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ADDRESS BY MR RICHARD BURKE, MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION
OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, TO THE CONFERENCE OF
UNIVERSITY INFORMATION OFFICERS, TRINITY COLLEGE,
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"Universities and the European Community"

Address by Commissioner Richard Burke to Conference
of University Information Officers, Trinity College, Dublin

Universities have a long tradition of scholarship which transcends national boundaries, attracting scholars, students and ideas from all parts of the world. In addition to their local and national responsibilities, they are by definition international institutions. Many networks of contacts already exist within the European Community between scholars in most disciplines and areas of study. This represents a powerful asset to the process of constructing the European Community.

On the occasion of your Conference, I am pleased to have this opportunity to underline the important part which universities and other higher education institutions can and should increasingly play in the development of the European Community. This objective is a key element in the first action programme for educational cooperation which the Ministers of Education of the Nine adopted in February 1976, and about which I propose to talk to you today.

Cooperation in the field of higher education within the framework of the European Community is a relatively recent phenomenon, and there are special reasons why this is the case. The Treaty of Rome, which provides the legal foundations of the EEC and sets out the definition of its powers and tasks, contained no mention of the word education as such. The founding fathers had restricted the original European mandate to the field of vocational training and the retraining of workers, at that time considered distinct from mainstream education. The Treaty also provided for the mutual recognition of qualifications and certificates to enable professional persons who wished to do so to practice in other Member States.

The field of education was considered by many to be an exclusively national preserve, and there were (and still are) naturally many hesitations about introducing educational policies into the Community framework.

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The necessary political commitment to build cooperation in the education field generally within the European Community had its beginnings in the early 1970's. In the years immediately leading up to the first enlargement of the Community, in 1973, there was a marked shift in national thinking about the future orientations of the Community. The Summit Conference of Heads of State held in Paris in 1972 marks this collective shift of emphasis, and is the key to understanding the subsequent pattern of development. At the Paris Conference it was agreed to emphasise the human concerns of the Community, and to this end to establish the first social action programme, a policy and fund for regional development, a new thrust in favour of cooperation with the third world, and a first environmental programme. The Paris Communiqué stated that "Economic expansion, which is not an end in itself, must as a priority help to attenuate the disparities in living conditions. It must emerge in an improved quality as well as improved standard of life. Special attention will be paid to non-material values".

It took several years of difficult negotiation before the ground rules for collaboration could be established and a first education programme set in motion on a Community-wide basis. The terms and priority tasks are set out in the Resolution adopted on 9 February 1976 by the Council and Ministers of Education.

The main concern of Ministers was to ensure respect for the rich variety and diversity of educational activities which make up the educational policies and practices of the Member States. This approach was perhaps most forcibly advocated in particular by Denmark and the United Kingdom, because of the strong tradition of local and decentralised powers which operate and the limited legal powers available to national governments for intervention in the education field. I emphasise this aspect at the outset because there was in the 1960's and early 1970's a widely held fear that the existence of a Community dimension in education would inevitably carry with it harmonising, standardising and centralising forces and methods of operation. This notion was, I hope, dealt a death-blow by the Ministers and the Commission in 1976.

This political sensitivity led the Ministers of Education to invent a formula to give effect to collaboration which is unique within the machinery of the Community, for it combines the classical institutional machinery and procedures of the Council of the European Community with

a voluntary commitment of the Education Ministers of the Nine to work together on a continuing basis outside the legal framework of the Council. Unfortunately, this formula is still giving rise to both political and legal difficulties, most particularly on the part of our Danish partners.

This means in practical terms that there has been in existence for 4 years now an Education Committee consisting of representatives of the nine governments and of the European Commission. The constitution of each delegation reflects the peculiar decision-making structure of each country - one each from the two separate Belgian Ministries of Education, for West Germany representatives of the 11 Länder, as well as of the Federal Republic, and a delegation from the United Kingdom which normally includes officials from the regions as well as from the headquarters of Department of Education and Science in London. In the case of Ireland, the delegation consists of representatives from the Department of Education.

