



CRUI

Conferenza dei Rettori
delle Università Italiane

Conference of Italian University Rectors

Report on the State of Italian Universities 2005

Rome, September 20th, 2005

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*The printing of this work was completed in November 2005 by Città Nuova of the P.A.M.O.M.
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I would like to thank and greet all those who have made possible the repetition over these years of this report to the country of the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI), thereby demonstrating, as they do, sensitivity towards, and interest in, the state of the university system. I would like to thank for their presence, and I also would like to greet, Minister Moratti and the other authorities of the government, of politics, and of the institutions, the General Vice-Secretary of the Office of the President of the Republic, members of parliament, Italian and European rectors, deans, lecturers, technical-administrative staff and students.

Universities want to engage in dialogue with the country. They want to show themselves to students and their families, to the political forces and to parliament so as to be able to describe in a loud voice their condition and thus be able to outline the configurations of the present, thereby creating a hypothesis about the future. This is an ethical task that we feel we cannot abandon because we know – and here there come to my aid the words of a great poet, Giacomo Noventa – ‘every present is the future of another’.

This is the real meaning of this appointment of September which is not, and could not be, a ‘super-inauguration’ of the academic year. It has never been, and could never have been, a day of ritual lamentation of a force within society that is interested in advancing irresponsible claims. It has never been, nor could it ever become, the day of an assizes that expresses sectional corporate interests. Universities require a major operation of transparency and openness: they require the shedding of conditions that illuminate their withered aspects as well as the rediscovery of sunny openness towards the younger generations; they require allowing themselves to be known about – with a poised readiness to help – by the outside world, without simulations or constrictions derived from modesty but with the serene awareness of those who know themselves, their own limits and their own problems together with their forms of potential and their well-anchored strong points.

The Nature of Real Dialogue

The essence of dialogue is a relationship between one or more voices. It has not been easy to push the academic world from a blessed and judging isolation to responsible involvement and the perception of a possible active presence, in a way that avoids the intrinsic – but how very comfortable – risks of a feeling of superiority that is conjoined to passivity. This was well described by August Strindberg: ‘Morality, which should be the study and the practice of rights and duties, ends up by becoming the study of the duties of

other people towards us'. To escape these risks means to defend the possibility of interpretation and action through dialogue without becoming barren amidst querulous recriminations. And during these moments of crisis reflecting on the way in which morality should be conceived should be the task of everyone.

With respect to ourselves, it is true that the path that has been followed has been shown to be insufficient and still lacking in many of its parts. However, much has been done to ensure that universities look with renewed eyes at their own reality so as to induce them to rediscover shared positions in relation to the great questions that mark their lives: to make them grow, after a certain fashion, in awareness of the role that they play in the destiny and the dynamics of the development of the country. And they have thus rediscovered in recent years the pride of proposing and organising concrete projects of renewal, thereby driving away the easy and recurrent criticism of silent and unwilling conservatism. In all this process the CRUI is a point of reference, an area of drafting and of proposals in a limpidity of action which we declare every year in this hall and put into practice day by day. Universities want to make themselves protagonists in a positive way under the banner of reasonableness and real change. Differently from many of the voices that animate debate – which express the interests of specific categories or are the self-created outcome of typographical forms of legitimation on sheets of paper – the proposals that spring from the university system do not derive from improvisations of the moment but are the result of progressive syntheses that have their roots in the experience and daily realities of our work. Whatever the judgement on these proposals may be, there can be no doubt that they constitute a significant part of the debate and that to ignore them, even before being an action of imprudence, is a short-sighted error of political calculation. Thus those people are mistaken who do not want to see in this form of representation of universities the character of a union, just as those people are in error who engage in calculations of self-interest or attempts to condition matters which at times are also not very correct at an ethical and political level.

The 'Idola Academiae'

The greatest and most important match to be addressed, as I have already said, is that of a real attempt to find a more intense dialogue with Italian society, with the world of culture and communications. To achieve this it is necessary to have an idea of what society thinks about us and our world.

The perception that Italian society has of its own universities seems at time to be similar to the attitude of the inhabitants of the cave of the Platonic myth. From the back of the cave they cannot see other men but only perceive their shadows which are thrown by the fire and the echo of their voices.

Universities and society experience in mirror-like roles the same logic of the inhabitants of this cave: both attempt a dialogue that fails because, in place of the real thing, they find themselves in front of the throwing of a shadow.

The Day of Universities is, and must be, also a moment when the *idola* fall from both

parties in a finally directed interlocution between universities, on the one hand, and the country, on the other.

And we must be aware of the following fact: to deny their existence, to ignore them, to allow them to grow, means to allow the rooted establishment of unfounded legends that end up by constituting the greatest obstacle to processes of renewal acquiring that political centrality that alone constitutes the guarantee for such renewal.

Of these distortions the most dangerous are those that spring from real facts and end up by being placed under the arc lights of the system of the mass media, which feeds on them and nourishes them, and this to such an extent as to lead society to believe that an individual case is representative of the general situation. This is a procedure which, in putting together facts that are separated from each other as well, runs the risk of providing an image that is very inferior to a census that has been carried out in conditions of greater objectivity. Thus universities are said to be a domain of disorganisation inhabited by lecturers recruited through appointment procedures which are not very transparent and which are strongly influenced by forms of personal favouritism and interests that have little to do with scholarship and learning; it is said that universities do not offer students an education of high quality, indeed, one that is too little or too much connected with the labour market, with an unjustified proliferation of study courses that are often merely imaginative and created more for lecturers than for students; it is said that universities know only how to ask for resources that they are unable to employ effectively; it is said that they are not transparent and do not want to be assessed; it is said that they are constantly losing excellent 'brains' who are forced to emigrate from Italy; it is said that they are not competitive with foreign universities and that their scholarly and scientific output is of low levels of quality in comparison.

There can be no doubt that universities that think about their own destiny must take upon themselves the burden of these criticisms and decide to look in a direct and rigorous way within themselves, trying, first of all, to evaluate that portrayal. Let us therefore analyse the real state of Italian universities, beginning with one of the most relevant questions, namely that of teaching.

