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Viviane Reding, Member of the European Commission responsible for Education and Culture

« The challenges of shaping Education and Cultural policies for the Enlarged Europe »

Forum "Culture, Cultural rights and Education in an Enlarged Europe"

Ladies and gentlemen,

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I am grateful for this opportunity provided to me to share with you some thoughts concerning the future of Europe in education and culture in view of the enlargement of the Union.

The European Council in Copenhagen took place just a few weeks ago and we all know that it marked a major step, if not the first one, towards the future of the Union and the reunification of the European continent.

Indeed, with the planned integration of 10 new members in 2004, the European Union is entering a genuinely new historical stage.

There is no doubt that this event will give it a new face by deeply modifying not only its geography, but also its policies and institutions.

The enlargement will unite 500 million Europeans. This is more than just an event of 2002: it is the result of 50 years of joint efforts of building Europe, a half century of peace and prosperity which made it possible to build up a Union of countries and citizens with democracy, freedom and the respect for human rights as its foundations.

This Union of 25+ will bring together a great wealth of languages, identities and cultures. It will also show greater social and economic disparities than is currently the case. It might even bring a change of paradigm: the human factor is going to be more important than the purely economic thinking. If you add to this globalisation, environmental issues and the cohesion and solidarity of peoples and regions, the new dimension of Europe becomes evident.

Our challenge is to build a Europe reaching beyond the sphere of economy to promote sustainable development as a means to meet citizens' expectations concerning quality of life and cultural and social diversity.

In all these aspects, Education, Training and Culture have a decisive role to play because a powerful knowledge-based economy cannot develop without a high level of education, as social cohesion cannot exist without tolerance and respect for the culture of others.

Maybe the most widely shared and deepest imperative for European Education and Training systems in the "new age" is to acknowledge their new, "European" responsibility to those who study, teach and research.

In spite of diversity and nationally-based institutions, curricula and degrees, students and others learners in Europe need to be certain that the qualifications they acquire in one part of Europe open them fair possibilities for further study and for work elsewhere, first and foremost within the European Union.

I am convinced that students and learners are increasingly aware of this and will therefore favour universities, curricula and degrees offering the highest acceptability beyond the country where they awarded.

Could we really expect European degrees to be recognised at their real level all over the world as long as they are not easily recognised within Europe itself? This is a major issue in terms of quality, competitiveness and attractiveness of our systems and in my view a key determinant for the future of an enlarged Europe.

After this summary reference to the fundamental challenges ahead of us, I will now briefly review action and challenges in the areas of education, training and culture.