



**MRS QUINTIN'S SPEECH AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE**

**"MEETING THE CHALLENGES FOR  
EDUCATION IN EUROPE"**

**2 MARCH 2009**



**Education and culture**

**Visit of Mrs. Odile Quintin to Australia  
2 March 2009**

**Speech at the University of Melbourne, hosted by EU Centres and Jean  
Monnet Centre**

**3.0 Speech**

(about 1950 words)

**Introduction**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for this invitation, and thanks to our hosts, the EU centres and the Jean Monnet Centre at the University of Melbourne.

Before I begin - and I know that I speak for all my colleagues in the European Commission - I would like to offer my condolences on the tragedy resulting from the bushfires. We have all been very touched by these dreadful events. Allow me to express our solidarity with Australia, and to wish you the very best in reconstructing the lives that have been affected.

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**I. Learning through cooperation**

One of my reasons for visiting Australia is to exchange ideas about higher education with the Australian authorities. Earlier today, I met my counterparts from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Our enriching discussions underline just how much we can improve by sharing our experience.

In fact, the European Union itself places a high value on improving performance by learning from each other within a broad policy cooperation framework. It is worth remembering that within the EU, each of the 27 Member States is responsible for their own education systems. Although each system is unique, we all face the same challenges, and mutual learning can inspire all partners towards change.

The job of the European Commission is to support countries in taking forward their reforms, agreeing common objectives, and identifying successful policies and practices. We also manage a significant Lifelong Learning Programme, with a budget of about 7 billion euro (14 billion Australian dollars) from 2007 to 2013, which supports large-scale mobility within Europe, for schools, teachers, vocational education and adults, as well as higher education mobility in our popular Erasmus funding strand.

One central focus of our work has been a thorough overhaul of European higher education, and our combined efforts are beginning to bear fruit.

Today, I want to discuss these reforms, and why they are necessary. You will certainly recognise the issues, since the Bradley report on the challenges for Australian Higher Education examines the same themes – widening participation in higher education, increasing funding, linking university-business cooperation, and ensuring quality.

I want to make it clear that although the present economic crisis calls for tough choices, it must not distract us from continuing these reforms. This is not the moment to divert resources and interest away from higher education. Now more than ever, people need high-level skills to get through the crisis and to be in a position to seize the new opportunities that will arise when the world recovers.

## **II. The challenges facing higher education in Europe**

The principal challenge we face is ensuring that people have the right skills to thrive in today's knowledge society.

Are enough young people choosing the higher education path? It seems not. Despite the 4000+ higher education institutions in the wider Europe, our people are still relatively under-qualified. Only 23% of working-age adults have completed higher education, compared to 33% of Australians. Not enough of our talented young people enter universities; not enough adults have even seen a university from the inside.

What's more, we do not manage to get enough of our migrant population into higher education.

Let me underline that there is a great deal of good quality in Europe. But our higher education is fragmented in sub-systems which do not interact well. Too few students include a period of study abroad in another European country as part of their studies. International staff

recruitment is rare. Student and staff exchanges with Australia and other parts of the world need to grow.

Universities are still not sufficiently open to the rest of society. They have enormous, but underused, potential to help society prepare for the knowledge era – by equipping people with the right skills; by opening their doors to new types of students and innovative programmes; by joining forces and sharing knowledge with other sectors in society.

### **III. The response – reforming higher education in the knowledge era**

#### Bologna reforms

The desire to reform in Europe has seen 46 countries band together to create the European Higher Education Area – what we call the 'Bologna process'. The aim is to make European higher education more competitive and more attractive for Europeans and for students and scholars from other continents, by making the different higher education systems more compatible with each other.

Bologna reforms concentrate on three dimensions of higher education:

- Introducing a unified, 'three-cycle', degree structure covering bachelor, master and doctorate.
- Investing in quality.

- And standardising the award of academic credits (the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation system).

The speed and scope of the reforms vary from country to country. But I am happy to say that the overall trend is clear: Europe is heading for a more open, a more attractive and a more competitive higher education system.

I know there is a great deal of interest in Australia in our reforms to modernise Europe's universities. I am certain that these reforms will improve cooperation and mobility between us.

This spirit of cooperation will guide the **Bologna World forum**, to be held in Belgium at the same time as the Bologna ministerial conference in April. In Europe, 2009 is dedicated to creativity and innovation, and I hope this event will launch an innovative dynamic in policy cooperation between countries inside and outside Bologna.

### University-business cooperation

And how well are we preparing our young people for the world they will encounter after university?

Our research shows that more and more jobs will require high skills. At the same time, Europe's population is falling. We will not have enough graduates to fill all the new jobs. We will need to call on people already in work, who must be able to improve their skills.

The Commission believes that dialogue with the world of work can help universities offer more to students and deliver their mission more effectively.

Cooperation with business can help design courses relevant to the labour market; bring business skills such as entrepreneurship and leadership into programmes, as well as encourage curriculum innovation to meet the needs of working people.

