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In this Special Issue:

**The Cultural Heritage and Academic Values
of the European University
and the Attractiveness of the
European Higher Education Area**

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From the Joint Editors: The European University and Its Heritage – The Inspiration for Learning and Source of Knowledge based on Respect of Academic Values

JAN SADLAK, J. MICHAEL MILLER, C.S.B., and SJUR BERGAN

There would not be this special issue if it was not for an event which was special, and not only in the eyes of the beholder – the Joint Editors of this issue of the review. The event in view has been the Bologna Process Official Seminar on *The Cultural Heritage and Academic Values of the European University and the Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area*, which took place from 30 March to 1 April 2006 in Vatican City. It was organized by the Holy See, in collaboration with the Rectors' Conference of Pontifical Universities, the Pontifical Academies of Sciences, UNESCO-CEPES, the Council of Europe, and under the patronage of the European Commission. The presented papers reflect the “width and depth” of the topics which were addressed during the meeting while the conclusions and recommendations attest to a “collective wisdom” coming out of the discussions. Particularly fitting is also the address to the participants of the Seminar by Pope Benedict XVI during a special audience.

It should also be mentioned that the Vatican Seminar has been organized in a clear context, reflected in the title of the meeting: that of the work undertaken by the Working Group of the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) which responded to the statement by the ministers of the Bologna Process in the Communiqué adopted at the 2005 Bergen ministerial conference to the effect that “the European Higher Education Area must be open and should be attractive to other parts of the world”, followed by the important argument that “we reiterate that in international academic cooperation, academic values should prevail”. The ministers asked the BFUG “...to elaborate and agree on a strategy for the external dimension”. The Vatican Seminar was the first of the three official meetings¹ which were organized in order to provide input to the strategy document to be presented to Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education which will be held from 17 to 18 May 2007 in London (Zgaga, 2006).

The millennial history of the university in Europe (a generic term covering all types of higher education institutions which are centre of research, teaching and learning) attests to its pivotal place in the European cultural heritage (in this issue: Grochowski, Marga, Życiński). All essays presented in this volume provide historical evidence of this contribution, including a special role played by the Roman Catholic Church, especially in the earlier periods of European history (in this issue: de Ridder-Symoens). But even more important is the degree to of trans-disciplinary and trans-denominational agreement with regard to the importance of the cultural context and academic values for the future of European higher education (in this issue: Campbell, Hannes, Lagarde, Sirat). For this

¹ Two other Official Seminars were: The Athens Seminar “*Putting European Higher Education Area on the Map: Developing Strategies for Attractiveness*”, organized by the Hellenic Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (24-26 June 2006), and the final meeting – the Oslo Seminar “*Looking out! Bologna in a Global Setting*”, organized the Royal Ministry of Education and Research (28-29 September 2006).

very reason, it is also necessary to see that however important structural reforms are for the implementation of the goals leading to a creation of the European Higher Education Area, the Bologna Process is more than structures (in this issue: Braga da Cruz, Figel, Mac Sithigh). It is about an academic community in which institutions and members:

- Are a source of independent thinking, respect and commitment to searching new knowledge and truth;
- create conditions which attract employability, presence and collaboration of people who are doing “interesting and relevant” work in the eyes of other members of the academic community;
- possess a “robust sense of reality” that higher education is foremost at the service of society (a common public good) and as such requires a certain detachment from current political agendas or immediate economic public and private interests;
- collectively and individually adhere to ethical and moral principles with regard to research, teaching and external commitments.

It is about making the academic community true to itself and true to the society of which it is a part (in this issue: Berchem, Magyar). However, it is equally important to see higher education in a wider context as it serves its main purposes, including:

- preparation for the labor market;
- preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- personal development; and
- development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

In the above context the proposed new perspective on seeing the role of the European university as a contributor to the “wisdom-based society” merits our particular mention (in this issue: Blasi).

It should also be emphasized that however important the European dimension of higher education, the international dimension (in this context, the dimension “beyond Europe”, even though it can of course be argued that the European dimension is also “international”) is equally important. What is being done in higher education in Europe also affects the ways in which Europe, its institutions, nations, and citizens interact with other parts of the world, and how “Europe” is viewed by other parts of the world (in this issue: Filippov, Miller).

