strength and its great capacity to guide change and adapt in good time to different needs and requirements.

It is primarily for this basic reason that we point out with concern the decision to give official recognition to 'telecommunications' universities, which are separate from existing university realities and, indeed, alternative to those realities.

These initiatives can neither be supported nor accepted. Above all else, they seem inconsistent with the declared aim of wanting to increase standards of teaching. In actual fact, the availability of buildings and equipment are not sufficient in themselves to create a university. And an information technology platform is not enough to ensure that forms of teaching meet minimum cultural standards.

Recently, in the hall of a secondary school in Veneto known for its extreme modernity and its openness to the world of information and communications technology, the following slogan appeared: 'the computer solves almost all the problems that it creates'. Do we really want to believe that a mere information

technology platform can replace that of the community of students and lecturers that we call a 'university'?

This is not a matter of defending tradition and closing ourselves to innovations but of stressing the principle according to which a *container is not enough – you need substance*.

And the pathway that has led to the official recognition of telecommunications universities does not seem to have aimed in a particular way at the ascertaining of the effective possession by such bodies of the indispensable requisites to assure minimum standards of quality, which are necessary to the cultural growth to which such universities are called.

The truth is that the label 'university' is becoming increasingly obviously a commercial label, based on which the dynamics of exchange on the market of education prevail over the meaning of institutions that have worked for hundreds of years by that name.

The confusion between universities and other institutions, such as the so-called company universities or other inventive creations, which are completely detached from existing universities and have ignored the regional university co-ordination committee, is to be encountered all too frequently. Indeed, it seems to me that there are those who seek to fuel this confusion.

And this is all the more grave when one considers that we are living at a time when the defence of a label and an appellation is becoming a fundamental element in guaranteeing the genuineness of a product and its specific identity. The distinction between a research university and a teaching university is totally extraneous to the institutional form of Italian universities.

THE TREASURE OF RESEARCH

When one speaks about universities, a separate charter has to be dedicated to research. Indeed, after a certain fashion one is dealing with two chapters: one dedicated to university research in the strict sense, and the other dedicated to what is

not university research. One is dealing – and the point should be made clear right away – with a distinction of a purely expositive character. Research is not a sector in which one can make distinctions between subjects and provenance: it is an area in which, more than ever before, what matters is the project, and even more, the result.

With respect to university research I have to renew the complaint, which by now has become habitual, of the progressive reduction of the funds allocated to support it.

Although we continue to *condemn the scarcity of resources*, a few timid smiles can be ventured in relation to the procedures involved because *some steps forward have been achieved which I adjudge to be positive in character*. I am referring, in particular, to the profound renewal – which at the present time has only been set in motion – of the procedures for the assessment of university research projects of national interest.

Finally, the necessary activities for the creation of internal procedural rules within guarantor commissions and for the creation of a stable list of revisers have been launched. Above all, and to avoid the risks – which have been called attention to on a number of occasions – of errors in assessment, the creation of a ‘theosaurus’ has been set in motion, that is to say a set of basic rules that will ensure that the relationship between the assessor and the project is based upon objective rules.

For our part, we consider the attention paid to an objectification of the assessment procedures and an increase in the credibility and the authoritativeness of the judgement on projects to be one of the fundamental contributions that can be made, without the expenditure of financial energies, to the public system of all research, including university research. At a time of scarce resources, being able to rely on real competition and rules which, although not infallible, are certainly objective for the assessment of projects, is something that is of fundamental importance. We are ready to work with whatever the Ministry may wish to do in this direction and to make our organisational capacities and our commitment available to this initiative, which, indeed, we consider valuable.

As regards non-university research, we looked with favour on the launch of the new stage of the *National Research Council* (CNR).

The President of the CRUI is a member of the governing board of that body. He is appointed not on a personal basis but because of his office. By this action we wanted to point out the importance that we attribute to the challenge of renewal that this body is engaging in and to the possibility that the activity of the National Research Council will grow in quality and size, thereby allowing an expression of that recognised quality that the potential of its researchers can certainly aspire to achieving.

It is our conviction that an improvement in the structures of and an increase in the activities of the CNR are not in contrast with the interests of universities. *Exchange between research centres and universities belongs to the tradition and happy pages of the history of this country.*

What we do not understand is the wish to promote *a project that is completely spurious as regards the context of the relationships so far described in this report and that belong to our system* – indeed, a project that is declaredly in conflict with all the protagonists of the Italian panorama, at least as far as we know: the Institute of High Technology in Genoa.