Polyfunctional Teaching

For a long period of time after the establishment of mass universities, two-thirds of those who had matriculated did not gain a degree and those who gained a degree did so after a major delay. Today, the number of graduates as a percentage of the general population is amongst the lowest in Europe, even though that figure has increased by 33% over the last three years. The reform of study cycles should improve this situation, increasing the quality of the human capital of the country by obtaining access for the highest number of young people to the first level and by securing access to the second level for those who are well set along the path of specialisations and the creation of an elite. Today, the number of matriculated students has increased by over 11% despite a demographic fall in the number of nineteen-year-olds of the order of 12%; the number of students abandoning their

university studies has fallen from 70% to 35%; and the number of inactive students and the time taken to graduate have also decreased markedly. We do not as yet have sufficient relevant data on the new system to assess whether there has been a more rapid and certain access to the labour market on the part of graduates, and here I refer to the other element that should have characterised the reform of universities.

This last objective, if reached, would show that the quality of graduates has not been called into question by that reform. But despite the great success of the first level master's degree the far too frequent continuation of the student's studies with the second two-year degree is real and requires a profound reflection. The problem is twofold. On the one hand, people continue to compare the three-year degree with the previous traditional degree which was of four or five years' duration, arguing, and this is true of lecturers as well, that the present three-year degree is a series 'B' degree, evidently forgetting all the ill that was spoken of the previous degrees. On the other hand, the emphasis placed by the previous and present legislatures on how the three-year degrees should meet the needs of the labour market (that they should be more utilisable in the labour market), that is to say, in rhetorical terms, that they should confer professional skills and expertise, has created a dangerous negative tendency. In the subsequent reform of the university reform, reference was for long made to the so-called 'Y' (a shared year and a choice by the student between two pathways, one of which was to be 'professionalising' and the other of which was to lead to the second two-year degree), but when the guidelines and directives are read, the 'Y', fortunately enough, is not at all obligatory. This is exactly what the CRUI had requested.

Both the legislative approaches and the debate underestimated, in my opinion, the principal aspect of every real teaching activity engaged in by universities today: that the objective of such teaching is above all to teach people the method by which to learn throughout their lives (life-long learning, that is to say, which is so important at a European level), and that time spent at university is not something that is episodic in character, namely something that has a beginning and an end.

The fact that the head-spinning change in knowledge and technology makes any baggage of notions obsolete and that thus work activities tend to change their contents, means that the excess in specialisation in the processes of education and training is even dangerous. And it has not been realised that students, or at least the best of them, look to the culture of ideas and the practice of thought with the nostalgia of those who do not have the time to live them.

The fact that the level of employment of graduates a year after obtaining their degrees of the old system is declining, and that businesses declare that it is their intention to employ a low number of graduates, is worrying.

The system of production was wrong, and is wrong, if it requires graduates that are only useful today, if it requires graduates to do what it is already doing, and not, instead, graduates that are able to bring added value in the management of complex situations with that creative capacity that only general learning and knowledge can provide. It is essential to communicate with the world of work and this is a commitment that the CRUI has been engaged in for some time.

In the labyrinth of rules and regulations and formal parameters in which the old and new systems force us to operate, a certain number of lecturers, with great personal sacrifice, tried to innovate, that is to say to remodel, the contents of the courses, by moving the barycentre from teaching to the learning of the students.

In many cases, however, this attempt has not been successful and the contents of the previous four-year or five-year courses have been forced into the three-year degree, that is to say that disciplines have prevailed over the objective of the study courses according to personal logic and not collegial logic, as should have been the case, with an excessive proliferation of courses of study which only today are registering an inversion of the trend, something which at this point is also welcomed by the teaching bodies.

‘You already know this story’, wrote André Gide about the myth of Narcissus. ‘But we will tell it again. Everything has already been narrated but as nobody listens it is necessary to begin again each time’.

This should now be done again with universities as well. As I said last year, and I will repeat the point again today: what is required is a profound re-examination of the contents of study courses, their new harmonisation, a moving away from an emphasis on universities as institutions that confer professional skill and expertise, the giving of real centrality to the student, a revision of the system of credits through their standardisation, and thinking anew about ways of teaching and learning.

Today the opportunity is there and it should not be missed because it is possible to achieve a reform implemented by universities with the exercise of their autonomy.

The False Fetish of the Legal Value of University Qualifications

In this context, the recurrent statement that the abolition of the legal value of university qualifications is a panacea for all the ills of the system of higher education is shallow and deceptive, especially if it is proposed in connection with the privatisation of universities and everything connected with them.

The legal value of university qualifications is based upon two pillars: the national system of teaching, which establishes the general characteristics of study courses and the qualifications that are conferred, and the national examination, whose function is to ascertain the possession by candidates of certain kinds of knowledge and competencies for certain specific types of profession. The degrees and diplomas conferred by universities and institutes of higher education have an exclusively academic value, with certain rare exceptions in the health-care sphere. The ability to practice a profession is conferred subsequently by national examinations.

As regards international comparison, the opposition between the Italian model (which provides for the legal value of qualifications) and the Anglo-Saxon model (involving an absence of the legal value of such qualifications) no longer has reasons to exist. Although they have not had available to them state rules and regulations in the matter, Anglo-Saxon universities have for some time now harmonised their curricula both as regards the time-

period of studies and the contents of such studies, and they are obliged to adopt the standards envisaged by the accreditation societies present in these countries.

This seems the feasible 'third way': 'yes' to the legal value of qualifications but also the introduction of the accreditation of courses, something we are working on with the National Committee for the Assessment of the University System. This is a decision that is consistent with the processes of growing autonomy in relation to teaching, with the prevalent use of public resources, and which provides guarantees to users about the quality of the educational supply offered by individual universities.

In our system, as a result of a decision of the national Constitution, the function of a university, whether it is a state university or a private university, is of a public character. This is because the interest for which a university is responsible is of a public character. There cannot be a function performed by universities without there being a horizon that coincides with the community, which, in the case of the community of studies, is the global community.

Universities as an Institution

If one begins with the concept that a university is structured on the basis of the public character of the interest involved, then one cannot have doubts about the existence of a specific duty of the state to provide support to it in an adequate way.

And an adequate level of such support constitutes a yardstick of public sensitivity towards the questions and issues connected with knowledge and learning. This sensitivity has two fundamental directions. On the one hand, we are dealing here with directing attention to those people who are the roots and producers of knowledge and the terminals of its process of creation and transmission. On the other, this is a matter of assuring that these people have the instruments that will make their role possible and their efforts gratifying.