Business can also help instil a more entrepreneurial spirit in universities themselves, and offer expertise in managing resources as well as bring new sources of funding.

This is why the Commission has launched the **University-Business Forum**, a discussion platform for mutual learning. We are helping to bring down the barriers between these worlds, and plan to place this cooperation on a long-term basis.

### EIT – integrating the knowledge triangle

The partnership model also underpins the EU's new flagship initiative, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology.

The best of our universities and research bodies, and top business interests, will join forces in innovative consortia, known as Knowledge and Innovation Communities, to turn the latest knowledge and research into innovation products.

The EIT will inspire change in how higher education is organised, fostering mobility between higher education, research and business, and promoting the free movement of knowledge.

The EIT is a European venture, but one open to the world. The call for proposals opens in April and I hope that Australian partners will see this as an opportunity to innovate on a global scale with Europe's best.

#### **IV. Mobility for better skills**

##### Erasmus - a European success story

Freedom of movement is one of the core principles of the European Union, and education and training is no exception.

Our research shows that students who spend a period studying abroad develop skills that are extremely useful in today's more diverse societies and workplaces – such as a greater sense of initiative and greater self-esteem; better language and cross cultural skills. Students who have studied abroad have better employment prospects and are better prepared for today's globalised world.

The Erasmus Programme for mobility is a European success story. After 20 years, almost 2 million young Europeans have studied in another European country, and we aim to reach 3 million by 2012.

But we believe that many more young people should have these opportunities. Later this year we will publish a **Green paper**, with

ideas for multiplying and simplifying mobility so that ultimately, a study-abroad period can become a standard part of all degree programmes and of all lifelong learning phases, in schools, vocational training and for adult learning.

## **V. Europe-Australia cooperation in higher education**

Erasmus has also inspired Europe to develop inter-university cooperation and mobility on a global scale. We all share the benefits - better connected higher education systems promote understanding among peoples and drive up quality, through international dialogue, comparison and competition.

I want to mention three areas where cooperation between Europe and Australia is bearing fruit.

### Bilateral cooperation

Since 2002, Europe and Australia have shared a dedicated bilateral cooperation programme, to which we have just added a very promising policy dialogue. So far, 47 Australian universities - including Melbourne, of course - and 43 European universities have worked on joint curriculum and mobility projects.

I invite you to check out the joint call for proposals we publish next month, which targets long-term partnerships between universities and business. And from next year on, we will most likely encourage consortia to go beyond the traditional focus on mobility and start working towards awarding degrees together.

## Jean Monnet

There are many good reasons for mentioning the second item on my list: the Jean Monnet Programme.

The EU's Jean Monnet Programme promotes excellence among universities in teaching, researching and debating European integration. The Jean Monnet network not only spreads the best teaching on European affairs worldwide; it is a vast resource of information and critical thinking that in turn helps influence the debate on the European project.

The University of Melbourne is a leader in European studies in the Asia-Pacific region. It is not surprising that your Contemporary Europe Research Centre has been awarded the title of Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence.

I would like to thank Professor Philomena Murray – the Jean Monnet Chair at the University of Melbourne – for her continuing and very positive cooperation with the Jean Monnet Programme. I am also delighted to have the New Zealand Jean Monnet Chair, Martin Holland, with us today.

I am also pleased that this lecture is being co-hosted with two other European Centres: the Innovative Universities European Union (IUEU) Centre at La Trobe University and the European and EU Centre at Monash University. I would like to thank both Directors,

Prof. Pascaline Winand and Prof. Philip Bull, for their excellent EU-focused curricular and outreach activities.

I hope that European studies activities in Melbourne will serve as a model for universities elsewhere in Australia. Given the great size of your country, and the great potential for cooperation, I would encourage even more universities to come forward with high-quality Jean Monnet applications to strengthen the links that bind Australia and Europe together.

### Erasmus Mundus

And finally, I want to mention another success story that can help shrink the distance between our two hemispheres – our Erasmus Mundus Programme.

Erasmus Mundus is our world-class programme for studying in Europe. We have just expanded it to include PhD students, and to offer opportunities to institutions outside Europe to become full consortia partners.

So far, almost 7000 of the world's best students and scholars have come to Europe to study, including 60 Australian students and 53 scholars.

### **Conclusion**

Last week we launched Erasmus Mundus II. This morning we launched the first EU-Australia Policy Dialogue on Education. This evening we launch the Pacific Regional Chapter of the Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association.

I wish you all the best in your endeavours.

Before handing over to Gregor Lichtfuss, who is the coordinator of the Pacific Regional Chapter of the EMA, I want to underline once more the growing web of education contacts between our two parts of the world: Erasmus Mundus; our bilateral cooperation; the Jean Monnet programme and the EU centres of excellence.

By using all these cooperation opportunities to the full, universities in Australia and the EU can forge links to capitalise on their undoubted excellence, and build the knowledge society that will ensure we weather the current storms.

Thank you.