

The Association of European Universities ( CRE ) has identified the need to create a body that wherever possible will safeguard the application of the fundamental principles of the Magna Carta, with Universities conceived as autonomous and independent entities, whose strength derives entirely from reason and culture.

This proposal has undergone considerable development since it was first put forward at the European Conference of Vice Chancellors and Rectors in Berlin in August 1998 (nineteen ninety-eight).

The Magna Carta or Declaration of Academic Rights for Universities was signed on 18 September 1988 in Bologna, during the celebrations for the Ninth Centenary of the University.

Work on drawing up the Magna Carta began in Bologna 1987 and was concluded in Barcelona in January 1988.

With regard to the work of that Committee, I should like to mention in particular Prof Carmine Romanzi, who was at that time President of the Conference of Vice Chancellors and Rectors of European Universities, as well as a gifted colleague who is no longer with us, Prof Giuseppe Caputo.

The founding principles, laid down in 1988, that we have a moral duty to defend are as follows.

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#### PREAMBLE

- 1) At the approaching end of this millennium the future of mankind depends largely on cultural, scientific and technical development, and this is built up in centres of culture, knowledge and research as represented by true universities;

- 2) the universities' task of disseminating knowledge among the younger generations implies that in today's world they must also serve society as a whole, and that the cultural, social and economic future of society requires, in particular, a considerable investment in continuing education;
- 3) universities must give future generations education and training that will teach them, and through them others, to respect the great harmonies of the natural environment and of life itself.

### **FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES**

- 1) The University is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organised because of their geography and history; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching.

To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power.

- 2) Teaching and research in universities must be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind changing needs, the demands of society and advances in scientific knowledge.
- 3) Freedom in research and training is the fundamental principle of university life, and governments and universities must ensure respect for this fundamental requirement.

Rejecting intolerance and always open to dialogue, a university is an ideal meeting place for teachers capable of imparting their knowledge and well equipped to develop it by research and innovation and students entitled, able and willing to enrich their minds with that knowledge.

- 4) Each University is the trustee of the European humanistic tradition: its constant care is to attain universal knowledge; to fulfil its vocation it transcends geographical and political

frontiers, and affirms the vital need for different cultures to know and influence each other.

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It seemed to us that the most appropriate idea was to set up an 'Osservatorio' or Intelligence Unit whose main task would be to gather and disseminate information about University conditions and legislative developments relating to Higher Education.

On the one hand, we are aware of the objective limits that Universities have in assuring compliance with these founding principles, as we clearly have no coercive mechanisms to fall back on.

On the other hand we are also aware that before denouncing cases in which academic freedoms have been violated, there is a need to be informed and to disseminate up-to-date knowledge and information in order to create the consensus that is required to obtain support for Higher Education at a European and international level.

The contact or rather the immersion of Universities in society that the Magna Charta or Declaration of Academic Rights identifies as the essential task of Higher Education today means that, while maintaining our traditions, autonomy and fundamental principles, we need to be able to adapt, at the same time identifying the processes that are taking place in society as a whole.

European society is now witnessing the development of alternative forms of higher education, with a shift away from the idea of the University as an elite community, an evolution that is probably inevitable due to the enormous increase in the number of young people studying for a university qualification.

The extraordinary development of Information Technology and the means for the dissemination of knowledge presents us with new problems, such as the elimination of the direct relation between academics and students that has long been at the basis of our European university system.

All this has major consequences in terms of respect for University traditions and the fundamental principles of academic life, that need to be reconciled with dynamic change and common rules defining the social role of Universities.

In this connection the legislation of the European countries is rapidly developing, in a common context because we share a number of problems.

The 'Osservatorio' or Intelligence Unit would have the task of studying the development of Higher Education in Europe, and the relationship between Universities, society and the economy, as well as outlining the future development of Universities, in order to lay down norms regarding the relation between developments in Europe, the European legislative framework and the principles of the Magna Charta or Declaration of Academic Rights.

All this requires systematic and comparative study, carried out in an objective and independent manner, so that the indications provided by the 'Osservatorio' or Intelligence Unit will be characterised by clarity, impartiality and depth of understanding. In this way the Intelligence Unit itself will achieve visibility, credibility and the ability to influence events, as a body characterised by an intellectual framework, based on European legislative and institutional provision.

This brings me to the second task of the Intelligence Unit: that of providing the Universities at both a European and an international level with information about any developments within States or communities that risk undermining the creative and cultural role of Higher Education.

By this I mean any act aimed at reducing academic freedoms, both relating to the Universities as such in relation to every form of power, and to individual faculty members within the system and within the society in which they work, and student freedoms, as students are the ultimate aim and the primary justification for the existence of university teaching and must be educated as individual who will take their place in society even before being educated as experts, professionals and scientists.

Clearly there is no chance of introducing immediate and effective sanctions, but at the same time the existence of an independent body, set up by institutions of Higher Education, can be a means of moral censure and a powerful instrument for protecting institutions and individual academics and students.

This noble cause requires a degree of financial autonomy to support the intellectual endeavour of those who are appointed to be part of this body, with the task of preserving the life and development of an institution that has a fundamental role to play in the progress of the peoples of the world.

We undertake to provide this financial autonomy.

Let me conclude by underlining that the Magna Charta Universitatum is a document that is a precursor to the historical Declaration that will shortly be signed by the Ministers of 30 European nations that will then be read by the Minister, Senator Ortensio Zecchino, to whom I should like to extend my particular thanks for granting this privilege to the University of Bologna.

The Magna Charta is a document underlining the autonomy of individual Universities and of the community of European Universities. It is therefore a key document and almost a historical and moral legitimation for the open "European space of higher education", a product of European history and of the history of European Universities who, by redefining their autonomy and independence, remain key players in the development of our continent's culture for now and for the future.