

THE GLASGOW CONVENTION: *STRONG UNIVERSITIES FOR EUROPE*

The Bologna Declaration, signed in June 1999 by the Ministers responsible for higher education from 29 European countries and presently subscribed by a total of 40 countries, launched a very dynamic process for the reform of the national higher education systems in Europe with the objective to develop a competitive, coherent and cohesive European Higher Education Area (EHEA) until 2010.

The Bologna Process gained momentum mainly due to the active involvement of higher education institutions, students, governments and other interested partners. The fact that the Ministers are meeting every two years to take stock on developments and push objectives and achievements forward also added to the process dynamics. The last Ministerial Summit took place in Berlin, on 19 September 2003, and the next will happen in Bergen, Norway, on 19-20 May 2005.

A few weeks before each ministerial meeting, the European universities have met on a special Convention, to take themselves stock on the results from the projects and conferences that were meanwhile organised and to produce a declaration to express their views on the achieved progresses and the issues that are arising and, in this way, influence the political decisions.

That was the case of the Salamanca Declaration (March 2001) and the Graz Declaration (May 2003), prior to the Prague and Berlin meetings.

In order to convey the voice of the universities to the ministers in Bergen, the European University Association (EUA) has just organised the *3rd Convention of European Higher Education Institutions* (Glasgow, 31 March – 2 April). Addressing the priorities defined in the Berlin Communiqué, which recognises the essential role of higher education institutions and students in realising the EHEA, and consequently the need for strong institutions, the theme for the EUA Glasgow Convention was *Strong Universities for Europe*. To guide and focus the discussions, five thematic papers were prepared and distributed

beforehand to the 620 delegates, building upon the expertise accumulated through the work developed along the process. They relate to the themes of: the core values for European universities in responding to evolving societal needs; enhancing the research mission of the universities; implementing sustainable Bologna reforms in higher education institutions; improving quality in European higher education; and funding of European higher education. These background documents, together with other relevant policy papers, were published in one single booklet – *The Glasgow Reader* – which is available in the Convention web site (www.EUAconvention.org) together with the keynote speeches, the presentations made at the Convention and the conclusions from the working groups. A formal Declaration will be issued in mid April, as the main input from the universities to the Bergen meeting.

Another very important document presented at the Convention is the *Trends IV* Report, concerning the developments in the reforms at each of the signatory countries and the trends that are emerging in the implementation of the Bologna objectives and priorities. Based on material drawn from a series of institutional site visits and from questionnaires run through the national Rectors' Conferences, it gives an objective view of the development of the EHEA and the constraints that are affecting it. A major conclusion is that many higher education institutions have adopted or are in the process of adopting the Bologna reforms, and that these reforms have revealed, and in some cases even strengthened, the institutions' capacity for change, and have also brought a considerable array of added values and multiple opportunities for enhancing the quality of higher education in Europe. The Trends Report is also available on the Convention website.

The President of the European Commission closed the Convention with a comprehensive speech, very supportive of the higher education institutions and their essential role for the cultural, economic and social development of Europe.