To emphasise that expenditure on the personnel of universities is a real and authentic form of investment is not to engage in rhetoric. This is because, you see, that when in our country the best is asked for, an expert is consulted; it is in universities that that expert is looked for. Why is it, then, that these people, who are so praised when it is a matter of declaiming truths that are of interest to everybody or of providing us with ways of improving our lives, must in some cases, when the *idola* prevail, be subject to the humiliation of being considered people who profit from public money, fossilised parasites who belong to realities that are in decline?

In addition, it is a real and authentic falsehood to let it be believed that the expenditure on university personnel is of a high level. The data that have been recently published by the Committee for Assessment demonstrate that the expenditure on personnel as a percentage of total outgoings is, in the case of two-thirds of our universities, less than 61%. This must be seen within the context of the fact that we have a student-lecturer ratio that is one of the highest in Europe and that, differently to what some people would like it to be believed, the teachers of many disciplines are lecturers employed on the basis of untenured

contracts. The number of such contract lecturers, for that matter, cannot be expanded if one considers that one of the minimum requirements recommended by the Minister to activate a course of study is that within that course of study the number of such contract lecturers should not exceed 20% of the total of the lecturers that are needed.

The concrete facts demonstrate that universities are not a bureaucratic organisation intended to be a response of a Keynesian kind to the need to employ people. The real privileges are to be found elsewhere! And anyway, in order to correct possible confusions in relation to this area and above all else to emphasise the unity of intentions, the rectors of Italian universities decided unanimously on 24 February on a code of conduct, a real and authentic auto-regulation, that envisages not only rigorous respect for the limits on expenditure on personnel but also rules that privilege young people and indicate correct planning.

Above all else we must go back to stressing that the increase in expenditure in universities is requested by those who already work in them and that therefore they do not have ulterior reasons for asking for such an increase: if they do so, if they do so with so much insistence, this is because they want to do their work better than is permitted today. We are not upholding privileges or forms of protection, we are not protecting our selfish self-interest. In formulating our requests we look at the young people who surround us and their faith in progress and their faith in the capacity of scholarship and learning to create a better world: it is for them that we go on asking, with firmness and limpidity, that expenditure on universities should be seen as an expenditure that involves investment in knowledge capital.

The Stereotype of Job Appointments

The problem of the credibility of job appointments has become a decisive point for universities, which really want to present themselves in a crystalline way to public opinion, given the centrality of human resources for their mission. For the further reason that only by giving credibility to this mechanism can one undermine the stereotype of rigged job appointments in which the private self-interest of the member of the appointment commission and the modest intellectual and scholarly level of the winner of the competition are in opposition to the (presumed) incontestable credibility of careers outside universities and the axiomatic virtue of those who were not appointed.

These are accusations that have their objective basis in authentic episodes of misconduct or exaggerated local loyalties – forms of behaviour that I condemn here with severity.

But even though this is a matter of certain episodes, the reform of job appointments is necessary and should be carried out. Indeed, with speed and with the agreement of the university world. After a very long period of indecisions, at the end a parliamentary Bill was drawn up which was studded with attempts at mediation and recurrent temptations of a dirigiste character. During the course of these long vacillations we witnessed the contents of the Bill change as a result of the extemporaneous contribution of forces of a completely heterogeneous character which dedicated very little attention to the fate of universities,

interested, as they were, in introducing amnesties on the cheap. Lastly, we witnessed the collation of a draft law which in the space of tired parliamentary afternoons acquired amendments which constituted other *in adiecto* contradictions. In doing this not only does one not solve the problems of the universities but the very functions of democracy and parliament are humiliated, with the cancellation of the great ethical value of politics at a moment when politics needs to find new breath.

This reform aims at the return of a national recruitment system for an appointment to a position. Even though the agreement that this proposal receives today can be compared to the dissent which led to its abandonment (delays, agreements that were penalising for the best candidates, nepotism, and yet elements), this is a decision that can no longer be contested. But, having said this, the Rectors think that it is necessary to establish an agreed modality as regards the creation of the appointment commissions and secure the adoption of more severe rules as regards transparency.

In reality, if one wanted to provide a decisive answer to this problem one would establish a new direction centred around two fundamental words: trust in the protagonists and responsibility in choices.

Above all else, I believe in making universities responsible in those choices of theirs from which results spring and from which derive, through assessment, positive or negative consequences for universities and thus for the faculties and departments that constitute those universities. The time has really come for us to align ourselves with the other European countries with which we want and must compete, where universities decide and are assessed for what they manage to do. Nobody could then allow themselves not to favour the best candidates both in recruitment and in career advancement, which, indeed, would be suitably distinct from each other. These are the features of a proposal that I will complete later on in this report.

The Central Question of Recruitment

During these years of troubled transition, in our studies, in laboratories, and in libraries, we have transmitted ideas, learning and the wish to imagine to very many of our young people. In order to favour the best, one begins anew from here: retying the relationship with those most lively intelligences that we ourselves have educated and trained. They really are our future; the present of those who will come.

Today we have an innovative European Charter of the Rights and Duties of Researchers. It defines the researcher as a professional figure involved in the creation of new knowledge, products, processes, methods and systems, and in the management of projects, whether these involve basic research, strategic research, or applied research, and the transfer of knowledge. This definition embraces, therefore, all the figures that already operate in research within Italian universities and research institutes, including those who are not tenured. This Charter defines the need for transparent procedures of recruitment; acknowledges that the researcher is an integral part of the institution in which he or she works, and envisages suitable career possibilities and insurance and pension provisions;

argues that it is right to involve researchers in teaching; hopes for their participation in the decisions of the institutions to which they belong; calls for a responsible role for them in the management of research; and emphasises the importance of limiting positions after the obtaining of a PhD to short periods before the achievement of a tenured position. At the present time in Italian universities there are over fifty-thousand young people with untenured contracts of various kinds, and their contribution to research, to tutoring and to supplementary teaching is often essential.

Not only within the European context but also with respect to these fifty-thousand young people, the contradictions that remain in the project for the reform of the juridical status of university lecturers are evident: the broadening of the conferring of the status of suitability to be appointed to a position and the reservation of positions for which there are no resources and whose provision is excluded. The Bill, instead, should have offered young people the real opportunity to emerge from a selection process in order to obtain tenured positions and then be assessed in an ongoing way. It is advisable, indeed, to explode another myth: a recent study carried out in the United States of America showed that there is no difference at the level of scholarly and scientific output between tenured staff and personnel employed for a limited period of time.

