



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**SOC/429**  
**Modernisation of**  
**higher education**

Brussels, 28 March 2012

**OPINION**

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on the

**Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Supporting growth and jobs - an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems**

COM(2011) 567 final

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On 20 September 2011 the European Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on the

*Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Supporting growth and jobs - an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems*

COM(2011) 567 final.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 29 February 2012.

At its 479th plenary session, held on 28 and 29 March 2012 (meeting of 28 March), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 100 votes to 1 with 9 abstentions.

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## 1. **Conclusions**

- 1.1 Well-designed higher education is critical for Europe's economic and intellectual future, strengthening the basis of social and economic performances, enriching living and working conditions of the coming generation(s), and being indispensable for shaping future values in European society.
- 1.2 The EESC shares largely the analysis by the Commission as well as the proposals and recommendations of Commission and Council<sup>1</sup> to be implemented in the forthcoming years, of which many link up with the EESC Opinion "Universities for Europe" of 2009<sup>2</sup>. The EESC underlines that the EU Agenda needs to be completed and expects more ambition from the Council.
- 1.3 Despite a growing awareness and convergence of views there is still a long way to go. Improvements on paper are often reluctantly implemented. Vested interests, (soft) protectionism, and the still wide diversity and fragmentation of the higher education landscape – in spite of the Bologna process – block rapid adjustments. This is far from a technical affair as adjustments often imply an overhaul of existing structures as well as new

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<sup>1</sup> Council's Conclusions 28-29 November 2011 on the Modernisation Agenda.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 128 of 18.5.2010, p 48-55.

definitions of responsibilities, methods, programmes, and focus. These elements require continuous attention in the modernisation process in a more precise and detailed way.

- 1.4 Effective diversity in higher education is, of course, desirable with classic universities bringing together teaching and research, and other types of higher education like higher vocational institutions, education with a primarily regional focus – also cross-border – and institutions with a limited number of courses. More generally, smart specialisation and distinctive profiles are needed. The EESC insists on effective synergies between the various types and on flexible learning pathways at all levels of education.
- 1.5 Europe 2020 should be fully applied, in substance as well as in organisation. The Commission, the Council, the MS and higher education should share responsibilities and coordinate effectively. Europe 2020 implies interconnections between higher education and the flagships, such as the Innovation Union, Industrial policy, Agenda for new skills and jobs, and Youth on the Move. Higher education systems and policies should be part of the country-specific recommendations in the Semester.
- 1.6 Autonomy<sup>3</sup>, accountability, and transparency of the institutions are key to fulfil their mission and to generate better value for money. These are also crucial for putting higher education at the centre of job creation, employability and innovation. (National) agendas should ensure professionalisation of management, up-to-date curricula, training, quality assurance of teaching and research, specialisation, as well as international attractiveness. Special attention is required for the entrepreneurial university.
- 1.7 Funding is vital. It is worrying and counterproductive for Europe 2020 and Europe's position in the world that higher education is underfinanced and that budgetary constraints put public finance further under pressure. Satisfactory funding for higher education should be ensured, irrespective the sources of funding. Practices should be disseminated.
- 1.8 The number of students still increases rapidly. Gender equality opportunities in all areas and on all levels must be guaranteed. The dynamics of the economy and of society at large require both unhindered access and satisfactory quality. In case of an introduction (or increase) of national tuition fees, these should be accompanied by flanking policies for scholarships and loans, and guarantees of access.
- 1.9 More students, knowledge workers and researchers in the technical field are needed; technical education has to be presented more attractively. The contribution of social partners and labour market expertise must be well structured. Businesses – whatever their size – should be enabled to make significant contributions to curricula, training, and to an entrepreneurial spirit.

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<sup>3</sup> See for the latest analysis "University Autonomy in Europe II - the Scoreboard", European University Association, 2011. There is still a world to win.