This Education Committee is responsible for the management of the education action programme. The special tasks of the Commission are to prepare proposals for joint action for consideration, to make sure that cooperative actions between the Nine are implemented effectively and to administer the Community education budget.

So much for questions of structure, what are our main activities? You will see from the Education Action Programme set in motion in 1976 that it encompasses a limited number of priority initiatives, including the education of migrant workers and their families and the preparation of young people, especially unqualified school-leavers, for transition from school to working life. I shall not have time to comment on these other important aspects today but shall focus specifically on the section of the Resolution concerning higher education.

The main thrust of our efforts in the field of higher education is to increase the mobility and exchange of students between the Community countries. The latest figures we have indicate that no more than one Community student in every 200 (or 0.5% of all students in the Community) spends part of his or her course in another Community country. Just as in medieval times, we need to enable the contemporary student to move easily and collect credits in a programme of studies involving more than one institution. We are tackling this in a number of practical ways.

workers' children, the teaching of foreign languages, the preparation of young people for working life, and policies for the access and admission of students to institutions of higher education.

Each country has set up a focal point of reference for access to information and documentation about its own structures, latest legislation and statistics, and main policy initiatives. These national units will now be networked so that they can speedily exchange information on questions of bilateral or common concern. In Ireland the national unit forms part of the Department of Education, whereas in the United Kingdom the coordinating task has been assigned to the National Foundation of Educational Research.

In addition to this information system, we are concerned to provide educationists with direct opportunities to study the experience of their counterparts in other member countries. This is the key if we are to multiply awareness of the various educational systems and gradually permeate the grass-root level practitioners with the best of European thinking and practice. So we are investing in people.

By 1981, the Community's new schemes of intensive study visits for education specialists will have involved about 1,000 grant holders. The three schemes currently in operation involve:

- senior officials from local and regional levels in secondary education (i.e. 11-18 age group);
- those with special responsibility for the period of transition from school to work, e.g. vocational guidance specialists;
- higher education personnel with key organisational responsibilities in the running of higher education institutions.

The scale of this effort will, I believe, yield great dividends. It represents a significant contribution to extending personal contacts within the Community, and is the indispensable basis for building collaborative efforts and projects for the future. This is one of the main building blocks in our attempt to build a European atmosphere for educational development.

We have also examined carefully ways of increasing contacts between representatives of higher education institutions. The universities of the Member States are closely linked at national level through the national conferences of rectors and vice-chancellors of universities, and at European level they have for some years been linked through the Liaison Committee of Rectors' Conferences which brings together all the national conferences in the EEC Member States. In the case of the growing number of other higher education institutions, such as Polytechnics which are not represented in this way, the position is much

One great difficulty in the past has been the lack of the most elementary information to students on the opportunities and conditions for the mobility of foreign students within the Community. To fill this gap, the Commission has produced a Handbook of Guidance to students in the Community. As a result, students have easy access to information on where they could study in another country, the conditions of admission and procedures of application. This Handbook is now available in its second edition and does provide a valuable vade-mecum to higher education in the Community. We have arranged with the Council of Europe to bring out next year a companion volume on the other twelve European countries which are not members of the Community.

The appearance of the Student Handbook has also stimulated the question of the production of a similar volume designed to assist members of academic staff interested in periods of teaching or research abroad, and we are currently looking into the feasibility of such a publication. We have supported too the production of a report on opportunities for further training by university administrative staff - prepared for the Commission by the Registrar of the University of Sussex and the Kanzler of the University of Saarbrücken.

Apart from these particular initiatives, there is a general need to provide a system of ready access to up-to-date information about existing practices, policies and plans in other Member States. It is striking how little we know of each other's education systems within the Nine - similarities, differences, legislative initiatives, policy alternatives or trends. A deliberate effort is needed to improve this situation since the historic connections of countries individually have not always been with those who are now their partners within the Community. In Ireland and in the United Kingdom for instance our natural points of reference for contrast and comparison have in the past been with the English-speaking world.

