Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 945 (1990)[1]

Financing higher education and research

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly :

1. Notes the conclusions of the Colloquy on the missions and means of the university : issues and prospects for the financing of the European university system (Barcelona, 4-6 September 1989), organised jointly by its Committee on Culture and Education, the Standing Conference on University Problems (CC-PU), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the University of Barcelona ;

2. Regards higher education and research in the spirit of the basic principles of the Magna Charta of European Universities, which defines the university as ‘‘an autonomous institution which produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching" ;

3. Notes that the problems of financing universities and other institutions of higher education concern all member states, despite the considerable diversity in the situation and structure of higher education in Europe on the one hand and the heterogeneity of levels of economic development on the other ;

4. Observes that, in most member states, the lack of sufficient financial means is mainly due to a rise in the number of students enrolled, to the major increase in the costs of education and research, and to stagnation in public funding ;

5. Regrets the negative effects of this situation on the quality of higher education, on research (the results of which are rarely readily marketable), on the independence and autonomy of institutions of higher education and lastly on co-operation between them in Europe (as a result of the increasing disparity in their resources) ;

6. Recalls that education is a priority issue, and invites the competent authorities to make the effort necessary to remedy the situation in higher education on the basis of the following principles :

6.1. Higher education and the student

a. Higher education should be democratised to enable as many persons as possible who so wish to enter it. The only justifiable selection is student merit and in no case should it be linked to his resources.

b. All member states should guarantee that there are no financial obstacles to the right of access to higher education.

c. Higher and further education should be made a priority area, and this should be reflected in practice by a financial effort on the part of the public authorities.

d. Existing grants systems should be developed to enable a maximum of persons to follow higher education. Systems of guaranteed loans at reduced rates, as well as sponsoring and means-tested parental contributions, can be encouraged, although they should be controlled by the public authorities.

6.2. Research

a. There can be no higher education without teaching and research being closely linked.

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1. Assembly debate on 11 May 1990 (8th Sitting) (see Doc. 6152, report of the Committee on Culture and Education, Rapporteur : Mr Bassinet). Text adopted by the Assembly on 11 May 1990 (8th Sitting).

b. The formative character of research and its close involvement in higher education should be observed.

c. The importance of autonomy in research work and the fact that research should be carried forward in all fields, independently of any short-term commercial interests that some might hold, should be remembered.

d. ‘‘Cross-funding" of research should not get out of hand.

e. Systems of evaluation - for example between European researchers working in the same field - and self-evaluation of research should be set up.

f. The use of academic researchers as consultant experts should be encouraged.

6.3. Administration of institutions of higher education and research

a. Teachers, researchers, administrative and technical personnel, and students should be associated, according to their competence, in fixing the main lines of higher education and research policy of the institution.

b. Each institution (Administrative Board, Council or Board of Trustees) has the right to designate its own head (Président, Vice-Chancellor,...).

c. The application of the main lines of policy should be administered by qualified professional staff.

6.4. Relations between higher education and society. Relations between the institutions of higher education and society have always been very close. These institutions should also develop co-operation with firms and the private sector in general. However, while higher education cannot ignore the economic situation and market reality, it should also retain its public service role.

6.5. Co-operation in Europe between institutions of higher education and research

a. There is a very considerable advantage in combining the resources of different institutions, enabling certain projects to be carried out, spreading risks and diffusing knowledge.

b. The mobility of researchers, teachers and also students should be improved by a greater number of co-operation programmes such as ERASMUS.

c. Inter-university co-operation should be increased with a view to remedying the important disparities in higher education between East and West and also North and South, particularly by eliminating existing barriers.

d. The new media present unprecedented co-operation possibilities which should be developed, in particular in the field of distance-teaching based on a network of existing institutions.