The question of recruitment is connected with that of the right recognition to be given to current researchers, who for years have been involved in teaching activity as well as research. It is their activity as lecturers that allows the carrying out of many study courses. The formula that envisages conferring on them a purely honorific title of 'professor', in the place of a clear and defined role, has generated a movement of general dissatisfaction: not only the rectors but also the CUN, the Conference of the Deans of Faculties, the academic organs of sixty-four universities and the researchers, have expressed themselves contrary to this. A sound solution could have finally allowed a separation of recruitment from the stages of career advancement and the creation of a real project for young people that we have been calling for some time: a project, that is to say, able to allocate specific state resources for the recruitment of young people, with the recovery of these resources through turnover in the years to come.

This reform costs nothing for the state budget, something that by now happens every time that projects are addressed for universities. There is even the absurdity of envisaging in some amendments the obligatory use of resources for universities (resources which for that matter do not exist). This is a fine way indeed of respecting the autonomy of universities.

Universities which Increasingly Know how to Finance Themselves

It is probably the case that this way of approaching funding, in addition to being a convenient path to follow, may also be the effect of another one of the shadows that dance upon the walls of the cave: the fact that for far too long the legend has been allowed to become rooted that universities live exclusively at the expense of the state. The contribution of the state and local authorities to universities is less than 65% of the total

income of thirty universities. The rest of this income comes from private contributions, and the revenue from student fees is equal to or less than 10% of general income in most cases.

Within the context of our public system does there exist a compartment which has the capacity to drain so many resources from the private sector and has the strength to cooperate so intensely with the forces of production and with economic realities? Let us bear in mind that apart from the tax concessions on private donations (which was praiseworthy introduced with the so-termed provision for competitiveness), in Italy we do not have a system of incentives for companies as regards the use of resources in university research that is even distantly comparable with the system that has a beneficial effect on the university system in the United States of America, which, indeed, is often invoked as an example to be imitated for our universities.

Why the 'Brains' Flee

One of the effects of the barrier placed in the way over recent decades to the entrance of young researchers into our universities is that many of the best 'brains' have to choose the path of high-level emigration in order to obtain beyond Italian national boundaries those forms of satisfaction and those recognitions that they could not aspire to obtain here. And we do not have an equivalent importation.

The phenomenon exists and it has always existed: we have had, and we have, extraordinary exponents abroad of Italian scholarship and learning in many sectors, ambassadors that the whole world has envied and envies. To have them return to Italy is not easy because this does not depend only on the subjective wishes of universities but also on the fact that international competitiveness in the world of research is creating a situation in which we, with our scarce resources, are not very incisive. The damage caused by the 'brain drain' for Italian universities themselves is considerable from all points of view, and this at a time when Italy for the most part needs the maximum contribution from her most creative intelligences. This phenomenon should be fought against in a decisive way: universities, with specific measures as well, must be in the front line to alter it. As I have already said in relation to job appointments, merit must always and in all situations be rewarded. And for those who come or come back we must find a suitable and stable placement.

All of this cannot be corrected with one measure or another, or with emergency forms of logic which, although they are useful in the immediate period, necessarily end up by being short-term in character. A real policy for the 'return of brains' would be the outcome of a commitment on the part of the system. And it is precisely this that universities do not have – something that the Rectors have been calling for years and which is constantly elusive. It is advisable, however, not to ignore the data available to us.

Since the regulations and directives in this field have existed and since some resources have been allocated (that is to say from the end of the previous legislature and, this year, with a further increase in the allocation to the university fund of ordinary finance), four hundred and sixteen scholars have returned or come to Italy to work in university

departments (out of a total of one thousand and fifty five applications that were made), of whom 70% are Italians and 30% are foreigners.

Universities: Searching for Research

Beyond the smoke of indifference and the curtain of general or propagandistic visions, it is difficult to perceive the truly unique and important work that is produced in university laboratories and libraries. This is a silent dimension, but a dimension that is essential and vital. It is easy to think that little research is done in Italy. Let us put things in order: let us distance the mist of the imaginary and look at the real state of one of the essential functions of universities.

We have a low number of researchers, a figure that corresponds to a half of the European average (a record that they share with the administrative-technical staff, who are nonetheless so valuable for the life of universities) and a third of the situation in the United States of America. Our researchers are the least paid in Europe and also those with the highest average age. For every researcher, as for its other tenured or contract staff, a university pays 8.5% of the gross salary received to IRAP (a national levy), whereas companies – and this is certainly absurd for them as well – pay 4.25% on a sum made up of the return less the cost of research. Despite this fact, our scientific and scholarly research is in line with the European average, both as regards publications and with respect to patents, when assessed in terms of the numbers of researchers. A study on the scientific and scholarly output in Italy of the best Italian scientists and scholars demonstrates that when this output is compared to the best scientists and scholars in the world on the basis of an index of citations of publications our contribution as an average is about 15%, higher than the world average, and reaches 30% in some scientific and scholarly areas – this is really not something of small account!

The strength of research is far from clamour, beyond fake forms of modernisation and managerial temptations. For the Rectors this relationship is essential and should represent the deepest soul of a university and be inseparable from teaching activity itself. Can a university be a university and separate these two twins by force? Can one create and call universities those private bodies that provide education without engaging in research? The answer can be none other than a decisive ‘no’.

The relaunching of research must occur through the activation of broader collaboration between universities, research institutes, companies, credit institutions and connected foundations. This idea, fortunately enough, is central to the National Programme for Research, which the CRUI appreciates precisely for this reason and in relation to which the Conference of Italian University Rectors has expressed substantial agreements as regards its general lines and its political-planning approach, even though the CRUI has identified failings in the quantification of the resources to be allocated to the programmes. After certain uncertainties, the adhesion to European initiatives to support basic research, amongst which we may refer to the European Research Council, and on whose board now sit two representatives of our national scientific and scholarly

community, is also to be adjudged positively. If one really wants to give value to this document, it would be advisable for its consequent actions to interact with the other initiatives that are taking practical shape in relation to these areas, in particular the Bill on competitiveness. This co-ordination must concern both the direction and the modalities of investment and the role that in this context universities can play as subjects that are active in the drawing up of projects and as subjects of reference in the procedures of assessment and accreditation. Just as it seems to be necessary to implement effective systems of assessment in relation to the real launching and development of technological districts.

