

Good morning, Dear Commissioner, Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you here today and I greet most cordially all of you. I would like to extend a special welcome to our colleagues from Australia, Brazil, Canada, P.R. China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Tunisia, and the United States of America.

Members as well as non-members of the Bologna process, we all met here before, at the first Bologna Policy Forum - a platform where we could meet and where issues of common interest could be discussed. Personally, I consider it extremely important for the Bologna Process to be open to the cooperation with all the interested parties. And I am very happy that the relevance and significance of the Bologna Process is widely recognised by so many countries all over the world.

Nowadays, living in a global world, where modern communication and transport technologies bring the continents closer together, we all look for solutions of similar problems. An event occurring in the territory of one country is sooner or later going to influence other areas as well. Current financial crises could serve as an eloquent, although uncalled-for example.

In order to overcome global problems we must look for global solutions. Higher education together with research and innovation should be one of the areas of our intent focus. Besides the importance of technology and innovation, I would particularly stress the intercultural cooperation of institutions worldwide, continuous dialogue and promotion of understanding among people and cultures. In my view, such an understanding is of utmost importance in the

present global world where xenophobia, racism and other forms of discrimination still remain in existence.

We are on the way to finalise the Declaration of the European Higher Education Area next year. In this context, we must not forget that EHEA should not be viewed as a closed world. On the contrary, it must be open to different approaches and ideas. Exchange of views and experience, sharing common interests, all this helps to shape the internationalisation of higher education, which is one of the Bologna Process priorities.

Cooperation at an institutional level already exists; this cooperation is realised through two- way mobility of students and teachers, joint study programmes, which need to go together with recognition and quality assurance. There are bilateral institutional agreements; there are bilateral governmental and cultural agreements. But we are in great need of a cooperation basis at higher transnational level. And Bologna Policy Forum could and should become such a basis - a platform for meeting, sharing ideas and listening to our colleagues and partners.

This Forum is a unique opportunity for all of us to start the platform for our common dialogue. We cannot promise here, today, that the Bologna Process will be extended beyond the scope of the European Cultural Convention. However, today, we have the opportunity and occasion to listen to the ideas of our colleagues outside the Bologna Process. And together we will try to find the most suitable future shape of this platform. This is a pilot project which must be further elaborated.

Dear friends and colleagues, I wish you effective and interesting discussions. I do hope that Bologna Policy Forum will become an integral part of the next Bologna Process conferences.