- 1.10 Universities and business, both sides keeping their independence and responsibilities, should jointly develop strategic innovation agendas. An interaction between higher education and companies usually add a lot to research, transfer of knowledge, development of transferable skills as well as the development of ideas. Good practices should be disseminated.
- 1.11 The need for a ranking and quality assessment system can hardly be overestimated to create value for money and for successful international mobility. The EESC welcomes the launch of a carefully designed U-Multirank. In addition to this "mapping" other conditions for mobility of students and researchers, and internationalisation have to be improved.
- 1.12 Convergence of higher education systems positively affect conditions of cross-border mobility of students and researchers which is beneficial for individual performances as well as for the European labour market and European integration. The Erasmus programme should include a pilot for a "mobility semester".
- 1.13 The EESC endorses strongly a link between the Modernisation Agenda and Horizon 2020, Erasmus for All and the Structural Funds

## 2. **Introduction**

- 2.1 Education at all levels is of highest interest. Due to "subsidiarity" higher education in Europe has developed nationally. The Lisbon Treaty speaks only of vocational training and retraining as areas for EU measures<sup>4</sup>.
- 2.2 The 1999 Bologna Conference initiated a decisive breakthrough, leading to a Europe-wide Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degree system. The Bologna Agreement has contributed to a convergence of higher education systems in Europe.
- 2.3 Meanwhile the EU launched successful international programmes for students and researchers such as Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus, Marie Curie Actions, and others. It encouraged cross-border research projects systematically through successive FPs.
- 2.4 There is an ongoing process of reforms and bottom-up initiatives in and between universities. Such initiatives include the establishment of groups of similarly oriented universities such as the League of European Research Universities, the Coimbra Group and others, favouring specialisation in various directions, for instance in research or in social sciences.
- 2.5 The EESC concluded in 2009 that "in the current sub-optimal university system the great potential of universities is insufficiently developed"<sup>5</sup>. This view is shared by the Commission,

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<sup>4</sup> Title XII, Education, vocational training, youth and sport, Articles 165 and 166.

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 128 of 18.5.2010, p. 48-55, point 1.1.

in its Modernisation Agenda<sup>6</sup>. The Council concludes that "quality of education and research is a key driver" for modernisation and "strengthening the knowledge triangle between education, research and innovation is a key condition to jobs and growth"<sup>7</sup>.

- 2.6 Bringing higher education up-to-date must be realised in a very diverse landscape within diverging national and regional socio-economic contexts. Classic universities and other types of institutions have specific missions. The concept of the classic university implies both education and teaching, and research.
- 2.7 In view of a sustainable social and economic recovery decisive steps to enhance quality in higher education are essential.
- 2.8 In addition to many analyses on desirable reforms the Working Document accompanying the Communication<sup>8</sup> summarises developments in MS fostering modernisation. However, considerable disparities in vital areas remain to be tackled:
- economic productivity per country – level of higher education attainment and economic output per capita,
  - qualifications in view of employability,
  - disparities as to the agreed EU 40% attainment level for higher education, although participation in higher education is increasing significantly across Europe,
  - differing levels of investment in higher education, differences in funding, disparities in development of publicly- and privately-financed higher education,
  - in spite of "widespread and far-reaching reform of higher education governance", continuing disparities in financial and institutional autonomy and accountability.
- 2.9 In its overall analysis the Commission also points to shifts, notably the development of the knowledge triangle across the continent, closer relationships between universities and business circles, a focus on "high-end" knowledge-intensive activities, such as R&D, marketing and sales, value chain management and financial services, services in general, ICT, underrepresented societal groups, the changing gender balance - women accounting for more than half the student cohort at pre-doctoral level across Europe, although at doctoral level a reverse trend takes place- and impressive cross-border European and worldwide learning mobility.
- 2.10 The EESC is in favour of deepening the existing country reports, analyses, and recommendations parallel to a systematic country-specific method as applied in the Bologna

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<sup>6</sup> COM(2011) 567 final, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Council conclusions on the modernisation of higher education, 28/29 November 2011.

<sup>8</sup> SEC(2011) 1063 final, p. 48.

Process progress reports and to fine-tuned OECD studies on higher education and quality measurement. Country-specific approaches will provide "good practices".

- 2.11 The EESC notes that certain important issues are left aside in the predominantly-general analysis, such as national and regional political interference in higher education, the way in which the need to foster participation and quality is being materialised in MS, the authorities' approach to specific requirements for professors, teachers, researchers and students, the mutual relationship between various levels of higher education in Member States, the development of common ground for education and research within universities, and, last but not least, reliable statistical evidence.
- 2.12 Commission and Council strongly emphasise the relationship between higher education and the economy. They do not specifically address health faculties, social sciences or humanities. This is understandable given the need for focus, especially in a time of crisis. On the other hand, as the goal of any education is an optimal relationship between education and work, it would be highly desirable also to discuss how faculties or academia that are not intimately related to the economy, however important, should deal with modernisation.
- 2.13 Cooperation between industry and health faculties is needed, since the new cost-effective diagnostic and therapeutic technologies require an expensive, capital-intensive hands-on training, high quality education and lifelong learning. This will help to reduce mortality and disability rates.