The Minister has announced that she wants to proceed to an annual revision of this document. It would be a good idea for universities – perhaps through the participation of the CRUI itself – to be able to play an active part in this revision: we all agree on the fact, beginning with the inseparable intertwining of basic research and the applications of research, that it would be opportune for the National Research Plan to become the National Programme for Research, Innovation and Competitiveness.

There is, however, a basic limitation, which in this case as well finds expression in the short-sighted philosophy according to which study and research should not have costs, as though, that is to say, they were forms of waste. This is why, therefore, compared to what was envisaged in the guidelines of 2002, the total investment in research is markedly lower: it seems to have become easy in this country to propose plans without worrying about where to find the funds for them.

If a lack of funding produces evident disturbances, the recent involution of the rules of certain procedures worries us even more. And this for the special reason that although the lack of funds can be attributed to particular economic situations, the revision of the rules is only a question of ethical and political choices.

One example may serve for the rest. The rules for the funding of research projects supported under the National Programme PRIN (Research Projects of National Interest) meet the need to make the decision-making process objective (or as objective as possible) and verifiable in the formation of the judgement that makes possible access to public funds, which, indeed, is increasingly difficult and increasingly sought after. Last September we indicated that this contribution of transparency was encouraging. Then, without any explanation, the procedures changed. The tasks of the guarantors and thus their responsibility as well were limited. In fact they are employed solely to draw up a sort of catalogue of projects, whereas two auditors for a minimum of ten projects, connected with each other according to an unknown algorithm (which could not exclude overlappings of key words and unfair conclusions), are to be chosen by administrative decision with the help of the CINECA (Consorzio Interuniversitario per il Calcolo Automatico dell'Italia Nord Orientale) so as then to reach an agreement on the judgement. This seems to us to constitute a real and authentic regression.

Research and Innovation

In proposing the shift and the enlargement of the National Research Plan to the National Programme for Research, Innovation and Competitiveness we should, however, be careful not to adopt the hendiadys of research and innovation, that is to say we should not use them with the semantic equivalence employed in journalistic jargon and political language. The proposal and this appeal are not in contradiction.

In truth, the public contribution in the field of research must be separate from expenditure in the field of innovation. The distinction between the two levels must be rigorous if one does not want to finance, under the label ‘expenditure on research and development’, expenditure that in reality has the mere function of updating the apparatus of production.

The contribution in the field of innovation can be episodic and occasional, incoherent, by area and by volume, in a way that is contrary to the contribution in the field of research which, indeed, must be ongoing. Expenditure in the field of research has results that are naturally uncertain and of a maturation that is unpredictable – nobody is able to say today if the research that involves some of the best mathematicians to solve Riemann’s problem of primary numbers will have applications that are socially or economically relevant. But unexpected applications have already been achieved given that the properties of primary numbers are used today for the cryptography of credit cards. Investment in research must be completed with a policy of transfer and appreciation which allows knowledge to deliver added value.

In recent years universities have developed specific initiatives, from spin-off (there have been some hundreds of such examples of this, supported by universities, and about a hundred examples of start-up derived from the outcome of research, conducted by universities and controlled by their inventors) to a positive approach to local research, which bring out the new tendency of the system of autonomous universities in the direction of the development of the country. Innovation is the result of a system of relationships that begins from fundamental scientific research and through a complex interaction of the international scientific community becomes a new basis of widespread knowledge from which to develop productive repercussions in compartments that are different from one another as well. To employ the recent European Community term: a new ‘technological platform’.

Such a complex interaction is increasingly finding expression in local areas in which are united university institutions of importance, dynamic industrial contexts, and discerning financial organisations. An analysis of the new geography of development, indeed, illustrates that in the world poles of growth are being redefined: they are centred around university systems that are not only capable of educating and training human resources in conformity with new social needs but also of generating new industrial bases that are closely linked with basic research. This is not only the case with Silicon Valley or Boston, but also with Stockholm, Israel and now Taipei and Bangalore as well.

This new model of relationships should also be based upon a greater capacity on the

part of the private sector to take advantage of the important role that the PhD has acquired in our country: the young people who leave university with this qualification, and in numbers which are constantly and markedly increasing, have skills and expertise that are very useful for the world of business as well as for universities. The change that universities have carried out in this cycle of studies (the third cycle in the European system) is unfortunately still too often ignored and not positively appreciated. Universities have demonstrated that they believe in the PhD, they have allocated significant resources to it, they have approached it in a new way in relation to their own general architecture, they have brought similar PhDs together in special schools (not least because of an evident impetus in this direction supplied by the Ministry and the National Committee for Assessment), and they have imposed organisational rules that had been neglected for far too long. They have, to sum up, shown that they believe in the PhD as a perfect synthesis of education and research, for the purpose of research, which in its turn constitutes a cardinal part of education.

As a recent conference organised by the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei demonstrated, experience at an international level shows that the world of new industry is increasingly connected with basic research. The extraordinary case of the biotechnological industry demonstrates how a regeneration of American industry took place following developments connected with the large-scale research on the human genome, research, for that matter, that was strongly supported by notable Federal funds and defended by laws on property rights that put universities in a position to stimulate new companies and enterprises.

The link between innovation and local areas is for that matter the key to the whole of the new approach of the business policy of the European Union, which places emphasis on the need to create a new knowledge society, beginning with a strong acceleration in people's capacity to translate research into innovation but, at the same time, to disseminate the results of research in local areas, through a new alliance between autonomous universities and autonomous regions.

In this competitive context, Italy has notable situational and structural limitations. The Document for Financial Economic Planning, which foreshadows the annual national budget, portrays a country whose growth is essentially stationary, which has an industrial profile that is on the defensive, and which manages only with great difficulty to stand up to the new competition that exists at an international level. And thus the question of the relationship between universities and companies is not only a question within universities but must become also the central point of a new vision of the growth and development of our country.

Yet in the Document for Financial Economic Planning there is not even a word of reference to universities – not even a word; indeed, not even the word 'university'!