We are amazed at the conspicuous financial contribution that has been made to the project, but more than anything else the *open challenge made to universities* has left in us a feeling of deep concern, involving as it does an approach of replacing universities with other than universities, as though one could not develop within universities what is defined as being ‘excellent’.

If so-called ‘excellence’ can only exist outside universities, does this mean that universities must humbly take on the role of a super-secondary school or a super-technical institute? Not in the least. *We solemnly declare here that in Italian universities we intend to go on providing an excellent basic culture and an excellent culture of excellence, as we have always done.*

We thus ask that this Institute be led back to being an element that appreciates

the university system and not one that involves declared fracture with, and the elimination of, the efforts and the successes of so many Italian researchers.

WHAT WE NEED FOR RESEARCH

The former European Commissioner for Research, Philippe Busquin, has pointed out that in 2003 Italy was placed last amongst the twenty-five countries of the enlarged European Union as regards investment in research (in 2003, as well, public investment in research fell by 5.3%, and this despite the plan of Minister Moratti and her commitment to implement that plan; in addition, private investments in research in Italy are the lowest in Europe). The Commissioner has called strongly for *a relaunching of the Lisbon strategy as regards research, the formation of human capital, and innovation as a vital element in the economic recovery of the member States, with a reorientation of their objectives in this direction.* Italy has a further reason for doing this if one takes into account the fact that her scientific production is recognised as being of high quality, and indeed it is such in comparison with other countries if considered in terms of the number of researchers – leaving aside the means available – who are much less numerous in proportionate terms.

The CRUI has repeatedly called for a firm set of initiatives in the form of projects and of resources available for research, the advertising of calls involving projects of at least three years in duration, a constant interaction with research bodies, and in particular with the CNR, for a remodelling but not an abandonment of centres of excellence, for the provision of help to universities in establishing the bases – as they have indeed done in the past – for the development of high technology industries and the use of incubators as instruments for the creation of forms of excellence and new ideas. *Indeed, there can be no doubt that without a strong renewal at the level of technology, the future of Europe, and Italy in particular, is destined to experience a progressive decline in relation to the other economic groupings, the United States of America, Japan, China, other emerging countries, and the Scandinavian countries, to cite only some examples.*

We have requested a *national research register* in order to optimise the use of resources and avoid dispersion or repetition at the level of finances. We have been forerunners in assessing the results of the scientific and scholarly research of universities and we have made our contribution to the work of the CIVR with a view to the definition of an adequate, flexible and rapid system of assessment *ex ante*, *in itinere* and *ex post*. We are strongly strengthening the Ph.D. with the creation of *Ph.D. Schools* within an international context so as to attract students from other countries, including new emerging countries such as China and India. We have called for action, through agreements in relation to programmes with the MIUR, leading to the creation of the permanent installation of large-scale equipment and the creation of mixed laboratories involving the participation of both universities and companies. We launched a project, which we called the ‘young people project’, which unfortunately has not as yet been adopted, that envisaged a prior provision of state funds for universities directed towards the recruiting of already trained young researchers who are today languishing in a limbo of uncertainty, a limbo which demotivates them and drives them outside universities, and who should be returned to universities in the years to come with the greater financial possibilities that will be offered by the large number of members of the – unfortunately elderly – teaching staff who will retire. Today we relaunch this project.

Extraordinary measures are not sufficient. We need a plan of certain investments over a number of years because *learning must be nourished in an uninterrupted way if we want it to live and to produce*.

OUR RENEWAL: HOW AND WHY

Their criticisms of certain measures that have been passed or that are being drawn up should not make people think that the CRUI and the universities want only to conserve. This is because, as I demonstrated in the first part of this report, I make a distinction between the proposals and innovations that we consider positive and those that we consider mistaken, and because in relation to the vast gamut of subjects connected with universities we have demonstrated that we have a vision that

involves the making of proposals. But the fact is that we *find ourselves faced with an epoch-making change and thus the whole of the system of the interactions between universities and society, and the system of the internal structures of universities, must be reconsidered*. This must always be done in an approach of autonomy and freedom that allows universities to adapt to the times on the basis of the recognition of their public mission, their responsibility towards the society that has created them, depends on them, and supports them.