### 3. **Europe 2020 and higher education**

- 3.1 In 2009 the EESC qualified the Lisbon Strategy and European higher education as potential major catalysts for the process of modernisation. In the same vein the Commission rightly relates universities to goals and targets of Europe 2020.
- 3.2 A decisive innovation made by Europe 2020 concerns "governance": closer coordination within the Commission and between MS and the EU also in matters that are not or only partly covered by the Treaty.
- 3.3 Of great importance for higher education are the flagship initiatives, in particular Industrial policy, the Innovation Union, an Agenda for new skills and jobs and Youth on the Move.
- 3.4 An increased monitoring role of the Commission, including country-specific recommendations in the Semester, should support the needed university reforms.
- 3.5 The higher education modernisation agenda must be fully covered by Europe 2020. The EESC welcomes the pivotal role of education in the framework of and reference to Europe 2020 in the strategic agenda of the Commission.

3.6 The EESC believes that the link between Europe 2020 and higher education boils down to the following:

- Europe 2020 links higher education with innovation, industrial policies and mobility;
- it creates an additional basis for shared views and cooperation between the Commission and MS, between individual MS and among education institutions;
- it generates new impulses at national level for modernisation;
- developments in higher education must become part of the country-specific recommendations in the annual Semester;
- Europe 2020 will create new forums for cooperation , and increase fruitful cross-border networks;
- the link with industrial policy and innovation requires intensified consultations with the private sector. Consultations with SMEs and micro-enterprises remain undervalued. The EESC insists on real engagement of higher education, governments and Commission to use practical experience of these enterprises in the design of programmes and curricula.

3.7 The Commission makes a distinction between key issues reserved for MS (and education institutions) to address, on the one hand, and specific EU issues, on the other. The EESC prefers to speak of MS' and the Commission's "shared responsibilities" in Europe 2020.

#### 4. **Issues to be tackled by the MS, the Council and higher education**

4.1 The identification of key issues in MS should lead to focused action. More push is needed. The Council should set priorities on proposal of the Commission which subsequently monitors national implementation.

4.2 A special focus is desirable on "more flexible governance and funding systems which balance greater autonomy for education institutions with accountability to all stakeholders", leading to specialisation, educational and research performance, and diversification<sup>9</sup>.

4.3 As the EESC argued in 2009, an appropriate framework and autonomy are crucial<sup>10</sup>. Despite organisation, including autonomy and funding, is a key responsibility of the MS, the EESC considers a debate on these aspects among MS and in the Council indispensable as they greatly affect the outcome for teachers and students.

4.4 The EESC agrees with the policy objectives set out in the Key policy issues box in § 2.5 of the Modernisation Agenda. These objectives entail far from technical adjustments. They are very much related to the national political environment. First and foremost, governments should be addressed rather than higher education. Political persistence, legislation and regulation, to be discussed with all stakeholders, are essential.

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<sup>9</sup> COM(2011) 567 final, p. 9, OJ C 128 of 18.5.2010, p. 48-55, point 1.4.

<sup>10</sup> OJ C 128 of 18.5.2010, p. 48-55, points. 1.4, 3.5.1 and 3.5.2.

- 4.5 Governments and institutions should also be encouraged to make international comparisons concerning the benefits of greater autonomy.
- 4.6 Contrary to common practice, which included a successful "massification" of higher education<sup>11</sup>, the focus must, in line with the current debate on higher education, shift towards smart specialisation, diversity of strategic choices and the development of centres of excellence. Successful examples in MS can lead the way.
- 4.7 The EESC acknowledges that such objectives may entail major shifts in education philosophies in MS. This is a matter to be discussed in the Council, including roadmaps and timetables.
- 4.8 In the current crisis there is an obvious link between modernisation of education and the economy. But the process should be broader. The EESC points equally to the need for up-to-date standards in terms of professionalisation, curricula, degrees and mobility in social sciences and humanities, which are important for European intellectual life, values, and identity. Moreover, well-run health faculties, social sciences and humanities also contribute to the economy.
- 4.9 The EESC endorses closer relationships between higher education and business. It shares the opinion that close, effective links between education, research and business, combined with the shift towards "open innovation", will be crucial for the knowledge triangle.
- 4.10 Accordingly, for institutions directly or indirectly related to the economy, the EESC endorses partnerships with various types of businesses as a "*core activity of higher education institutions*"<sup>12</sup>. There should be a focus on entrepreneurial, creative and innovation skills of students as well as on interactive learning environments and knowledge-transfer infrastructures. An open mind to the "entrepreneurial university" is also needed
- 4.11 Conditions must be put in place for students to switch easily from one type of education institution to another, including flexible pathways from post-secondary vocational education and training to higher education, to upgrade their qualifications<sup>13</sup>. Such conditions are also most helpful in life-long learning.

