



*Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca*  
*Consiglio Universitario Nazionale*

Prot. n. 20914 del 18/11/2015

**Hon. Silvia Costa, Chair**  
**Hon. Members of**  
**the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education**  
**Brussel**

Rome, 18 November 2015

**Subject: *Internationalisation of Italian Higher Education System***

Dear Chair,

Dear Honorable Members,

It was with great interest that the Italian National University Council read the Directorate-General for Internal Policies' Study on the *Internationalisation of Higher Education*, commissioned by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education.

The Council believes that this survey together with the *Yerevan Ministerial Communiqué* and *The Fourth Bologna Policy Forum Statement* adopted at the ninth EHEA Ministerial Conference are very important documents for the development of Higher Education and Research in Europe.

The creation of a European Higher Education Area is an essential premise for building an inclusive society with educational opportunities which support innovation and jobs. The construction of such a system, as stated in the *Yerevan Communiqué*, «is based on public responsibility for higher education, academic freedom and institutional autonomy»; «it relies on strong public funding and is implemented through a common degree structure, a shared understanding of principles and processes for quality assurance». It also needs concrete tools such as the mutual recognition of skills and competences in order to promote academic and student mobility.

The Council strongly desires that Italian Universities actively contribute to the creation of a European Area which is more cooperative than competitive.

The Italian Higher Education system has undergone an extensive reform process over the last 15 years, one of the aims of which was to assure its internationalisation. However, as the study highlights with specific reference to Italy, «reforms without resources are never easy» and rarely achieve their aims. Moreover, Italian «Universities have been required to internationalise in order to receive funding, rather than being funded in order to internationalise».

Italy's public expenditure on research and development is considerably lower than the average for OECD countries and has been cut drastically, especially since 2009. There has been a 20% reduction in academic and administrative staff numbers, and fewer researchers naturally mean a lower innovation potential. The low numbers of young Italians who actually graduate is also of concern, especially given the constant fall in University enrolments.

Despite this, Italian researchers are acknowledged as performing well in comparison with Europe, but their low numbers preclude achievement of the objectives set for Italy in compliance with the principles set forth in the international agreements.



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All this also has a negative impact on the internationalisation process. The initiatives of individual Universities and researchers and the partnerships that they have succeeded in activating, thanks in part to the underlying favourable socioeconomic situations, do mean that some progress has been made. However, much remains to be done to ensure that such initiatives are not restricted to individual institutions and researchers but are instead available to all Universities in Italy.

The Council recognizes that internationalisation cannot involve merely offering courses in English or employing academic staff originating from other countries, but requires the overhaul of the traditional educational pathways and didactic delivery methods and the creation of research environments capable of developing world-class expertise. Suitable measures are needed to assure this.

Italian Universities are still in need of modernisation. To this end, they must be freed of burdensome regulations and excessive red tape such as that created by recent legislation. These bureaucratic constraints are barriers to their innovation.

To meet all these challenges and enable our Universities to grow and become «strong players in the European and international arena», the commitment of the Government through tailored policies and adequate resources and regulations is needed.

Sincerely,

THE PRESIDENT  
Andrea Lenzi

THE VICE-PRESIDENT  
Carla Barbati