Are we dealing with a radical change or a renewal? To change radically could also mean replacing universities with something else because universities do not want or cannot renew themselves. Such is not the case. *Universities know that they have to change in the next ten years rather more than they have done in the past fifteen*, when they have had to adapt to the movement towards mass higher education but have been able to do rather little as regards changing their structures, their models, and their decision-making processes.

The birth of a united Europe, the processes of the globalisation of knowledge, and the acceleration caused by the European area of higher education and research will in a short time impose rapid and profound changes.

In Europe, in fact, the creation of a shared area of higher education and research has shaken the traditional scaffolding of universities, even our historic ones. But the pathway that universities set in motion with the Bologna Process will not lead automatically to the hoped for mobility of lecturers and students or to the greater competitiveness of Europe if there is not a *network of quality universities* that is recognised through assessment and accreditation, and if *networks of research with a critical mass of tasks and integrated projects* are not established.

THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE IN UNIVERSITIES

In our system both state and non-state universities are public not in the sense that they want to be supported solely by public resources but because they perform a public function.

Universities are, and must remain, institutions entrusted with performing a public function, institutions at the service of national society and the institutional and social realities that operate in their local areas, institutions involved in the construction of a transnational system within the European framework. The final declaration of the conference of European ministers of higher education, held in Berlin last September, and led by Minister Moratti, emphasised that higher education ‘is a public good and a public responsibility’.

Their task is, and must remain, the growth of knowledge and the critical transmission of knowledge at a higher level, *linking in an overall and balanced way research and teaching.*

In relation to such a task, *changes in the juridical forms of universities are not feasible*, not even when these changes are suggested by operations involving the redefinition of directions and the nature of public expenditure: under other headings these would not be insignificant. I may give one example from many: the suggestion to transform universities into foundations would bring about – but only in an illusory fashion, given European rules – a change in the position of universities within the institutional system of the country. And this would mean the setting in motion of a process involving the dismantling of the system of public universities, indeed, the emptying of the constitutional guarantee of freedom of research and teaching.

One cannot play around with label, nor think – or allow it to be thought – that is sufficient to change the public into the private for problems to be changed into opportunities, for inefficiencies to be changed into reasons for change, for the scarcity of resources to be changed into an increase in competition.

Those who follow directions in line with ephemeral or seductive anglophile fashions, and feed the illusion that it is sufficient to leave the public character of universities behind us in order to find solutions, is cultivating an illusion.

Is it not the case that in although California the University of Stanford – a place of Nobel prize winners and discoveries – is a private institution, the University of Berkeley, which can boast equal prestige and an equal number of Nobel prize

winners, forms a part of the public system of the universities of the State of California? And we should always remember the following: we are in Italy, we are not in the United States of America.

IF THE MARKET BECOMES A SIREN VOICE

Those who think that the only way by which to dismantle the self-referring character of the system is to open – even in a traumatic way – universities to the ‘market’, are equally in error, an error, for that matter, that is enveloped in the fascination of things only half understood.

The market can do much in other nations, but it can do so because the national dimensions are different, the culture is different, the circulation of wealth is broader and swifter, and the rules of the context are profoundly different from those that we know today in Italy. In addition, in the countries that are given as examples there is a traditional capacity for self-government and the regulation of the market itself.

The ‘university product’ cannot be subjected to the rule that is applied to commodities, the rule of low cost, if only because for the very good reason that the quality of the service provided is not an indifferent factor but a constituent part of the service itself. Nor can students be seen as consumers who are waiting to fall prey to voracious university institutions.

For a certain kind of goods (read university specialisations) there would be no market because in Italy there is no market for ‘university products’, in contrary fashion to what happens in other countries. And yet there is, as there is elsewhere, a need to continue to nourish a certain kind of capacity and knowledge.

If the university system does have to engage in self-criticism, it is that of having been drawn into a supply that is too fragmented and at times publicised in a way that is overly banal. Marketing and advertising cannot be applied to the cultural heritage and to cultural goods in the same way as they are applied to the sale of commodities.

Instead, in this area, we need to commit ourselves to a work of sensitising and increasing the awareness of young people. This involves a return to emphasising projects directed towards pre-university orientation where talents will be registered, vocations will be discovered, and young people will be pointed in the right direction.

From this point of view, I want to express publicly to Minister Moratti *the readiness of the CRUI to sign with the MIUR an agreement to jointly develop activities involving information and educational orientation from the first years of school*. I hope that in this area we can announce during the school year that has just begun a detailed series of initiatives.

