

Welcome address: "Importance of Internationalisation of European Higher Education"

Mr Truszczyński's participation in the conference "Promoting attractiveness of European Higher Education"

German Permanent Representation to the EU, Brussels, 07 June 2011

Speech

Remark: Only the spoken word counts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for this invitation to address such a distinguished audience on the very topical issue of the internationalisation of higher education.

Tackling the challenges arising from internationalisation is indeed high on the European Agenda, and I am sure that Germany has some valuable lessons we can all learn from.

The fact that education is becoming more international is a direct consequence of the globalising world in which we live. Increasingly, we are facing universal challenges, and education is no exception.

Even though education is clearly, and will remain, a national responsibility, these challenges, in particular the increasing competition from non-EU Higher Education Institutions, call for a European response.

We cannot remain idle: technological developments and the emergence of new economic powers in Latin America and Asia are clear reminders that we must provide our graduates with quality education that is relevant in a changing labour market. I will just remind you of a key figure: labour market forecasts indicate that, by 2020, 35% of all EU jobs will require high-level qualifications (*up from the current 29%*) .

Companies have long been competing for the best and the brightest. But now universities worldwide are also competing to attract the best students. This competition is growing – and again, it comes not only from developed economies, but also from emerging countries, including a number of Asian and Pacific countries -.

The world tertiary student population has grown by a third since 2000 and has reached over 150 million. Half of all students world-wide enrolled outside their country of citizenship are studying in the EU; this represents around 9% of Europe's 19 million higher education students.

The EU is therefore doing reasonably well in attracting foreign students, but it needs to do more to attract the very best.

In this situation, I believe higher education institutions do not have a choice between going international or staying local: they

need to develop an international strategy in order to attract the best national and international students, increase their teaching and research capacities and become more visible worldwide.

The stakes are high, and the rewards are clear. By going international, schools will be able to better prepare students for the global knowledge economy. And by adopting internationalisation strategies, they will have to address – or continue addressing - key dimensions of excellence such as recognition of qualifications, quality assurance, better governance, modern curricula, and the shift towards learning outcomes and skills.

At European level we are aware of these challenges and we are working on different fronts to support Member States and higher education institutions.

The "Europe 2020 Strategy" sets a number of goals that will help the EU's Member States face the increasing global competition. The strategy underlines that in order to provide students with the best skills, and to make the European Higher Education Area more attractive to the brightest minds from abroad, we need to modernise our higher education systems, increase attainment levels, and expand learning mobility.

In the autumn the Commission will present its proposals on the modernisation of higher education, in a new policy agenda that will respond to these core objectives. But be assured that the imperative of modernisation is also at the heart of our current reflection on the future higher education programme. We want to make it more coherent and understandable by its users, more focused and more visible worldwide.

We are building on some good results. Today, more than half a million EU students study abroad, three out of four in another EU country. This is thanks to the Erasmus Programme, but it also reflects the efforts of Member States which are increasingly aware of the importance of facilitating international mobility.

Germany, the UK and France together account for two-thirds of all foreign students in the EU. Germany is the third largest recipient, with about 260,000 a year or 17% of the total. And between 2000 and 2008, the number of "mobile" German students has almost doubled, from more than 50,000 to over 100,000. I commend what you have done in Germany. These are encouraging figures and an example for other countries to follow.

I also congratulate the Federal Government for the ambitious long-term target of having 50% of its Higher Education students enrolled in an international experience. This target substantially exceeds the Bologna Ministers target that by 2020, at least 20% of graduates in the European Higher Education should have an international experience.

But let me briefly turn my attention to the main actors of these processes: the universities themselves. Our universities have a long tradition of cooperation with countries outside the EU. The results show that cooperation of this kind not only benefits students. It has led academic staff to develop the competences needed to work in an open international environment, to adapt their curricula and to apply teaching methods incorporating a global dimension. This in turn has had a positive impact on the quality of the higher education on offer.

Universities have benefited from their participation in EU international cooperation programmes like Tempus, Erasmus Mundus or Marie Curie.

Erasmus Mundus has been instrumental in promoting European universities as an excellent study destination, in particular through the establishment of high-level integrated joint degrees.

The European Commission has also been active in creating the "Study in Europe" brand name, promoting EU higher education worldwide. We support the creation of alumni associations that act as ambassadors of EU higher education cooperation programmes and are important actors of the international marketing strategy, like DAAD (*the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst*), the British Council, or the Alliance Française.

I will also mention the Bologna Policy Forum, which facilitates policy dialogue between the European Higher Education Area and other parts of the world, and is one of the fora used to enhance the external visibility and leadership potential of European institutions, as well as processes like qualification frameworks or tuning for higher education structures.

And we regularly hold policy dialogues on education with key partners such as Brazil, Australia or India, with whom we met on the 25th and 26th of May here in Brussels for a very fruitful exchange.

Europe's successes are generating increasing interest among global partners, in particular through common tools such as the European Qualifications Framework, or common approaches to the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance.

All these instruments allow us to strengthen dialogue with partners worldwide, and make it more concrete and relevant to our objectives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Higher education is crucial to how we will develop as a society. The prosperity of the European Union depends largely on our capacity to provide our students with the skills that they will need to compete in a globalised world.

Given the excellent performance from Germany, I welcome HRK's Audit, which will be presented here, as an example of a positive strategic vision to respond to the challenges of globalisation.

Thank you for your attention.

Remark: Only the spoken word counts.