Different Amongst Men, not Against Men

If we look at the planet, well beyond the neighbourhoods of our own home, the present age is pregnant with amazing contradictions. This age has broadened to the utmost the

culture of human rights and at the same time witnesses, in a powerless way, the repetition of massacres and the barbarities of terrorism which violate man's conscience and his body. This age has promoted the globalisation of the planet to the point of making it a single village and at the same time perceives the growing alienation of people, not only from a shared society but even from themselves.

It has directed itself to the globalisation of the economy in order to increase growth and development and at the same time it is witnessing an increase in poverty in whole populations, when, indeed, it does not witness a decay of civilisation. It seeks to build a single market of goods and services and yet decreases and wastes ecological and natural resources which are indispensable for the life of man. It is moving towards increasingly supranational institutional and political entities and on the other hand of resistance of citizens to such new forms of membership are increasing, with a flowing back to small homelands, something that is often the sign of a narrow approach and narrow cultural horizons, if not the pursuit of mere localistic or individual economic interests. It champions the culture of development and peace, while at the same time wars continue and new breeding- grounds of potential conflicts are spreading.

Terrorism lacerates, with its by now almost daily ferocity, not only bodies but consciences as well. Increasingly often, and despite the development of civilisation, men are denied the right to be such, and it is preferred, instead, to imprison them inside identities that burn and destroy the person that is inside that identity: a Muslim, a Westerner, a Christian, a Sunnite, a Shiite, a Taleban, an American...Men are disappearing, to be replaced by their masks: and with them are also disappearing those rights that alone have the power to make them men.

As was the case yesterday, and even more than was the case in the past, the answer of civilisation lies in culture and learning. If the world really wants to give itself a credible future, if Europe – as our President of the Republic observed at the time of his visit to the European Parliament in June of last year – wants to make of itself a reliable 'privileged area of human hope', then they must both draw upon their ancient hearts for the values, the projects and the achievements that constitute the basic and inalienable heritage of mankind.

We want to, and we must, feel ourselves different *amongst* men and not *against* men.

The European Approach of Italian Universities

The time of a new policy, the policy of culture, is at the gates. As we stated on the day after the last and terrible acts of terrorism, it is our deep belief that education and research can play a fundamental role in the construction of a society based upon the universal values of peace and tolerance, with respect for every form of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. We are deeply convinced that only the policy of culture is able to fill the empty spaces created by the lack of answers to the empire of the transnational economy and the dead state of diplomacy as a policy of mediation.

The Europe of knowledge can thus really become the Europe of peace. Italian

universities present their candidatures to be its principal engine. For this reason as well we are striving for a Europe of Universities and we want our universities to be European. For this reason we agreed with the Glasgow Declaration of April 2005 of the European University Association which called for ‘strong universities for a strong Europe’.

The internationalisation of our universities has in recent years taken place through the experiences of the mobility of our students and of our young researchers. As regards participation in the European programmes of Erasmus Mundus, which envisage the creation of international master’s courses, Italy is the third country in Europe in terms of levels of participation and the second in terms of co-ordinated projects. Last July, in Camerino, Italian universities solemnly signed, and they were the first to do so, the Declaration of Commitment to the European Charter of the Rights and Duties of Researchers, which prefigures the definition of the status of researchers in the European Research Area. In a planned way, and following a specific decision of both a political and cultural character, Italian universities have looked in particular at Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and Central Europe. Led by the Conference of Italian University Rectors and working with Confindustria, they have sought through the Marco Polo project to expand relations between Italy and China by attracting students and researchers to Italy, by establishing forms of interaction with our industrial and commercial system, and by stimulating the growth of human rights in China as well. A synergy has been created between the actions of the Conference of Italian University Rectors and those promoted by our own Ministry.

The Republic and Universities for Everyone

We are at a delicate hairpin bend in our national life. Over the next year the political forces will be called upon to address the most important questions that concern our democratic life, from decisions at an economic level to the restarting of parliamentary discussion, and this will also concern the lattice of questions that involve the life and the existence of our universities.

At this difficult point I would like to stress that the state has an indispensable role to play and must provide universities with a sense of security about resources through five-year plans that finally align public funds for our universities with the European average in the sphere of the funding of higher education. We are still far away from that goal, even though, thanks to the role of the Minister as well, there was a sign of attention being paid to this in the national budget of 2005, which, however, was almost completely absorbed by the salary increases decided by the state but borne by university budgets. And the funds for university buildings have never been increased since the cut of over 40% that was applied in 2002.

The problem of resources, naturally enough, also exists for the non-state universities. It is at the very least indispensable that their autonomy is of such a character as to allow them to obtain such resources from private sources, without, for example, a public service such as student’s welfare being made to weigh upon private resources, as indeed happens today.

And thus while we call upon lecturers and students to feel that they are members, and to be members, of an educating community, with the enormous responsibilities that the ethics of culture and knowledge requires, we call upon the state to believe in universities, to seek responses of high quality, but also dedicate a suitable quantity of resources to universities.

The first point of the Pact for the Relaunching of Autonomous Universities signed at the Accademia dei Lincei, by Minister Moratti and by myself on 22 June 2004 reads as follows: 'the university system is a public service that operates in the national interest and in the interest of communities within local areas, and it develops forms of integration in line with the principle of subsidiarity, with the autonomous initiatives of companies and private parties. Universities are the location of education and the critical transmission of knowledge, and connect research and teaching in an overall way within themselves, assuring their complete freedom. All citizens are assured access to the university service, with the guarantee of suitable financial support to those who are deserving and are without funds. Equally, suitable support for the mobility of students will also be implemented'. Are we certain that these principles have induced coherent and concrete action? They will have to do this. It is unacceptable that our system offers accommodation to 2% of students away from their home towns and villages whereas France and Germany offer such facilities to 7% and 10% of such students and Denmark and Sweden do the same for 20% of those students belonging to the same category. It is unacceptable that only 70% of deserving students in need receive a grant, which for that matter is of a rather modest size. It is incredible that as regards these questions people think that they can solve (having, for that matter, weak perceptions of finance) the problem of resources for universities by inducing these last to increase their fees for students (the 'charges' as I still hear said). And one should condemn the fact that students look for a university near to their homes. Yet mobility requires a system of accommodation and reception for students away from their places of residence, a virtuous circle between local authorities (above all the regional governments but also the municipalities) and universities so as to help people who are undoubtedly disadvantaged.