If, instead, we use the market as a metaphor we immediately grasp the need for an improvement and an increase in the quality of education and research: *through the introduction into the system of suitable instruments that promote forms of competition and specialist differentiation between universities*, to be achieved through free experimentations with innovative models in research and teaching, and thus also through a simplified and controlled diversification of the education supply.

We can certainly observe a strong demand for knowledge of a social impact because knowledge in the knowledge society is not only a goal but also a resource directed towards the growth of the economy. For universities this implies a more utilitarian vision of knowledge, without, however, falling into a distortion of the original idea of what a university is. In order to retrieve the role of being the best institutions in the world, in addition to everything that has already been said in this paper it should be stressed that universities must intensify their relations with the other economic and industrial realities, as well create networks (to produce patents and new companies as well), in order to expand their links with trade and industry, strengthen their role in their local area, and make their services usable by third parties. *They must become diversified, albeit conserving their essence as institutions of research and education, and compete to be seen as operating at a high level, at least in certain acknowledge sectors.*

UNIVERSITIES ARE NOT COMPANIES

This is also a way of strengthening bridges between society and its universities. *And yet universities cannot transform themselves into companies without becoming lost.* Competition is a matter of quality, the creation of areas of excellence, answers to social expectations, the ability to graft on long-term processes of improvement, the capacity to engage in projects and make investments, and awareness of the economic costs that the social function of universities involve. *The mission of universities is the production and transmission of original knowledge to which people have open access, and the certification of the validity of knowledge and its transmission.* Knowledge is a public good and the individual use of a piece of knowledge does not impede its simultaneous use by many other people, just as a candle can throw light on many other candles without losing its intensity. This is all the more true the more you are dealing with basic knowledge, namely knowledge that is at the base of the production of knowledge or is complementary to that production.

As Paul David, a Professor at Stanford and Oxford, has recently observed, universities must not transform themselves into companies, not least for the simple reason that companies are not very good at patenting and selling their products. The essential mission of universities is to think, to create learning and culture that is freely distributed to students and society.

Universities are institutions that must equip themselves with a new self-culture, but they must remain a public good that can be used by everyone through the right to real study, which is not an example of a levelling equality but the provision of opportunities and support for merit. Such universities are a 'political subject' in the processes of cultural, social and economic development, a 'knot' of networks of relations that includes cultural bodies, research institutes, companies, international organisations, and agencies for innovation in local areas. Such universities are a fundamental 'competitive advantage' for the local areas because they are locomotives for the development of the local socio-economic systems, above all

because of their capacity to supplement such systems with the general and codified scientific and scholarly knowledge that circulates at a global level. The fertile relationship of co-operation between the CRUI and regional co-ordination moves in this direction.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SYSTEM OF COMPANIES

Reflection on 'universities and the market' inevitably brings with it the subject of the relationship between universities and the world of business.

This is a relationship in which the CRUI has always believed and which it has cultivated with tenacity and conviction.

Together with Confindustria we signed a *framework agreement* some years ago, which was accompanied by an *operational protocol* that was signed on 29 July 2004.

This agreement is organised around a 'Marco Polo' programme to foster the mobility of students and researchers between Italy and the new emerging economies of Asia; the strengthening of ties between education, research and companies; the introduction of a levy equal to 50% of the transfers from companies to universities as early as 2005; an increase in the number of students and researchers belonging to scientific and technological disciplines; collaboration to create a new model for the government, funding and assessment of universities within the framework of a certain, suitable and growing financial support for universities, which also envisages a process involving the accreditation of degree courses, as an ideal follow-up to the work engaged in by CampusOne as well (a project, born three years ago to contribute to the relationship between the world of production, listed at a European level as a model for the assessment of degree courses, which this year, because of a lack of funding, will come to an end); and the creation of a database and an information system on the distinctive capacities and expertise of universities, directed to the transfer of knowledge between universities and companies as well.

We believe that the Italian world of business should be led to believe in the

universities of their country and must be helped to make knowledge a constant and unfailing element of its own process of production. It is a good idea, therefore, to develop other concrete initiatives that in large measure do not depend solely on the exponential entities of these two worlds. I am alluding here to the need to *foster technological transfer* through suitable and agile organisms, which at the present time are completely absent from the Italian context. I am also alluding to the need to entrust the carrying out of a census of specialised structures and to *foster encounter between productive capacity, industrial programmes, and ideas relating to, and the possibilities of achieving, innovative development.* And, lastly, I am also alluding to the bestowal of a special tax status on research expenditure, which should, indeed, be completely exempt from taxation.