Next week, we shall be officially launching an information network on education based on information services established in each Member State, linked by a central unit in Brussels. This will be called EURYDICE, hopefully an indication of a forward-looking service. In the first instance, this new service will be concerned to meet the needs of policy-makers in each country, and will concentrate on the following four subjects of special Community interest: developments in the education of migrant

more fragmented, and generally unsatisfactory. The Commission has arranged a series of preparatory discussions which I hope will lead eventually to the creation of some kind of framework or forum which would represent the whole spectrum of higher education in the Member States, and act as a two-way channel of communication between the organisations and the institutions they represent, and the Community institutions.

One of the main concerns of the Ministers of Education when considering the scope for cooperation was the possibility of developing a common approach to the question of the admission to institutions of higher education of students from other Community countries. Some countries impose numerical limitations on their student intake including those from other countries; some charge fees; some differentiate between the fees for home and those for foreign students; some are organised to offer assistance in improving linguistic competence; some apply admission criteria for students from abroad which contain non-academic conditions not required of home students. In an attempt to iron out these problems, and after a lengthy period of consultation with all concerned including representatives of the higher education institutions, a set of guiding principles was agreed by the Ministers of Education on 29 June this year.

Earlier this year, the United Kingdom authorities decided to exempt EEC students from the general arrangement whereby differential fees are charged to overseas students. This demonstration of European commitment was warmly welcomed by all the other European countries and by the European Commission and was an important contribution to the collective agreement of the Ministers to the principle that where tuition fees are payable in a Member State, those for students from other Community countries will not be higher than those applicable to home students. I hope this will lead to an increase in the intra-European flow of students. In approaching the question of student mobility, we have distinguished two types of student involved for they raise different problems. Firstly, there is the student who wishes to spend the whole period of the degree course abroad. Secondly, there is the part-course student - the one who wishes to spend a term or a year abroad as an integral part of his or her degree programme. The Commission's first priority proposals have centred on opening up the opportunities for the part-course category student for we believe this will be quantitatively much more significant in the years ahead.

The idea of promoting part-course mobility has two other aspects to which I attach importance in the Community's strategy in this field. Firstly, it will contribute in practice to the grass-root demolition of barriers in recognising periods of study spent abroad. The more higher education institutions gain direct experience of dealing with such problems, the more likely they are to solve them at a local level. Even if we eventually define a Community-wide agreement or convention for the mutual recognition of academic qualifications, we have to recognise the autonomy many higher education institutions in Europe enjoy in determining their admission policies and criteria.

The question of the equivalence and the academic recognition of diplomas throughout the Community is one that is under active consideration not only by the Community institutions, but also within the framework of the Council of Europe and UNESCO. The Commission has published a report by the Dean of Admissions at Goldsmith's College, London, on the present state and prospects for the academic recognition of diplomas in the European Community. This report surveys existing arrangements, evaluates their significance for student mobility, and suggests certain guidelines for a Community policy in this field.

So far nevertheless the main effort of the Community has been on resolving the problems of professional qualifications, though in some cases these also involve elements of academic credit. As long ago as 1974 the Council agreed on the importance of a flexible and qualitative approach to this problem, which sought to avoid as far as possible the prescription of detailed training requirements. On this basis Directives have already been adopted which make it possible for doctors, dentists, veterinary surgeons and nurses to exercise the "right of establishment" in another Member State. Others I hope will follow. These instruments lay down certain minimum conditions to be satisfied (normally in relation to entry conditions, length of courses, practical experience, etc.) in order that a particular professional qualification may be eligible for recognition throughout the Community. In parallel, it has been the practice to establish a tripartite advisory body, representative of the practising profession, the teaching institutions and the licensing authorities, with the task of keeping under review developments in professional training and advising the Commission

as appropriate from time to time on any need for amendment to the Directives.

The Commission grants for joint study programmes I mentioned earlier do not, at present, cover projects of research. There is, however, within the research budget of the Commission, provision for bursaries to be awarded to individuals for a period of research in any one of the scientific areas which is the subject of a Community research programme. These programmes, until 1973 confined essentially to nuclear research, now extend widely into areas including non-nuclear energy, the environment, raw materials and many others. The Community carries out research (direct action) at its own Joint Research Centre (which has four component establishments in Belgium, Germany, Holland and Italy) and also sponsors research (indirect action) at national research establishments and universities. The scheme of bursaries is a flexible one. It is open to scientists and engineers at all levels (including post-graduate students, academic staff, and scientists in industry) and the awards cover a period of time varying, according to circumstances, from a few weeks to a year and more, during which the recipient may work either in a Community research establishment or in a national institution engaged on a research programme sponsored by the Community.