An Overall Proposal

To declare the way things are cannot lead to it being said that the Conference of Italian University Rector forms a part of, indeed is leading the 'party' of saying 'no' to reforms. Exactly the opposite is the case. Democracy is discussion, it is to think through things together, but in order to preserve the honesty of thought the truth of the facts must be respected.

For some time we Rectors have been emphasising the need for an overall and inclusive reform based upon a clear strategic design which starts with a redefinition of the role of universities in today's society and the society of tomorrow and makes university communities aware and participants.

The university system needs unity, a sharing of its mission, political and managerial choices, responsibility in proposing objectives to itself and attaining them, and to subject

itself to the assessment of results. It needs, that is to say, to renew, with greater awareness and decisiveness, some of the fruitful experiments of the years 1993-2000 which were based upon an autonomy that has been tenaciously pursued and affirmed but which has not yet been absorbed at the level of its deepest contents. For example, it has not been possible to ensure the penetration of the culture of assessment linked to responsibility in relation to choices and to implement a real regional co-ordination of universities, which today is blameworthy deprived of power or ignored by certain ministerial decisions but which, instead, is essential to overall planning, and other things as well. There has not been adequate participation on the part of the members of the academic community because of conservatism or because of a lack of belief, because of forms of behaviour that have been at times ethically unacceptable, and because of an excess of power of representatives to the detriment of the decision-making responsibility of the organs of government. But it has also been the grave fault of governments who have not known how to guide change in a strategic way, providing adequate resources and seeking results.

Statutes for the Freedom of Universities

For universities to change it is of decisive importance to reorganise the rules and regulations that govern their lives. No longer the reductive reading of guarantees dictated by the Constitution for the autonomy of universities, nor recourse to directives of government Ministries which lack foundation in law but which tend to return responsibilities to the apparatuses of such Ministries. No, naturally enough, to any return to the separate dealing of individual universities with the Ministry. The deepest reason for the reorganisation of these rules and regulations springs from the need for the adjustment and lucid rearrangement of the sources of law in this sphere, which, indeed, have grown up in an alluvial and chaotic way. We need to draw up a Consolidating Act that is not only a Consolidating Act in a legal sense but which also in a declared way seeks to constitute, first and foremost, real and authentic statutes for universities: a text of principles and general clauses which, beyond the disciplining of the smallest aspects, makes clear the real face of universities with which our country presents itself at its appointment with the third millennium.

We would like to see created a codification of guarantees which dictates the rules and regulations that support the foundations of universities in a system of autonomy. A sort of defence of the meaning, the mission and the name of universities, such as to work against the proliferation of bodies that are not universities but which want to define themselves as universities and are officially defined as such. Let the point be well understood: non-state universities are a form of wealth in a democratic society because of their necessary expression of pluralism and their natural tendency to exercise an autonomy that is upheld by legal provisions and which is full and allows traditional experimentation. The defence of their mission, as universities of research and teaching is thus convergent with the mission of state universities, and both kinds of university form a part of the public university system.

The Major Step of Assessment

If it is true, as indeed it is true, that every form of a residual approach on the part of universities involving mere self-reference has been practically defeated, universities are now called upon to respond to society, both as regards their function as a service and their function of providing guidance, by educating and training those young people who will have to be protagonists of the society of the immediate tomorrow, in all the sectors in which the intellect exercises its prevalence, from innovative forms of technology to good administration, from the arts and the sciences to teaching and the profession of being a researcher.

The first responsibility of universities towards the country raises questions of a social character to do with the relationship between universities and the country, and involves the reception of the demand that comes from society and meeting that demand. On the basis of such responsibility, the university system is called upon to guarantee quality and transparency in its supply in every sphere: from teaching to research, and on to the services that are provided and administrative management as well. Indeed, the introduction of the systems of assessment, of the certification of quality and of accreditation constitutes the necessary and natural complement to, and balancing of, university autonomy. Although, on the one hand, the systems of assessment in the relationships between the central organs of government and the individual universities seem to take the form of an erosion of the autonomy of universities, on the other they are a strong inducement to responsibility. Within universities they are instruments by which to affirm the responsible authority of the organs of government. Naturally enough, in both contexts assessment dialogues with the dynamics of management.

It also dialogues with its special subject, namely the intellectual functions of universities, which are shaped by the transmission of original ideas that cross boundaries into the culture of the spirit. The services are instruments in the achievement of such ideas. And it is here that the intertwining between teaching and research makes any simplifying breaking-down of the whole into component parts arbitrary.

The Conference of Italian University Rectors has worked for years to disseminate within universities the culture of the assessment of study courses and research with practical and transparent forms of experimentation. The objectives of this have been to sustain creativity and innovation, in a context that is characterised by diversity, to strengthen the connection between teaching and research; to assure that students are successful in their learning; to promote dialogue with society by maintaining a strategic vision projected into the long term; to foster the internationalisation of teaching and research through dialogue; to induce the decision-making organs to find the ideal balance between centralisation and decentralisation (the Academic Senates and the Councils of Administration on the one hand, the Faculties and Departments, on the other); to involve in responsibilities all the members of the academic communities (from the lecturers to the technical-administrative staff, with these last as actors of quality in the central and outer organs themselves); to introduce the correct participation in the governance of universities of their stakeholders

within society, drawing upon the wealth that they constitute in the creation and implementation of strategies but also taking into account their possible limits in terms of perspectives at an economic level and the not improbable difficulties of interaction between universities and the members of a society that is lacking in schooling compared to the other European nations, or at least in the terms required by a knowledge economy; and to modify the relationship between representativeness and responsibility in the organs of government, increasing their efficiency without sacrificing democracy, the public interest, transparency, social fairness, and the balance between disciplines, which are positive and traditional characteristics of universities.

The culture of internal quality cannot, as indeed is the case with every other aptitude, be imposed – it has to be shared at the level of its objectives and its processes in order to make the activities involved of public utility and not, instead, make them the expression of individual freedoms.

The recognition of quality is a strengthening of autonomy, all the more so when this recognition is at an international level; and it is more than a simple accreditation, which has narrower spheres of application.