The relationship between universities and the world of business is of strategic importance for the world of universities. But we are also aware that this special relationship cannot be the only horizon. Inevitably, important sectors and important areas that belong to the full to universities and their mission would remain cut out. This relationship, therefore, is necessary to helping the university system, but it is not sufficient.

What brings together realities that are so different, but on the other hand also complementary, has to be the consideration that *so-termed basic university research is indispensable to the applications of research.* Oliver Cromwell would say: 'man never goes so high as when he does not know where he is going'.

THE GOVERNANCE OF UNIVERSITIES

The decision-making process within universities presently has its limits, above all because universities are a special form of community based upon knowledge. This community possesses stratified knowledge at the base of a hypothetical pyramid: from this follows a sharing of choices, not only by the lecturers but also by other protagonists of the process, by the students, by the technical and administrative staff and by other social groupings. *We need to manage to ensure that responsibility*

prevails over representation, moving along the sensitive ridge between respect for the nature of universities as communities and greater reliability and transparency.

The tasks of strategic planning and management – which are totally unprecedented compared to the past – that universities are called to engage in thus involve keeping the responsibility, efficiency and transparency of decisions closely linked to an effective capacity to achieve the democratic representation of all their component parts.

This is a challenge that we have to face up to and to meet.

As regards the governance of the system of universities, the Ministry must engage in functions that involve planning, direction and verification, but always (and of necessity) in a way that respects the autonomy of universities. *The governance of universities must eliminate every example of self-reference, but this cannot lead to a subordination of universities to social, political and economic realities.* There would be the risk of impeding the real possibility of producing knowledge in a critical way and performing a proactive role in the identification of pathways of development for local areas and the country, and in the creation of their cultural awareness.

In relation to the system of governance of universities we *propose guidelines derived from the application of these fundamental principles*, guidelines that respect the autonomy of universities but which are not so general as to hinder deviant developments and which are issued with an awareness of the detailed make-up of our university system, in which state and non-state universities, and realities that are rather different, are present, realities which must be free to interact in the best way possible with the respective special features of their local areas.

THE CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT

In the view of the CRUI, the introduction into the university system, at all levels, of a real culture of assessment remains of essential importance. The assessment of results must become the philosophy of the entire university system.

It must relate to teaching, research, services and administrative activities

through a process involving the testing of the achievement of previously established objectives, with a consequent subsequent modulation of the allocation of resources.

The assessment of the activities of the system and thus of individual universities must be entrusted to a 'third party' authority other than the MIUR or universities. This authority, in carrying out assessment, must consider all the aspects of the lives of universities and examine their activities in a way that tests not only the quality of scientific and teaching work and administrative efficiency, but also the conformity of the activities themselves with the needs of cultural and scientific growth and the educational needs of society. The activities of individual universities and the system as a whole must be measured with specific indicators for each performance and for each scientific area through an analysis, of a qualitative character as well, of the relationship between objectives, resources, and the results that are actually achieved.

To have universities that form a part of Europe and are able to compete at an international level we must introduce an authentic policy of assessment – assessment organised around two approaches which are correlated with each other.

The first approach: *universities must exercise autonomy in order to obtain the highest possible quality; the state must trust them but at the same time it must follow their growth a posteriori.* It should always be borne in mind that the activities of universities are complex, rightly shrink from bureaucratisation, and their quality cannot be measured solely with some parameter or other that involves an instant reading.

The decisions taken by universities cannot but take into account the need to develop strong areas that will characterise them and make them stand out as a result of comparative dynamics that are imminent. This will automatically induce greater efficiency and a better cost-benefit ratio.

The second approach: *high quality teaching and research will be increasingly expensive.* Research requires sophisticated equipment and long periods of time as well as more numerous groups of researchers based upon an interdisciplinary

approach. Teaching requires intensive work and a great deal of time dedicated to it by lecturers. For this reason, the public resources that are needed will increasingly grow in size. This is why *the trust of society in universities, the trust of politics, of the world of work, and of representative bodies in universities, is becoming essential, and knowledge about, and the transparency of, the activities of universities is a premise for such trust*. Universities must demonstrate that they know how to take structural decisions, and even unpopular ones, on their own. The quality of a university will always depend on the quality of its human resources, of its researchers, of its lecturers, of its personnel, and its capacity to attract the best students.