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<sup>11</sup> Between 2000 and 2009 the number of higher education students in the EU increased by 22.3% to over 19.4 million, European Commission staff working document on Developments in European higher education systems, SEC(2011) 1063 final, p. 16. However, this is no indication of the quality of the qualifications.

<sup>12</sup> COM(2011) 567 final, p. 8. See also Council conclusions 28/29 November 2011 which underline partnerships and cooperation with business, and other private and public actors.

<sup>13</sup> OJ C 68 of 6.3.2012, p. 1, which also urges the Commission to bring Bologna and Copenhagen processes together in an integrated approach, and OJ C 68 of 6.3.2012, p. 11.



- 4.12 Regional development warrants special attention. In many regions, in particular metropolitan areas, the link between higher education, the labour market, research, innovation and business is paramount. These regions are increasingly developing transnational, and even global, specialities. A systematic involvement of higher education usually is a catalyst in local and regional development and promotes economic resilience. National authorities must be encouraged to stimulate such regional processes<sup>14</sup>.
- 4.13 The EESC underlines cross-border regional cooperation in higher education. EGTCs can provide support for neighbourhood regions as well as for regions with comparable economic patterns<sup>15</sup>.
- 4.14 Funding is a vital issue. The crisis is also affecting public financing of higher education. Higher education risks on average to remain structurally underfinanced. Total expenditure is 1.2% GDP compared with 2.9% GDP in the US and 1.5% GDP in Japan. Moreover, private expenditure is very low compared to the US and Japan. Meanwhile the BRIC countries make also substantial progress. The EESC notes that the earlier EU-objective of 2% GDP for Higher education has not been taken on board in the Europe 2020 Strategy.
- 4.15 The required funding and goals like supply of high-quality graduates, professionalisation of management and value for money should support the Europe 2020 Strategy.
- 4.16 There is a wide variety of funding among MS. Some countries are far better off than others. The correlation between the output of higher education and employment makes maintaining adequate funding imperative by encouraging a greater variety of sources of funding, among them the use of public funds to leverage private and other public investment (match-funding).
- 4.17 A well-structured relationship between qualified education institutions and the business community can certainly help alleviate a downward development. Higher education should benefit from innovative processes in business. However, business or private financing should never generate unjustified influence over curricula or over fundamental research.
- 4.18 Universities and business, both sides keeping their independence and responsibilities, should jointly develop strategic innovation agendas. The interaction between universities and business can be strengthened by knowledge alliances. The European Innovation Platform, taking also into account the key enabling technologies, earmarked by the EU, can be very supportive.
- 4.19 Interaction and exchanges between higher education and companies usually add a lot to research, transfer of knowledge, development of transferable skills, and development of ideas. Good practices should be disseminated.

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<sup>14</sup> OJ C 376 of 22.12.2011, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pts 5.7 and 5.8.

- 4.20 The Modernisation Agenda does not give a position on tuition fees, as this issue is exclusively a national responsibility. There are various systems across Europe. A gradual rise in annual fees is a general trend. Tuition fees are controversial.
- 4.21 The EESC points to increasing dilemmas: the number of students is rising, quality must be enhanced, and employability requires higher standards of learning, but public funding in MS is remaining equal or even tending to decrease. This is a huge challenge. In case of an introduction (or increase) of national tuition fees the EESC underlines that these should always be accompanied by flanking policies for scholarships and loans, and explicit guarantees of access.
- 4.22 The percentage of drop-outs in higher education is too high, while a broader cross-section of society has to be attracted into higher education. In particular the social and cultural environment in countries that are lagging behind has to be improved.
- 4.23 Higher numbers alone, however, is not a satisfactory criterion. Objectively-measured quality rather than the number of qualifications has to prevail.
- 4.24 As to qualifications some principles should prevail:
- Consultations with social stakeholders and labour market expertise in view of employability
  - Consultations with business are vital: they should alongside consultations with big companies also include a continuous engagement to SMEs – micro and small – which is all the more important as industrial processes increasingly tend to fragment or be outsourced
  - Qualifications which are related to job creating dynamics, must be developed via learning – training schemes which ask also for commitment of and partnerships with companies
  - Interdisciplinary and transversal competences should be developed
  - Qualifications should be helpful to smart specialisation that enhances (international) attractiveness or regional specialties
  - Notwithstanding the diversity of higher education the way of defining qualifications should facilitate European (and international) exchanges and careers.
- 4.25 The EESC very much welcomes the proposals in the Communication concerning qualifications, quality assurance and the link between higher-quality education and researchers. It also shares the opinion that modernisation of education depends on the competence and creativity of teachers and researchers<sup>16</sup>, a fact that is often overlooked. In this context, all prohibitive administrative obstacles to careers in the academic sector – such as the

