

Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission

Feb 03

European University Institute

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Or rather friends. When I speak to the European University Institute (EUI) and its alumni, I feel quite at home.

Contacts between myself and the Institute have been frequent since I assumed office as President of the Commission; this is quite natural of course between a former professor and a university set up "to develop Europe's cultural and academic heritage in its unity and diversity".

You yourselves must be aware of how much you and the Institute have contributed to the intellectual life of Europe. When the Institute celebrated its 25th birthday last year, it already ranked as one of the world's largest and most successful postgraduate institutions in the disciplines of economics, history, law and social and political sciences.

Graduates of the Institute are now prominent in all walks of life, including the European institutions. There are at least 30 of you in my own Commission, I understand.

Your ties with the European institutions have always been close for obvious reasons. But it was your excellence that made your Institute the natural candidate for drawing up a detailed report on the reorganisation of the Treaties.

Nothing symbolised better the esteem in which we hold the Institute than the transfer of the Commission's regular meeting from Brussels to your campus in Florence in November 2001. The stimulating debate we had with students and staff - who know our dossiers as well as we do! - made it a very valuable and interesting trip.

Your Institute has also set up a working party to follow the work of the Convention on the future of Europe. Institutional reform is one of the biggest challenges facing the Union this year. It is not surprising to find that once again the Institute is in the thick of this debate.

This is why the Commission is anxious to strengthen relations between the European institutions and the Institute. It will continue to promote its development so that it remains a centre of excellence. Concretely, this means that our funding for the Institute will rise this year.

I know that your new President, Yves Mény, will keep the European University "in the vanguard of excellence". I wish you the best possible luck for the future.

At this point let me say how pleased I was to hear that Professor Mény is likely to be heading the Scientific Council of the consortium that will be producing the first volume of a history of the Commission. I know that he and the institute will bring all their accustomed scholarship and rigour to recording the role of the Commission in the pioneering years of European construction.

You all know as well as I do the scale of the challenges facing us over the next months. Europe is embarking on its biggest adventure ever when it prepares to welcome 10 new members and when it reshapes its institutions and its decision-making procedures. The goal is to make the Union fit for an increased membership and at the same time improve its efficiency, its transparency and its democratic legitimacy.

So far the Union has brought tremendous benefits to the European Union and to the whole of the European continent. Over the last decades, prosperity has never ceased to rise and Europe has seen its longest uninterrupted span of peace and stability. The introduction of a common currency, the

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