

**Mr. Figel' takes part in the Conference "L'Europe de l'enseignement supérieur, un espace de mobilité à renforcer", 4 November 2008, Nancy**

Madame la Ministre, chère Valérie Pécresse,

Monsieur le Maire,

Monsieur le Président Finance,

Chers collègues,

Mesdames et Messieurs,

J'aimerais tout d'abord remercier la Présidence française de l'Union et Mme Pécresse pour avoir placé la mobilité au centre de leur travail. Et merci pour avoir réuni autant de personnes et d'intérêts pour discuter sur la mobilité pendant la conférence. J'ai de grandes attentes, en particulier que cet événement nous porte à renouveler notre engagement en faveur de la mobilité pour la jeune génération.

La mobilité des jeunes n'est pas un nouveau sujet. C'est une question européenne depuis plus de 20 ans. La mobilité a fourni à la Commission et aux Etats membres les premières opportunités de travailler ensemble. C'est le grain de sable dans l'huître, autour duquel nous avons construit nos succès. *(Let me start by thanking the French Presidency of the EU and Mme Pécresse for making mobility the centrepiece of your work. And thank you for bringing so many people and interests together to discuss mobility at this conference. I have high hopes for this conference – that it will lead us to renew our commitment to mobility for our young generations. Mobility for our young people is by no means a new topic. It has been a European issue for more than 20 years. Mobility gave the Commission and the Member States our first opportunities for*

*working together. It is the grain of sand in the oyster shell around which we have built many achievements.)*

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to share with you some ideas: we are not the United States of Europe, but we need to be open and credible in what is linked to the Lisbon strategy and to our history. We have to combine learning from the past and acting today for the future. If we want to live in freer and more responsible times, we have to look at our educational institutions. Today there is a new sense of urgency behind the issue of mobility. Why? I would suggest two reasons – the personal and the political.

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Most of what we know about mobility in higher education stems of course from the Erasmus programme. Erasmus mobility is certainly a European success story. You may know the figures: growing from a modest 3.000 students in 1987 to the current situation where almost 160.000 students participate every year. Five years ago, we celebrated one million Erasmus students. We are close to 2 million now, and we aim to celebrate three million by 2012. But this is still less than 4% of students, so mobility is an exception rather than the rule. At the beginning, more than 20 years ago, some of the EC Member States were against, because of lack of money and of an EC legal base (this came later with the Maastricht Treaty).

Let me here recall the words of Victor Hugo: "On résiste à l'invasion des armées; on ne résiste pas à l'invasion des idées." Or, as it is translated in English, "Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come... "

A recent study underlines just why Erasmus is so good for the students who take part. It found that Erasmus students are quicker in finding a first job. Their careers are more internationally oriented. They become more independent and self-reliant. By living and studying in another country, they polish their

language and intercultural skills, skills that are more and more sought after in our globalised world. Studying abroad, possibly coupled with working abroad is for most students an unforgettable experience, which makes them proud to be European citizens.

Last but not least, a statistic I think is truly charming: one in six Erasmus students finds a long-term partner abroad. It is real integration! This, more than anything, encapsulates the 'Erasmus effect'. Our young people are not just experiencing Europe – they are creating Europe...

If there is any measure of how well the Eastern and Western parts of our Union are integrating after enlargement, just look at Erasmus and don't "be afraid of the Polish plumber". Participation of the 12 new Member States in Erasmus continues to shoot up. From barely 5% ten years ago, the new Member States' share now reaches 18%.

But mobility is not only a personal gain. It is also an incubator where a lasting sense of European citizenship is hatched; and it is highly relevant to Europe's competitiveness.

To play our role in the global political and economic arena, Europe needs our Erasmus generation. We need people with top-level abilities in team work and leadership, with intercultural sensitivity and multilingual communication skills. Learning mobility is an essential ingredient in developing this mix of skills. By the way, we will soon be publishing "New skills for new jobs" initiative.

The best narrative for Europe is "*unity in diversity*". As diversity is growing in Europe, we need to keep the balance by reinforcing unity. Universities should be ahead of this, because *uni-versity* is the central for the *unity in diversity*. Universities look for truth, science, knowledge, for the way ahead. They should also keep focus on human values. This week, I had also the opportunity to launch "Comenius Regio", which is based on local and regional authorities' partnerships. Next year we will open a new mobility strand for upper

secondary school pupils. Other mobility instruments are the Gruntvig and Leonardo da Vinci programmes.

In this context, I decided a year ago to invite some high level European experts to discuss their visions for mobility and make us some recommendations for the next decade. My main question was: how can the EU, building on the success of Erasmus, expand mobility not only in the university sector but also among a much wider cross-section of young people? For example mobility for young entrepreneurs and artists and in sectors such as vocational training, adult learning and volunteering?

I asked this High Level Forum on Mobility to examine three areas: barriers to mobility; the potential for future EU actions; and the potential for Member States' action to support the EU objectives. This forum met under the very able stewardship of Maria-João Rodrigues, whom you have just heard. The Forum presented its conclusions in June, embracing bold measures and original new ideas.

