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## **BOLOGNA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE**

**27-29 APRIL 2009**

**LEUVEN/LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE**

### **REFLECTIONS ON THE BOLOGNA PROCESS BY IRENE SELING PLENARY SESSION I ON 28 APRIL**

**ADDRESS BY IRENE SELING, SOCIAL ADVISER, BDA**

Chair, Ministers, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you today on behalf of BUSINESSEUROPE.

The Bologna Process is an extremely important catalyst for change. It has brought about more change in higher education than any other international instrument or policy has done before. There was, and there certainly still is, a need to modernise higher education systems in order to face the challenges of globalisation and address the expectations of the European societies.

For BUSINESSEUROPE employability is one of the key issues in the context of the Bologna Process. European labour markets and social systems need to adapt and modernise to confront the challenges of globalisation, technological change, population ageing and climate change. Even in times of economic crisis, if you ask businesses, you will hear that they consider the availability of competences as one of their biggest challenges. In many countries and sectors, companies cannot find much-needed highly skilled workers, such as engineers and IT specialists. Fewer labour market entrants, high replacement demand, increasing skill requirements, skill gaps and shortages are today's challenges. There is a growing need for highly skilled personal to meet the requirements of a global competition of knowledge and innovation.

Improving employability involves not only those who enter the labour market: Lifelong Learning policies and practices are key to raise the employability of those who are already in the workforce by refreshing and updating their skills and competences on a continuous basis. Individuals need to increasingly take greater responsibility for their own employability.



Universities should recognise and integrate lifelong learning into their strategies. BUSINESSEUROPE is convinced that higher education institutions will have to adapt their offers to different kinds of students. These are young people, mature students and employees undertaking studies while working.

Access to lifelong learning in higher education institutions needs to be enhanced. They should open up particular to those who hold a vocational qualification. Student numbers may well start to decrease for demographic reasons in the next future. Continuing education can offer potential opportunities for universities to face this development.

Universities cannot deliver Lifelong Learning alone. Lifelong learning has to be developed in partnership with business organisations which have an in-depth insight into the evolving needs of enterprises concerning employee qualifications. Businesses, employers and their organizations offer their intensive cooperation with higher education institutions in this context.

The demographic change in our European societies and on the other hand striving for the expansion of higher education systems through a better accessibility and higher completion rates are the most extensive challenges. Increasing the number of young people with an academic degree although the number of young people will decrease dramatically within the next decade refers also to the necessity of fundamental changes in our entire educational system, not only in higher education, but also in the schooling system. We need more and better teachers and a strategy which puts the single pupil into the middle of all efforts and considerations. "No Child left Behind" should be also our European motto.

In this context cooperation between schools and higher education institutions has to be improved substantially.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Bologna Process is the most challenging project in Higher Education in Europe. Let me emphasize that BUSINESSEUROPE is fully committed to the Bologna process and will continue so. We believe devoutly that the overall goals of the Bologna Process, improving comparability and compatibility throughout Europe, are the right answer to the future challenges.

Thank you!

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