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4TH EUA Convention:

European Universities and Commission President Barroso outline their vision for higher education post 2010

*In his speech this weekend to the European University Association's (EUA) fourth Convention of European Higher Education Institutions in Lisbon, European Commission President **José Manuel Barroso** underlined the increasing importance attached by the Commission to universities in meeting Europe's goals. He pledged his support to the ongoing higher education reform process and promised to put knowledge and innovation policies at the top of the European agenda in the months to come. President Barroso also endorsed the priorities for the future set out by the EUA Vice President, **Sir Roderick Floud** in his final report to the Conference, underlining in particular the importance of strengthening the autonomy of universities, of diversifying funding and integrating lifelong learning. These are themes that will be incorporated into the EUA's **Lisbon Declaration**, to be presented to the ministers of the 46 countries of the Bologna process in London in May 2007.*

The Convention, hosted by the Portuguese Rectors' Conference (CRUP), and five individual EUA members in Lisbon (the University of Lisbon, the Technical University of Lisbon, the Portuguese Catholic University, the New University of Lisbon and The Open University) was timed to take place just before the next Bologna ministerial meeting (London, May 2007). The theme of the conference was "The future of higher education beyond 2010", and the opening session brought together speakers from different parts of the world to compare their views on future developments in higher education: European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, Ján Figel; President of the American Council on Education, David Ward; and the Chinese Deputy Minister of Education Zhang Xinsheng.

The meeting also included presentations from leading experts such as Fotis Kafatos, President of the European Research Council, and an overview of the main findings of Trends V, EUA's in-depth report on the state of higher education in Europe, which is due to be published later in April.

Two years ago, at the last EUA convention in Glasgow, President Barroso called for increased dialogue with Europe's universities and stressed that the future of Europe's universities was "unquestionably one of Europe's top priorities". At his return to the meeting on Saturday, he again underlined the key role universities will play in helping the EU face global competition. He also outlined the need for greater flexibility in the European higher education system, and said that

The European University Association, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

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diversity should be encouraged to enable universities to focus on their strengths. He also underlined that geographical mobility was a vital element for creating a European knowledge society.

In his closing report to the meeting and to Mr Barroso, Sir Roderick Floud, Vice President of the EUA, picked out five themes from a wealth of recommendations which resulted from the convention: **internationalisation, research, quality, funding, and change**. These issues will all be integrated into the EUA's Lisbon Declaration. This declaration will look towards Europe's universities after 2010 and will emphasise the sub-title of the convention: Diversity with a common purpose.

Increasing interest from outside Europe

Professor Floud explained that the first years of the Bologna process had been necessarily inward-looking. But now the creation of the European Higher Education Area was being watched with increasing interest throughout the world. The presence at the convention of the Chinese Deputy Minister for Education – responsible for 23 million students - and of the President of the American Council of Education testifies to this. Europe is increasingly a magnet for foreign students and scholars. Professor Floud stressed the need to make Europe the destination of choice for the most excellent researchers.

Re-launch of the European Research Area

Because of the crucial importance of research to Europe's future and position in the world, the EUA looks forward to the imminent re-launch of the European Research Area. "We trust that the universities will be named as integral partners within the ERA and that we will play as central a role in the development of the institutions of the ERA – fostering both basic research and technology transfer - as we have done in the development of the

European Research Council and Framework Programme 7." Professor Floud explained

Assessment must not constrain creativity

The meeting participants also stressed the importance of Quality in teaching and research. Professor Floud said Quality assessment must also recognise diversity and encourage, rather than constrain, innovation and creativity in teaching and learning. "The new European Register of quality assurance agencies, which EUA expect ministers to approve in May has been developed by an innovative partnership between stakeholders; it is an important building block in this area and an essential component of the global attractiveness of European higher education."

Funding and innovation

Universities need space to manage and develop. They need to be able to determine their diverse places within a common purpose. "Micro-management or over-regulation, are the enemies of innovation and efficiency," he added.

Universities embracing change

The Bologna process has shown that universities can embrace change. The EUA looks forward, after 2010, to continuing the Bologna process and to focussing on areas which still need change, in particular lifelong learning and widening participation. Universities face the challenge now to use the tools of the Bologna process to respond to the needs of the European knowledge society. This means widening participation to many in society who have for too long been excluded.

Many of the keynote presentations will be available on the following website:

<http://www.euaconvention.org>