

PRESS RELEASE: 29 March 2004

EUA conference in Marseilles (2-3 April 2004)

Universities & Society: Engaging Stakeholders

For the first EUA conference in France, we will focus on a subject rarely discussed despite its key importance for European universities in the areas of training and research: the social contribution of universities through the development of partnerships with local businesses and authorities.

250 delegates from 45 countries will debate on the means and strategies implemented by European universities to answer societal needs through closer collaboration with companies and governments, especially those operating at regional level.

Universities today face increased market pressure, globalisation and the need to contribute to economic and social development and innovation, as well as declining or stagnating public funding support. In addition, they must also address the diversity of societal needs, promoting social cohesion and access to all, as well as ensuring the 'employability' of their graduating students. These somewhat conflicting issues will be the focus of the two day conference.

Contributors from across Europe

Hosted by the *Université de la Méditerranée* (Aix-Marseille II), the conference will be chaired by Eric Froment, president of EUA.

Various university rectors and directors of research centres will present answers from their institutions to the current challenges faced by universities across Europe (with examples from Scotland, Poland, Germany, France, Portugal, as well as Serbia and Montenegro). Case studies will focus on regional cooperation, governance and the often misinterpreted concept of 'employability'.

Partners' reactions

Political and economic stakeholders will present their contributions:

- Alain Mérieux, président of BioMérieux SA, France, presenting an industrialist's point of view.
- Jean-Jacques Mertens, Associate Director, European Investment Bank, Luxembourg
- Jean-Marc Monteil, Director, Higher Education Division, French Ministry of Youth, Education and Research
- Maria Rimini-Döring, Corporate Research, Information and System Technologies, Robert Bosch GmbH, Germany
- Johan Almqvist, President, ESIB (The National Unions of Students in Europe)

Which strategy for universities?

Working groups will look in depth at links and potential partnerships on the basis of three themes: *Gaining external and internal support*, *Responding to specific local needs* and *Creating a vibrant regional community*. Within these themes, the implications of change and adaptation to universities' management and governance structures will be explored.

Our goal is to identify and emphasise obstacles and success factors in order to allow the participants to develop their own strategy options for the future.

Press conference

The press conference will take place on **2 April at 11.00** with Eric Froment, president of EUA, Michel Laurent, president of the *Université de la Méditerranée*, Johan Almqvist, president of ESIB, representatives from the Minister for Higher Education and Research, members of the scientific and business community and local authorities.

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Bâtiment « Marseille Provence Métropole »
Room 103
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Towards Glasgow 2005: strong universities for Europe

The next meeting of European ministers for Education of the 40 countries participating in the Bologna process will take place in Bergen in May 2005.

Beforehand, EUA will hold the Convention of Higher Education Institutions in March 2005 in Glasgow with the objective to define the position of universities on the implementation of reforms to the European higher education system and the development of a European research area. The message will then be transmitted to the ministers, EUA being the representative of universities in the Bologna process.

To prepare for this convention, EUA is organising a series of three conferences in 2004. The Marseilles conference launches the cycle of meetings focusing on the social relevance of higher education and research for the development of a European knowledge society. The outcome of the discussions in Marseilles will be used as the foundation for the next two EUA conferences which will examine academic values (Turin, June 2004) and the role of universities in the training of researchers in Europe (Maastricht, October 2004).

For more information about EUA and the conference, please contact Christel Vacelet, Information and Communications Manager

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The **three universities of Aix-Marseille** bring together a total of 75 000 students, 3 000 lecturers-researchers, 3 700 PhD students and 2 000 administrative and technical support staff. The abundant choice of disciplines, offered together with a strong research capacity (more than 250 laboratories), are the key assets of these universities which benefit from a rich Mediterranean heritage as well as a well-established European focus.

Numerous partnerships have been built between national research institutions (the CNRS - National Centre for Scientific Research, the Atomic Energy Commissariat, the National Centre for Space Studies, etc.), as well as local authorities (Cities of Marseilles and Aix en Provence, their urban communities, the regional and local councils) and local industrial partners, a partnership which the universities would like to develop by setting up technology platforms, business incubators and development units.

mediterranee.univ-aix.fr

EUA promotes the creation of a Europe of knowledge through policy work and projects on higher education and research. EUA upholds the importance of quality, diversity, solidarity and cohesion.

EUA aims to strengthen institutional governance and leadership, and to promote partnerships in higher education and research both within Europe, and between Europe and the rest of the world.

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