I would like to underline two points the Forum makes. The first was mentioned by Mrs Péresse: the Forum formulated the ambitious long-term objective that all students should have the opportunity to study or work on a placement in another country. All degree programmes - bachelor, master and doctoral level - should include a 'mobility window' as an integral and recognised part of studies. Mobility should become a standard. 20 years ago it was difficult to agree on a little programme, today everybody agrees and we even talk about compulsory mobility: not "why", but "how". Second, the Forum called for a new partnership for mobility: it called for a partnership of Member States, the European Commission, the regions, universities, businesses, and foundations, to pool their forces and resources to make this bold vision a reality.

The Commission is currently discussing the recommendations and conclusions of the Forum, and the Council will adopt conclusions in November and for the first time we will adopt a piece of legislation – a Recommendation –

on youth volunteering. We will also prepare a Green Paper on Mobility in the coming year.

Mobility has another attribute I want to touch on: mobility makes the European Higher Education Area more attractive to students and academics from around the world - and to our own young generation. Mobility continues to be a catalyser: for example, 5 out of 6 instruments of the Bologna process were developed inside Erasmus.

In other words, mobility can act as an incentive, a kind of 'carrot' or 'sugar', helping to convince more young Europeans to take up higher education studies. And this is vital for Europe's future: we have an enormous potential, but despite the fact that we have over 4000 higher education institutions in the wider Europe, our populations are still relatively under-qualified.

Not enough of our talented young people enter universities; not enough adults have even seen a university from the inside. Only 23% of the EU's working-age population has achieved tertiary education compared to 39% in the US. Fewer than 60% of young Europeans enrol in third-level, compared to more than 80% of young Americans or Koreans.

This is a waste: a waste of individual talent and of human resources for our economies, especially in times of economic hardship. We want to reach the knowledge, and then we have to put this value at the centre of our policies. I believe that study programmes with integrated mobility windows, and joint degree programmes in particular, can help reverse this trend.

It is equally important to continue making European higher education better known and more attractive to the world. I attach great importance to this - better connected higher education systems will help to promote the mutual understanding among peoples that is the foundation of a stable and peaceful world.

We are by no means advocating a brain drain, but brain circulation. International dialogue, international comparison, rankings, and international competition: all these drive up quality in higher education. Quality matters most. If we are the best in the world in football, why should we not be in the first League also in higher education?

The European Commission is therefore promoting the attractiveness of European higher education. The EU's external policy aims to establish close cooperation with all world regions, in particular with the neighbouring countries through the European Neighbourhood Policy – this includes almost all Bologna members plus the Mediterranean countries. We also promote mobility and the attractiveness of the EHEA in our bilateral cooperation programmes with other continents.

Erasmus Mundus – the globetrotting younger brother of Erasmus since 2004 – is the EU's flagship programme for worldwide academic cooperation. With its European Masters Courses and competitive scholarships, Erasmus Mundus is certainly helping to improve the attractiveness of “destination Europe”. By the end of this year, we will have supported 103 courses, many delivering double diplomas, and 8,000 scholarship-holders. In the next 5 years, Erasmus Mundus II will have a total budget of 950 M€, which represents an increase of more than 300% compared with the first phase of the programme. It will continue the activities of Erasmus Mundus I, but it will also contain new features such as the inclusion of joint doctoral programmes and increased scholarships for European students.

The "Global Promotion Project", which is part of Erasmus Mundus, is raising the image of European higher education worldwide. Its very successful internet portal "[study-in-europe.org](http://study-in-europe.org)" allows students worldwide to access information on all EU higher education systems and the programmes they offer. We are looking forward to a very exciting second phase of Erasmus Mundus, starting next year.

I would like to conclude by mentioning the Commission report we have distributed at this conference. It gives details on the social background of our students, on Erasmus contribution to the modernisation of universities and on mobility, as education ministers requested last November. The Commission adopted the report last month, and I will present it to ministers in a couple of weeks.

The French organisers of this Conference have chosen the three main themes very wisely. Your discussions will touch on all relevant issues, ranging from the political framework conditions for mobility at macro level to the concrete institutional challenges at micro level, without forgetting the funding issue.

This conference offers the opportunity to tie together all the threads that have been woven around the central theme of mobility during the past year: the two Bologna Seminars in Brussels and Lille, the Report of the High Level Forum, the Commission's report to the Council and the Report prepared by the French Centre for Strategic Analysis.

We have accomplished a great deal over the past years. But our ambitions have been growing with our achievements. Rightly so!

I look forward to the recommendations that this Conference will produce. But over and above these detailed recommendations, I believe we can all subscribe to one central statement of the High Level Forum: what we need is a new partnership for mobility, involving Member States, regions, universities, businesses, students and other stakeholders.

The Chinese say: the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; and the second best time is today. I want to finish by quoting Erasmus Desiderius from Rotterdam. He said that there are three categories of people: ones who have dreams, others who face hard realities, and then those who are able to turn

dreams into reality. The name of Erasmus for our most popular programme invites us all to turn good ideas into reality.

I wish you all the best in this endeavour.

Thank you.