In a growingly complex reality which is characterized, among other things, by the multiplicity of affiliations and identities, a debate about values has a renewed significance. Also from that point of view, the conference on *The Cultural Heritage and Academic Values of the European University and the Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area* therefore came at the right time. The degree of complexity is even greater when we also invoke the role of research and technology in the present day world (in the issue: Hottois).

In addition, the essays presented in this volume underline that the values and heritage of European higher education are among the factors that make it attractive. The various issues analyzed in this issue can be summarized in the following questions:

What are the most important values of higher education in Europe, as they are transmitted to us through our academic cultural heritage?

How can the European academic community ensure that these values continue to inform the development of higher education in Europe?

Europe is a unique mix of what we have in common and what is specific to each of us: cultural diversity before the background of much common heritage. In considering a European identity and a European Higher Education Area, what is the proper balance between what is European and what is national or local?

How can we convince the world beyond academe that the European academic heritage is important for contemporary society and not just a luxury for the gilded few?

How, in the age of the sound bites and shifting priorities, can we argue the case of an institution that by definition takes a longer-term view ahead?

European higher education is engaged in the most comprehensive reforms since at least the immediate aftermath of 1968. These reforms are positive, and they are needed. However, precisely at a time of extensive reforms, and at a time that tends to emphasize short horizons and immediate gratification, it is important that all those engaged in European higher education take the time to reflect on why we are here and where we come from: on the purposes of higher education, and on the academic heritage of Europe. The Vatican Seminar, resulting in, among other things, this volume, contributes to furthering of the work on the heritage of European universities, a topic which was also part of the Council of Europe's campaign "Europe, a common heritage" (Sanz and Bergan, 2002).

The academic heritage is of great importance to the Bologna Process both because of its intrinsic value and because it provides us with a broader perspective on higher education reform. Reform is part and parcel of our heritage: the universities, along with the Church and the parliament, are the oldest continuously existing institutions in Europe. The university has survived precisely because it has been able to reform. Yet, universities have not just adapted their form: they have at the same time conserved their essence and their core values. It is this combination of adapting their form and preserving their core values that make universities relevant to modern society.

There is additional policy reasoning in looking into cultural heritage of higher education, as a source of knowledge when considering the public responsibility for higher education, which is also one of our European characteristics (Weber and Bergan, 2005). For higher education to continue to be recognized as a public responsibility there is a need to look at ways in which this responsibility can be carried out in modern, complex societies in order to ensure that Europe will continue to foster and develop the university as a place of reflection and debate, a place that is close enough to modern society to be relevant to it and yet has the necessary distance to encourage the critical thinking necessary not only for immediate remedies but also with longer term solutions.

There is evidence to suggest that, as societies become wealthier, traditions and institutions that bolster commitment and far-sighted behavior are eroded. Individuals increasingly live for today rather than tomorrow. Traditional values which were important for previous generations are being questioned or rejected sometimes without

providing alternatives that would allow us individually and collectively to face new and difficult challenges.

If you agree with the arguments presented above, there is a challenge for the university and the academic community at large to make the university a modern *agora*, which provides not only a common ground for scholars from all academic disciplines – exact, life and reflective fields of research and studies – to actively meet and match their ideas against one another but where society can discover a better understanding of social and cultural phenomena and credible answers to various problems in order to provide the basis for economic development and to assure the “intellectual growth” of the society it serves.

The universities and academia are expected to make an even greater contribution to Europe and its traditions, values and heritage. Recent events have demonstrated that the people of Europe consistently seek inspiration to bring about desired cultural and social advancements at the global, regional and local levels. In this regard an intrinsic link exists between *universal* values (those confirming the place of human being in society) and those which can be described as *locally-determined* cultural values (see in this issue: Etchegaray). Understanding, tolerance and mutual respect are imperatives of academic values serving as grounds for a renewed solidarity and which could promote and enhance the regional and global attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

It is the Editors’ conviction that all the texts presented in this special issue of the review, including the extensive book review (in this issue: Gilder) closing this volume, represent the most topical thinking about these important issues, yet: the debate must be continued while the proposed ideas are analyzed and tested.

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