I would like to repeat the point: we believe in the culture of assessment and we want the assessment of results to become the rule for teaching, research, services and administration, *with self-assessment and assessment by external figures and a consequent subsequent modulation of resources*. The criteria that have been recently introduced for the distribution of a part of the Ordinary Finance Fund have been useful and shared with the National Committee for the Assessment of the University System, but they cannot be assessment or replace assessment, which needs co-operation if we want to create a detailed model.

The CRUI has produced a document on this subject, which was unanimously approved, the fruit of work with a group of consultants. This document is more than a hypothesis and demonstrates the clear desire of universities to be correctly judged on what they have decided to do in the exercise of their autonomy.

The assessment, and the incentives and premiums correlated with positive results, are certain elements for the encouragement of efficiency. A university that is assessed in a positive way receives more prestige and more resources which it then allocates internally by rewarding and encouraging its most productive sectors (yet taking account of the fact that it, like every university, is a composite system that is supported by an interdisciplinary approach and cultural structuring). But this is not enough.

The conduct of every lecturer should be based upon the concept that *his or her university should be favoured over every interest – albeit legitimate – involved in*

belonging to any of its structures or a scientific-disciplinary sector. In doing this, he or she really works to strengthen that discipline, that structure, and that sector. And in this way he or she becomes able to bring quality, prestige and resources to the community that receives all of this. And even prior to this, and more than anything else, given that a university has the task of educating young people to become, in addition to competent, also citizens who are ethically responsible, *ethics should inspire all our actions, without any compromises or exceptions.* Nothing can take the place of this value.

It is also essential to pay *special attention to the technical and administrative staff*, to whom we owe so much and who must be appreciated as regards their salaries at a central level and a local level, with a decisive impetus, supported by training, towards professionalisation, and with the application of a meritocratic approach and agreed forms of flexibility in relation to work.

TEACHING VERSUS LEARNING. THE DISCIPLINES

What do young people expect from their university years? And what can we guarantee them? *An environment in which they can develop as people*, an opportunity to nourish their cultural passions and interests, an opportunity to breathe in an interdisciplinary approach and to acquire qualifications that will allow them to occupy positions of merit within society. *An environment in which it is possible to teach young people that in order to manage such positions of merit it is necessary to know how to dominate problems and strengthen skills and capacities by continuing to learn with the method learnt at university.* In this way young people will be integrated into the professions in the right way, namely with a *critical awareness*: what is useful today, tomorrow might not be useful or sufficient. This objective cannot be separated from *the move from teaching universities to learning universities*, that is to say from the taking possession by the student of his or her own learning, acquired through interaction, debate, demand and the analysis of processes and contents.

We need to overcome the conservative resistance of a certain number of

lecturers who are bound to consolidated and well-known practices and to a fertile but dangerous individualism. This approach distances collegiality in relation to decisions which is seen by these lecturers as a way of interfering in their decisions and of nourishing the pathologies of bureaucracy. We know, however, that an *interdisciplinary approach* is the only way of overcoming the placing of disciplines in compartments, a lack of clarity as regards courses of study, and inconsistency between these objectives and the contents that have to be learnt.

In this model centred around learning, *for the lecturer* there is not only greater work but a *much more complete role than that of the past* – that of being a guide, a mentor, and a helper; in substance, that is to say, *an educator* who shortens the move from factual and information contents to a real understanding and a real absorption of knowledge. This is because he or she accompanies young people during their pathway of learning, of method, of the rationale of knowledge, of learning, its uses, and the ethics on which it must be based. The art of teaching, as Anatole France argued, lies in provoking the curiosity of young minds to move towards the new with the intention of satisfying that curiosity in the future.

This is a pathway that should not abandon young graduates but should help them in achieving an occupational opening, in conjunction with the relevant offices that universities at the present time are increasingly strengthening.

For that matter, new ideas and new knowledge explode every moment and *today's knowledge is of such a complexity that it rises above the reductionist approach of disciplines.*

This also applies to research. And this is also because, and I would like to stress this point once again, *research and education advance together and are not separable.* In order to integrate them further, it could be useful to engage in yet more training outside the lecture hall, in libraries, in research laboratories, and in places where research is applied to professional practice.