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<sup>16</sup> COM(2011) 567 final, p. 5.

additional academic levels that exist in some countries (Poland among them) – should be eliminated.

- 4.26 Given the sharply increased number of students there is a worrying shortage of competent teachers. Quality in teaching and research means that satisfactory work conditions, attractive careers in education, and professional development as well as training facilities and rewards for excellence are necessary. This seems self-evident, but in the majority of MS the reverse is the case now. Therefore, the Council should define policy lines.
- 4.27 The Commission rightly stresses the need for a broad variety of study modes. Technical education must become more attractive. Social partners at national and regional level can play a very positive role in sustaining the image of technical studies. Individual companies can make a significant contribution. The EESC underlines commitment of SMEs – in particular micro and small – especially on regional level.
- 4.28 The European debate must focus on putting higher education at the centre of innovation, job creation and employability<sup>17</sup>. This should be a central goal for all stakeholders and a shared responsibility of the Commission, the Council, the MS and, notably, higher education itself.
- 4.29 Given the huge challenges the higher education agenda of the Commission and the Council is still far from complete and not very strong. The EESC underlines that the current crisis requires more focused, convincing steps from the Council, the MS and higher education. Changes may be underway, but they need to be accelerated.
- 4.30 All actors must equally take responsibility for professionalisation, curricula, quality assurance, specialisation etc. A roadmap and time tables by the Council on the link between higher education, innovation and employability is required. Higher education institutions should support this process in sketching themselves their role in promoting quality, and social and product innovations.
- 4.31 The views of the ERAC concerning highly relevant objectives relating to governance and institutional reform of universities, and the link between innovation, research and education, should become an integral part of the agenda. This should pave the way for shifts in numerous European universities<sup>18</sup>.

## 5. **Issues to be tackled by the Commission**

- 5.1 The EESC welcomes the goals the Commission sets itself in the modernisation process of higher education, joining recent approaches as highlighted in the Council Conclusions of last November.

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<sup>17</sup> COM(2011) 567 final, p. 12, point 3.3.

<sup>18</sup> See the Conclusions of the European Research Area Committee, 24 June 2011.

- 5.2 The EESC endorses the role the Commission can and should play in focusing on the evidence base for policy-making, among other things concerning performance and transparency. In a world of primarily – often politically inspired – national analyses and goals, a proactive role for the Commission, with objective assessments, is essential, including the terms of reference being discussed in the Council.
- 5.3 Such European assessments are likely to provide corresponding endeavours in MS, universities and research centres, reinforcing the common framework and hopefully leading to shared goals.
- 5.4 Against this backdrop, the EESC welcomes the launch of U-Multirank, a multi-dimensional performance-based ranking and information tool. It should improve transparency of the missions of the various types of institutions, and contribute to fair comparison of higher education performance in Europe. Moreover, it is useful to develop a European ranking in addition to the mono-dimensional Shanghai-ranking and other rankings anyway.
- 5.5 As the EESC argued in 2009, the need for a critical ranking and quality assessment system covering a broad range of issues of a wide variety of institutions can hardly be overestimated<sup>19</sup>. Transparency, provided by a verifiable third independent non-partisan body, will support national authorities and higher education to put emphasis on quality, differentiation, and smart specialisation. As the Commission notes, *"this independently run tool will inform choice and decision-making by all higher education stakeholders"*<sup>20</sup>.
- 5.6 In addition, "mapping" may well foster cross-border mobility among students, lecturers, researchers and professors, and, more in particular, help to upgrade research by creating new networks as well as partnerships and competition between higher education institutions across Europe.
- 5.7 The Council underscores mobility of students and researchers – free movement of knowledge – as a fifth freedom. The EU programmes fostering cross-border mobility for students and researchers are already successful. Nonetheless, existing systemic shortcomings have yet to be rectified. A "mobility scoreboard" is desirable to fight obstacles to learning mobility.
- 5.8 The Erasmus programme must demand more commitment from students. The EESC recommends a pilot for a "mobility semester" – a 5th semester in "bachelor". The programme must also be affordable for every applicant. The EESC supports the analysis of potential student mobility flows and the Commission proposals concerning the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System as well as concerning an Erasmus Masters Degree Mobility Scheme.