The development of the Community, and the impact of its policies, has also affected the content of university guidance and is increasingly giving rise to the introduction of new teaching and research programmes in higher education institutions, most especially in the fields of law, agriculture, political science and international relations, economics and management studies. The Commission has always been concerned to play its part in encouraging these European studies, by facilitating the access of teachers and researchers to the major sources of information about the Community's activities.

To date 380 centres of European documentation have been set up within universities and other higher education institutions; these are depositories of all official Community publications and legislation. The Commission also helps disseminate information about doctoral and post-doctoral research in progress through the periodical publication of a Register of university theses and studies. We also publish a regular Newsletter entitled "European University News". to higher education teachers and researchers, providing information about courses,

conferences, bibliographies and current activities of interest. Individual and group visits to the Community institutions are also available to staff specializing in European questions, and further support is provided through the availability annually of a limited number of research grants as well as subventions to publish doctoral theses.

This focus on European Community Studies was given a further impetus in November 1976, when the European University Institute at Florence was officially inaugurated. The Institute, which is financed by contributions from the nine Member States, offers a postgraduate programme in history and civilization, economics, laws, political and social sciences.

As Irish Minister for Education I was privileged to be involved in the initial stages of the Community's educational policy. At that time I was convinced that a European Community dimension to national educational policy was not only desirable but in fact essential.

My reasons had less to do with the administrative conundra of mutual recognition of degrees and diplomas than with the curriculum itself, the substance of educational policy. It seemed absurd, not to say unworthy, to be involved as a Government in the process of European integration without at the same time ensuring that our children had an opportunity to learn about the fundamental reason for our joining the Community, which is that our people, adults and children, are all of them Europeans.

In our Community of 260 million inhabitants, there are 60 million Europeans under the age of 15. It is my hope that this rising generation will have a much greater awareness of their European identity than my generation had as children. I can think of no better way of ensuring that the great enterprise of European integration will succeed.

I believe that the traumas of the European past were to a significant degree caused by the failure of the educational systems of the peoples of Europe to convey a sense of common European heritage and common destiny. I am not arguing for a homogeneous or a monolithic European historical culture. Quite the contrary. A true sense of our European past involves a sense of vast diversity as opposed to either a bland sameness or a narrow partiality. It means that students learn that there was and is more than one perspective on the Battle of Waterloo; they learn that in the real past there was more than one simplistic view of the Battle of the Boyne.

This brings me to my concluding point, a strong personal conviction.

This is an Anglo-Irish audience with representatives from all parts of Great Britain and Ireland, North and South. I think we would all agree there is hardly a priority of greater urgency in the relations between the British and the Irish people on the one hand, and between the people of various Irish traditions on the other, than that we should understand more about each others views of ourselves. I tried to say as forcefully as I could when I was Minister for Education, that a very serious obstacle in our path is our failure to understand that there is any view of the past history of these islands and their inter-relations other than the mutually exclusive versions of each of the peoples involved. Our "tribal righteousness", if I may so describe it, must be overcome.

I am more than ever convinced that Europe - a real sense of the diversity and mutually enriching traditions, cultures and histories of the peoples of Europe - can help provide a solution. We all know that people kill each other regularly and brutally in one part of this island because of a particular narrow view of history. Thus "history" kills almost every day or rather I should say, ignorant narrow xenophobia dressed up as "history" kills almost every day. The same can be said of "culture". Real history, grounded in the European reality of the past, and a real European sense of our culture, can save lives.

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Europe has both a responsibility and an opportunity here. The dark record of suffering of the people of Northern Ireland is a stark challenge to our Community and specifically to our Universities, from which come the teachers and leaders whose influence on how we see ourselves and each other is so decisive.