UNIVERSITIES, IDENTITY, MULTICULTURAL DIALOGUE

The observations that I have made so far in this paper have outlined an assessment of the year that has just ended and proposed an agenda of priorities and a philosophy of change. This approach is that much more valid in a country such as ours where the subject of planning the future, the destinies of the generations that will come and the level of the social responsibility of governments and institutions, has become a decisive challenge. This subject cannot be addressed with the strong desire to achieve a 'rapid effect', or, whatever the case may be, during a brief interlude between one electoral competition and another. It needs contents and an approach that are farseeing and awareness that our national problems cannot be reduced to a localistic logic and dimension.

If one wants to address the challenges of the future in a way that involves proposals, if we want to direct choices on such a sensitive subject as universities in a lucid and aware way, we must have an international perspective. And we must become aware that the project can no longer be implemented in absolute terms but must always be commensurate with what happens at home and near to us.

Today more than ever before an (at the least) European comparison must be the real and realistic context of our way of acting. *In the new scenario we encounter, at the same time, the parameter of commensuration and quantitative and qualitative comparison, and also the horizon by which we should establish our direction and the stages of the path to be followed.*

Today, Europe is a living reality that has entered our history with a breadth and a depth that were unimaginable until a few years ago.

The concrete launching of the project of the European Constitution today marks in a certain way a framework of reference in which universities are seen almost as the protagonists of co-operation and the development of a shared European fabric.

In article III-146 of the European Constitution it is established that 'the action of the Union aims at strengthening its scientific and technological bases through the

creation of European area of research in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technologies circulate freely, fostering the development of its competitiveness, including that of its industries, and promoting actions involving research held to be necessary to the meaning of the other headings of the Constitution'. And it goes on to say that 'to this end it encourages, throughout the Union, companies, including small and medium-sized companies, research centres and universities in their efforts involving research and technological development of high quality; it supports their efforts involving co-operation, aiming above all else at allowing researchers to co-operate freely beyond borders and companies to take advantage of the potential of the domestic market thanks, in particular, to the opening of national public tenders, to the establishment of shared rules and regulations, and the elimination of juridical and fiscal obstacles to such co-operation'.

Universities, together with research centres and companies, are thus expressly seen as factors of growth in terms of research and technological development intended to increase the competitiveness of the European economic system.

Indeed, it is expressly envisaged that the Union, among other things, will engage in specific actions involving a synergic linking together of different realities that supplement and encourage the growth of those actions undertaken by the member States. And this function of growth is all the more urgent and felt, the more the prolonged crisis of the economy continues.

Recent reports of institutes of economic studies have demonstrated that the negative effects of the present economic cycle are less evident in societies and industries where the level of competitiveness is higher and which have been able to create and conserve a more advanced technological position. *Research and development, therefore, are terms of the same reality, and universities, in which research finds its traditional chosen location, cannot but be directly involved.*

But one must not think that universities are engaged solely in the role of being a technological engine.

In reality, if a European perspective is adopted, universities also (and

probably) become places for the production of our cultural identity in the encounter with a transnational dimension.

Indeed, universities, in their natural openness to dialogue, are also a propulsive element for the production of a strong national identity – the identity with which we go into Europe and the world.

Now, at a time when globalisation is exalted and in an almost contradictory way local claims and requests are becoming stronger and the word ‘federalism’ has entered the political jargon of public opinion, it seems to be indispensable *to pay strong attention, following the teaching of President Ciampi, to the process that involves the production, nourishing and diffusion of our national identity.*

The identity that we are building, although it is plural in its contents, must be securely based and strong – this is what makes an area the home of a people and a nation.

This process, however, is a process that is genuinely cultural, a process involving the production, the growth and the transmission of values and critical awareness. *Thus it is a process that in universities finds its specific natural, and probably chosen, institutional location.*

The function of co-operating in the creation of a national and cultural identity is not contradicted by an emphasis on the functions of dialogue with different worlds, which were once far off but are now near to hand, such as those in Asia, those that have always been near in the Mediterranean, those that have been distant but nearby in terms of roots in Latin America, which look to us with justified hope, with a feeling of emptiness and nostalgia that must be eliminated as soon as possible.

I believe, in fact, that intercultural dialogue finds in universities its specific natural location, and *at a time that is so troubled and tragic as ours is one can legitimately affirm that the ability to set in motion processes of change and mutual enrichment with cultures that are not homogeneous is the key, before the success of a nation, to achieving tranquility.* In the ‘globalised society’ in which we live,

universities perform a fundamental role: they are naturally open to international relations and multicultural dialogue, and thus a strategic factor in the foreign policy of a country as well.