On this base, and it is this base that we have made solid over recent years, is to be located external assessment, which we asked to be entrusted (as Minister Moratti and Parliament seem ready to do) to an organism that is independent of the Ministry and of our universities. Indeed, although recognising and not wanting to lose the major work carried out first by the National Observatory on the University System and then by the National Committee for Assessment and by the Committee for the Assessment of Research, we want, finally, to create a model that can be assimilated to those models that have been in use for some time in other countries. External assessment promotes the process of quality within universities by inducing virtuous forms of conduct on the part of the organs of government and all the members of the academic communities. A process of the individual and collective acceptance of responsibilities is opened up and will gradually become stronger, a process of healthy competition between universities, all of which are interested in having the best lecturers, the best students, and the best services. Some time will be needed but we will reach the full decision-making autonomy of universities in the recruitment of young people and in the career advancement of lecturers who will be automatically subjected to the assessment of their activities not only by the central organs of government but also by the very departmental structures in which they work.

Remember the Universities

‘Remember the universities!’: this, in the form of a warning, is the invitation that I feel I should extend to the forces that are engaged in dialogue in the establishment of programmes intended to be implemented by the legislature that will begin next spring. Over the last decade universities have in part prefigured changes and in part have adapted to them. But the reforms that have followed one another in relation to the decisive aspects of their lives have almost all been, for various reasons, rather far from meeting general

assent. Overall, that is to say, a framework has been lacking within which, beyond assessment of worth, individual elements could be inserted. We have sought, and we are continuing to seek, dialogue. Instead, we have been placed in front of measures that have at times been adopted by a law in the form of a decree or, anyway, applied hurriedly; or surreptitious changes; and the unthought-through, and unthinkable, overturnings of things, by individual sponsors as well.

But the year that is to come will be the year of political elections. We make a sorrowful and strong appeal to the forces that are competing with each other to take over the leadership of the country. All our universities ask the political forces to ensure that in their programmes there is a commitment to the effect that the government that emerges from the elections will organise the convocation of a meeting of the principal forces of the university world: a great national assembly, prepared and preceded by a planning document that will be discussed in the universities and by the social, economic and professional forces of the country, so that the mission and the meaning of universities will emerge from it redefined.

Whatever the direction that it takes, we want a reform that is not the improvised outcome of majorities or of momentary parliamentary aggregations. We want a major public debate which, precisely because of the public character of the communities it deals with, can constitute an opportunity for a widespread embracing of social awareness.

Those amongst the political forces that know how to respond to this appeal will demonstrate that they really care about the destiny of the new generations, in a vision of the future directed by the great strength of utopia and by the wisdom of reformism. Anyway, of one thing we must all be profoundly aware: *we want, whatever the case, to advance.*

An ancient English proverb says: 'the book of a beggar is worth much more than the blood of an aristocrat'. When people say that culture is poor, unfortunately the truth is being said, but one should not confuse the poverty of means with the poverty of ideas. Universities will always, and whatever, be 'rich', even though they may be poor in financial resources. And universities, because of their centuries-old age and the high values of which they are the bearers, have a soul which by instinct perceives those who want to attack their vital parts. For century after century, as we stress, they have been aware that they possess only learning and culture, of which they are proud, and that they possess these things for the good of humanity. With the strength of our ideas, our books, and our laboratories, we want, whatever the case, to help our country to escape from its present state of crisis.

Taking Leave

These places of study and research of ours are not only nourished by the ambition to find immediate solutions. They are also places where the *construction of a great planetary utopia* is tried out, which is, at the opening of this new millennium, *education for everyone*. This is a utopia that can guide both scientists and artists, both the managers of the economy and political leaders. Within this utopia there is also the need for a large-scale raising of the level of education of the young people of our country. Not least because we want – contradicting a famous aphorism of Ennio Flaiano – for them to live in thirty years time in

an Italy that will have been made by governments and culture and not by the television. To have a university system that is able to assure this is a courageous and indispensable act by which to set in motion a change in gear that will be useful in an equal way to science, scholarship and society. This utopia should suggest to those who govern the planet that if in a decisive way emphasis is placed on knowledge then we will also have more wealth, more fairness and more justice. The place of this utopia is in front of our eyes, both near and far away: it is the world itself, it is the day when this world will no longer be *global* but *universal*. And *universality* is not only the root but the direction, the essence and the truest and most profound research for which universities came into existence.

Thus the task that awaits us is that of reflecting no longer on cultures but directly on man: this is *real humanism*, critical humanism, that humanism that in the practice of any branch of learning holds man and the values of society as the yardstick of choices and as the ultimate end of actions. A university is the gymnasium of humanism where young people are taught to practice humanism.

Abraham Yehoshua, in his book *The Terrible Power of a Minor Guilt*, gives the following account of the history of the killing of man by man: 'Cain raised his hand against his brother Abel and killed him'. Why did he do this? Strangely the text of the Book of Genesis does not tell us, it does not narrate to us the causes that brought about the first murder. This is why the wise men of the Hagadah broadened the Biblical passage in this way and made the causes of the conflict explicit: 'Cain and Abel said: let us divide the world between us. One of them took the land and the other took the other goods. But one of them said to the other: the land you are putting your foot on is mine! And the other said: the clothes that you are wearing are mine! And then he went on: take them off! The other said: go away! This is what led 'Cain to raise his hand against his brother Abel...' But Rabbi Yehoshua thought that things had happened in yet another way. Both the brothers, in his opinion, took the land and both took the other goods. So, why did the quarrel break out? Because one said to the other: 'the Temple will rise up on my property! And the other said: No, the Temple will rise up on my...' This is why it happened that 'Cain raised his hand against his brother Abel...'

This passage from Yehoshua was put before my eyes on the day after the tragic events of 11 September and made me reflect a great deal on the reasons for the hatred that is unleashed amongst men. In how many absurd and specious ways can a brother find words by which to say to another brother: 'I am going to kill you!' He can do so invoking the shabbiest reasons and the most sacred reasons; hatred can conceal itself behind anything. Faced with the mirror of conscience, and in front of you, members of university communities, I hope and wish for a world in which for no piece of land, for no article of clothing, and for no Temple Cain will ever raise his hand against his brother Abel. But we know that if this is never to happen again it will not be because heroes, such as Perseus, are able to cut off the head of an inexorable Medusa, but because, finally, man and knowledge will have been placed at the high point of everybody's attention, at the summit of the problem to be solved. Is this a dream?