

**Conférence des
présidents d'université**

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SPEECH GILLES ROUSSEL

OPENING SESSIONS EUA LEARNING&TEACHING FORUM

THURSDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2017 – UPMC

Mr. President of the European University Association, dear Rolf,

Mr. President of Université Pierre et Marie Curie, dear Jean,

Dear presidents and directors,

Dear vice-presidents,

Dear student vice-presidents,

Dear colleagues and dear friends,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a real pleasure, and honour, to welcome you here in Paris and I am delighted to open this European forum on recent transformations in learning and teaching activities.

The topic, which will be at the heart of our debates during these two days, is of great importance for each of our universities, each of our countries, their higher education systems and for the future of Europe and its citizens.

We are dealing with a very substantial issue because it is central to our daily concerns. It does directly affect our capacity of innovation, of adaptation and our determination to frame a vision for tomorrow's universities.

It is of critical importance because it goes hand in hand with the growing concern of our institutions, that is to say earning the best reputation possible. It also has to do with the need to welcome and educate a higher number of students, regardless of their profiles.

Our wish is to offer excellent education to students coming from the secondary education system as well as those engaged in lifelong learning.

Keeping the best elements in order to offer them the best perspectives for their future employability, is one of our key concerns.

This is also a major issue because we have to meet the new expectations of our public and work out the actions that will be most profitable to them.

Who can still believe that a lecture given in a university auditorium is the only relevant pedagogical approach?

Who can still believe that in this digital era, a teacher can turn away from innovation and educational research in order to educate his students in a better and more efficient way?

Who can still believe that is it fair and relevant to evaluate students through a mere final exam without a more personalised approach and without a quasi-continuous evaluation?

The stakes are high because of the future of knowledge-based societies in Europe. We must increase the level of qualifications of the European population, broaden our capacity to educate the young and the old alike, and give them the keys to understand the world in the era of “fake news”, and face the threats posed by so many dogmatic attitudes, in a time characterised by extremist simplifications and identitarian closure. Because our vision is to offer a learning process adapted to our audiences and to build the university of the 21st century, our mission will be to contribute to the education of young citizens, convince them of the need for more Europe, and make them open to others.

It is worth repeating that the construction of a shared higher education area is one of the most evident success stories in Europe. The circulation of students thanks to the Erasmus+ programme and the mutual recognition of diplomas are the best examples of this.

Best practices should be still further enhanced and the transformations we have initiated over the last ten years ought to follow the logic of this common mission of ours.

So, yes, the stakes are high and our role will be, naturally, to put this challenge at the heart of the public debate and to implement still further the transformations in learning and teaching in the political agenda of our own countries, but also and before all, at European level.

The celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the Bologna Process, which will take place in Paris, will give us an opportunity to make this topic one of the elements of the political decision-making process.

The French Minister for Higher Education, Research and Innovation will attend this forum tonight. I am sure that her presence will testify to the political commitment of the French government to the challenges which we are facing today.

As far as I am concerned, the message I would like to deliver to her is a message of trust. I am confident in the public authorities' capacity to accept the challenge of transformations in learning

and teaching, to support our institutions and their leaders in responding to the stakes in our society; by increasing the level of qualification.

In order to make this confidence palpable and put forward genuine solutions, it must be synonymous with the word “autonomy”, be it pedagogical or budgetary. Here is one of the main challenges that we must face all together so as to bring our projects to completion and meet the expectations of the whole academic community.

This is a major issue indeed, but I do not have any doubts that it will be met when I see so many presidents and vice-presidents from European universities or from other parts of the world just in front of me. I do not have any doubts when I look at the work you are doing in your institutions, when there is so much evidence of the involvement of an ever increasing number of colleagues working to improve the education and training we provide, when I see the ambitions that you all have, ladies and gentlemen.

Recently, I felt slightly surprised by a remark. This statement is that, regardless of the structure of our higher education systems, we all share the same difficulties, we all share the same expectations in terms of success, notably about the undergraduate cycle, and we all share the same ambitions of strengthening the connections between research and education. All things considered, it is not much of a surprise to say that we all share the same missions and goals.

During these two days, we are going to work on new learning practices, you are going to share your expertise, make the link between research and education, think about the ways in which we might better welcome all types of public and give us the keys to improve our higher education systems. Promoting this cooperation at European level is a strong message to our community as well as to our public authorities

In any case, as President of the French Rectors' Conference, I am happy to see so many of you here. I have to admit that when we contemplated the idea of having this event, one year and half ago now, I did not believe that it would be possible to gather so many people. Had I known in advance, I would have definitely taken some intensive English lessons...

I am grateful to the Université Pierre et Marie Curie and its president, Jean CHAMBAZ, for accepting to hold this forum here and I warmly thank all the staff for their participation in the organisation.

I would like to extend special thanks to the EUA and CPU teams for their work during several months, which will allow our discussions, our reflections and the development of our common efforts to take place in the best possible conditions.

I also wish to greet all the universities that have participated in thematic groups over the last months and that will share their experience with us as well as their observations which will enrich and be useful to our debates.

The richness of a meeting such as today's, is mostly based on the quality of participants coming to this very first Learning & Teaching Forum. I would like to thank them for accepting this responsibility.

Finally, I thank you all for coming. And once again, I can tell you that I am happy and honoured to welcome you here in Paris. I wish you all, ladies and gentlemen, an excellent and fruitful forum.

Thank you for your attention.