In this reality, which the notes previously made in this paper have been able merely to evoke in summarising fashion, the country must thus be able to present itself with its universities at a level to meet the challenges posed by the modern world. Projects and decisions must be consistent with this broader perspective and this horizon: without abandoning our tradition and our way of being, but linking this last to the challenges of the new age.

UNIVERSITIES: PROTAGONISTS OF THE EUROPEAN AREA

In this context, I believe that dialogue alone between governments and institutions is no longer sufficient. Not out of a sense of distrust but because of the serenely held belief that the state dimension is no longer enough.

Governments have worked together to create the European area through their farsighted and arduous work. They have established its fundamental rules. They have marked out its goals. And they have set in motion the overcoming of examples of national inertia.

But the European area is merely the place, which does not have national borders, where the relevant actors can move with freedom and in an autonomous way. However, the actors of this process are no longer governments, which have only been able to create the conditions for it: universities, as communities, have to shoulder the responsibilities and the challenges of dialogue. The historical stage that we await is thus made up of the development of an autonomous conversation directly engaged in by universities, between universities and for universities.

It is for this reason that the Conference of Italian University Rectors wanted the European Association of Universities and the conferences of rectors of European countries to be represented here today, and I greet them and thank them.

They are the representatives of that scenario of protagonists to whom at the

level of ideals we turn, by whom we measure ourselves, and with whom we wish to co-operate.

But they are not only the witnesses to our strong desire to overcome a purely municipal dimension in which every analysis is condemned as suffocatingly anti-modern and foolishly unsuited to the times. They are here amongst us today because they intend to bring a message and advance a proposal.

Indeed, it is specifically from this second university day that we wish to adopt a new initiative to which we attribute great significance, namely that of *making ourselves the promoters of a pathway of comparison and synthesis that leads to a joint declaration on the 'University of the Third Millennium' to which may be entrusted the summarising representation of the universities of the continent of Europe.*

Such a declaration would have a double meaning.

For educational pathways, first of all: it would be, in fact, the fruit of joint work between university institutions in which universities, retrieving the tradition of direct dialogue between cultural institutions which specifically belonged to them during the medieval period, could solemnly express their identity, under the banner of unity of intentions and principles, of plurality of contents, of openness to emerging cultures and the contemporary relevance of their mission.

But such a declaration would also acquire importance because of the horizon to which it is directed; *it should be a plan for development and a parameter for the dialogue of identities – at one and the same time a paradigm and a project.* We do not want to cancel differences or eliminate them: we know that they are the salt and the rationale of our existence, our strength and our mission. We want, however, to *promote the creation of declaration in which each European citizen can recognize his or her own university and other non-European cultures find the essential traits of the cultural institutions of the lands that are hosting them.*

Daily cares, today's troubles, the limitations of provincial life, should not hinder us from cultivating and promoting a great cultural project to be handed down

to the generations to come: the sign that our shared European society is able to express itself in the statutes of a European university for young people that will come.

This, therefore, is a project that we would like to work on immediately in order to implement it.

UNIVERSITIES: NAMELY COMMITMENT (THE 'STREBEN' OF FAUST)

With this hope and this ambitious proposal I would like to terminate my reflections.

We have perhaps forgotten what universities were for many of the generations that preceded us. In our distracted, and from many points of view confused, societies we do not manage to fully grasp what universities could be. *But we need to go back to reflecting on this point so that universities become a renewed opportunity for improvement and growth, for individuals and for the community.*

For this reason, we feel that we owe everyone a convinced declaration of our moral commitment to cultivate the progress of our institutions.

They are old and valuable institutions on which much of the well-being that we enjoy today is based.

In our world universities have always been at the centre of the culture, the progress and the experience of daily life: *they are almost its heart* because they are the creators of that heritage which makes our continent ancient, but at the same time renewed, attractive and competitive. Benjamin Disraeli described a university in the following terms to the House of Commons in 1871: 'a place of light, of liberty, and of learning'.

Italian universities and the Conference of Rectors ask the country to cultivate, together with them, this commitment; to dedicate to our university system the most penetrating forms of attention, the best energies, and suitable resources, in an effort that is the real, convinced expression of a unanimous agreement and the rightful expectations of the national community. Is this a utopia? 'A map of the world that does not include the country of utopia', wrote Oscar Wilde, 'is unworthy even of a

glance because it ignores that country to which mankind continually draws near. Mankind drops anchor, is on the lookout, sees a better country, and once again sets sail. Progress is nothing else but the realisation of utopias'.

