

“Modernizing European Universities”

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Concluding Remarks by Manuel Heitor

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I would like to start these concluding remarks by acknowledging all those individuals and institutions that helped in various ways to bring this Conference to fruition. Let me acknowledge all the speakers and the institutions represented in the Conference for their effort in making this event a very successful one.

This High-Level Meeting was organized for good reasons: in benefit of people, knowledge and ideas in Europe, as well as of European universities and in recognition of the increased role they play in modern societies. The ultimate goal is to look at **common European goals** to be achieved through **diversified national policies**.

This is because higher education systems **are under pressure** to meet demands imposed by a globalised knowledge-society without compromising quality deliverance. Although most European institutions and their staff have recognized the need for change for many years, the way institutions are organized, either internally, or through traditional links with society, as well as their structure of incentives, **have continuously delayed reforms**. Consequently, it is only in recent years that reforms have emerged directly conducted by governments in many different countries and political regimes. The Portuguese system is no exception to these mounting pressures and change has been recently introduced through governmental actions.

It is in this context that this meeting has addressed main trends for reform in Europe, in a way that clarified the diversity of challenges and opportunities facing European universities in coming years. In particular, it has been questioned **how to attract and sustain new talents in Europe and how universities can meet the global challenges of research and international competition for highly qualified human resources?**

The discussion today was focused on 3 main issues:

First, **the need to modernise funding mechanisms**, and ensure a better balance

between institutional and competitive funding for universities to meet the global challenges of research and international competition. This certainly includes the need to preserve the **institutional integrity of the university**¹, as well as to create flexible financial mechanisms to **attract and secure new talents in Europe**. But it may also require, as shown by Paul David earlier today, **increased competition and collaborative patterns among funding agencies in Europe**². We need to strengthen the role of the European Research Council and to foster additional competitive funding schemes with a transnational configuration by promoting collaborative arrangements among national funding agencies in Europe.

In this regard, and following the discussion a few weeks ago during the Conference on “The Future of Science in Europe”, Lisbon, 8-10 October, it is clear that, by and large, the financing of higher education and of science and innovation has occurred in Europe along rather traditional lines. Governments directly undertake R&D or subsidize (directly or indirectly, through tax measures) R&D performance and technological innovation. Governments raise – or forego – revenue to pay for this support. Yet, the history of science is rich with varied means of financing science and technological innovation. More importantly, developments in the size, integration, and technologies available in global capital markets present **the opportunity to think about new financing possibilities**. These involve both the channeling of resources from the global liquidity pools to science and technology, as well as enhanced risk management tools that are as important aspects of “financing” as channeling money.

Second, **the need to promote dynamic and responsive universities**, by widening the scope of diversity and of institutional autonomy, while ensuring effective accountability. Again, and always, preserving the institutional integrity of the university, at the same time new forms of knowledge production (namely in the way presented since the early 90’s by Gibbons and colleagues³) should be considered in reforming the university and its links with society. We have seen that raising the level of autonomy for higher education institutions, HEIs, is one of the main objectives of sector reforms, especially in Continental Europe. Granting **independent legal status**

¹ See Conceição, P. and Heitor, M.V. (2007), “Do we need a revisited policy agenda for research integrity? ...an institutional perspective”, “World Conference on Research Integrity”, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal, 16-18 September 2007. See also, Conceição, P. and Heitor, M.V. (1999), “On the role of the university in the knowledge-based economy”. *Science and Public Policy*, 26 (1), pp. 37-51.

² See also, David, P. and Metcalfe, S. (2007), “Universities and Public Research organizations in the ERA”, prepared for the EC (DG-Research) Expert Group on “Knowledge and Growth”, June 2007.

³ Gibbons, M, et al. (1994), *The New Production of Knowledge*, SAGE Publ.

to HEIs is one means of giving greater autonomy: it gives HEIs greater autonomy to govern themselves and function as they see most appropriate, in a free and independent way, in pursuit of work that is deemed essential to society⁴.

Third, **the need to foster the internationalisation of universities**, by promoting mobility and European university networks able to foster attractive and competitive research and learning environments and to attract and train highly qualified human resources. The key issue is the creation of international **partnerships** able to strengthen institutions and the necessary critical masses to compete at the highest international level and, at the same time, guarantee the adequate level of institutional integrity of the university.

If any conclusion can be taken at this final moment, is that there is a consensus about the need, and the opportunity, to **accelerate reform of universities** in order not only to stimulate progress across the whole higher education system, but also to foster the emergence and strengthening of European higher education institutions which can demonstrate their excellence at international level. In our current socio-economic context, Europe's universities aim to become worldwide competitive players, particularly in research. We certainly need **new approaches to research & education in environments of increased global competition for talent**.

But accelerating reform requires the need to concentrate higher education reform on a myriad of issues that will ultimately open the “Black Box” associated with all type of higher education institutions, preserving autonomy while **building-up a new set of relationships with society at large and introducing an “intelligent accountability” associated with a renewed structure of incentives**. And this must be achieved in a way that will promote **new leaderships** for Europe's universities. Earlier today attention has been called for the need to promote a European market of excellence for university leaders, as also a critical path to attract our best researchers to take the lead of our universities⁵.

I would also argue that **strengthening external societal links**, such as public and

⁴ See, for detailed comparative analysis, Abrar Hasan (2007), “Independent legal status and universities as foundations”, Paper prepared for the Portuguese Ministry of Science, technology and Higher Education.

⁵ See, for example, Goodall, A.H. 2006. Should research universities be led by top researchers and are they? *Journal of Documentation*, 62 (3): 388-411.

private research organisations for universities and regional and business links associated with vocational training institutions are critical in making the institutional changes required to meet the needs of global competition and the knowledge economy.

By focusing governmental and political actions on the external dimension, higher education institutions are asked to strengthen their capacity to make the **critical internal changes** for modernising their systems of teaching and research within a path of diversity and specialisation, without compromising quality. Furthermore, by **enhancing their external links with society**, higher education institutions are asked to carefully improve their relationships with economic, social and political actors, thereby creating “new” reinforced institutions that have gained **societal trust**.

In this respect, and following some of the issues raised by John Ziman⁶ many years ago and also noted by Nobel Laureate Richard Ernst (2003)⁷, as well as very much stressed in the course of this conference, one critically important and emerging institutional issue refers to the **training of students and young scientists** in order to provide them with core competencies that help them to become successful researchers and prepare them with the adequate “transferable skills” for the job market outside research and academia.

To cope with such a variety of demands and with a continuously changing environment, we all know that the higher education system, in particular, needs to be diversified. But the challenge of establishing **common European goals and diversified national policies** towards the “**modernization of European universities**” requires effective university networks and a platform of research universities, notably for stimulating the political debate among the various stakeholders and for assisting in the networking of national constituencies promoting the positioning of Europe in the emerging paths of **brain circulation** worldwide.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Manuel Heitor

⁶ Ziman, J. (1968), *Public Knowledge: The Social Dimension of Science*, Cambridge University Press

⁷ Ernst, R. (2003), "The Responsibility of Scientists, a European View", *Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* 2003, 42, pp. 4434 –4439.