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<sup>19</sup> OJ C 128 of 18.5.2010, p. 48-55, points 1.5 and 5.2.4, 5.2.5 and 5.2.6.

<sup>20</sup> COM(2011) 567 final, Key issues box, p. 11.

- 5.9 Article 179(1) of the TFEU is very explicit regarding research in the EU<sup>21</sup>. International mobility of researchers is key. Too often, hidden protectionism creates persistent barriers for researchers. This is damaging for European science and competitiveness. It also prevents national institutions reaping the full benefit of Europe's intellectual diversity. The EESC strongly endorses the Commission's proposal on the European Framework for Research Careers to foster researchers' mobility.
- 5.10 The EESC also welcomes the European framework for four career profiles for researchers, developed by the Commission and education and business experts. This must develop as an open system to create as many opportunities as possible.
- 5.11 The EESC stresses the need to streamline national financial and social conditions for researchers in a common European framework in order to remove remaining impediments to free movement. Europe-wide professional profiles should be developed and institutions should be encouraged to professionalise their human resource management.
- 5.12 An extension of the activities of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is desirable, not least in order to generate incentives to further knowledge alliances between business and the universities concerned. The same applies to reinforcement within Marie Curie initiatives and a quality framework for traineeships.
- 5.13 On a global scale the EU has to develop as a highly qualified competitor and partner. In this process higher education has an important role. Accordingly, the EESC fully supports the Council decision to invite the Commission to "*design a specific strategy for the internationalisation of higher education*"<sup>22</sup>.
- 5.14 The EESC supports the envisaged framework conditions for an extension of relations with partners beyond the EU, mobility partnerships and improving facilities for students and researchers from outside Europe via EU directives and a performance scoreboard<sup>23</sup>. Restrictions on non-European students and researchers need to be eased to attract talent and creativity from elsewhere.
- 5.15 The EESC advocates a Council discussion on the place of European higher education in a global context, which also defines the qualities required to be a successful competitor and partner. That may help education institutions to put the right conditions in place.
- 5.16 In a number of opinions the EESC has expressed its agreement with a focus on innovation and all aspects of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the drawing-up of the 2014-2020

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<sup>21</sup> See the convincing proposal "Towards a European framework for research careers, European Commission", 21 July 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Council Conclusions on the internationalisation of higher education, 11 May 2010.

<sup>23</sup> COM(2011) 567 final, Key issues box, p. 14.

Financial Perspectives. The EESC stresses the need for increased added value from the European funds.

- 5.17 Against this backdrop the EESC welcomes the Commission's specific proposal on a 73% rise of funding of the Erasmus programme in the budget 2014-2020 as well as direct references to (higher) education in the Structural Funds.
- 5.18 Without going into details of actual financial figures, the EESC shares the overall view that expenditure on education, research and innovation and cohesion policy all serve to create a forward-looking European environment. Whenever appropriate, funding under "restructuring of industrial sites" may also be used for this purpose.
- 5.19 The EESC very much welcomes the Commission's intention to establish in 2012 a high-level group (HLG) with a rolling mandate to analyse key topics for the modernisation of higher education. This HLG must be broadly made up of representatives from education institutes, academics, business and the social partners.

## 6. **Additional suggestions**

- 6.1 Focused incentives to professional development in higher education like Europe-wide courses for university management and leadership are desirable.
- 6.2 Special links between individual universities – twinning across Europe – are recommendable so that they learn from each other's practical professional and managerial experiences. Exchanges of experiences within cross border groups of universities, and specialised conferences and seminars will be equally helpful.
- 6.3 At regular intervals, the scientific and educational performance of university faculties or establishments is assessed by external commissions. The EESC recommends a standing practice of a highly qualified international composition of such commissions.

- 6.4 In view of the cost-output ratio of higher education, the EESC recommends a European analysis of the existing systems of administrative burdens. Proposals for improvement should be drawn up on the basis of good practices.

Brussels, 28 March 2012

The President  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee

Staffan Nilsson

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