

## ROUND TABLE ON EDUCATION AND INTER-UNIVERSITY CO-OPERATION

“Building the European Higher Education area – A further step forward”

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Madam Under Secretary of State and Dear President, dear Participants,

it is for me a real pleasure to take the floor on the occasion of this Round Table on Education and Inter-University Co-operation, which takes place during the annual shift of the Italian Presidency of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII), and I want, first of all, to thank the Under Secretary of State for Education, Higher Education and Research, Sen. Maria Grazia Siliquini for convening this meeting and for inviting me. I apologise for being unable to attend all the meeting, but, regrettably, I have to flight to Trieste within one hour to take part to a CEI Committee. Nevertheless I did not want to miss the opportunity to be here today and express to you, in my capacity of National Co-ordinator for the Regional Initiatives in the SEE, my deep appreciation for the work of this WT and for the results achieved.

In my address of welcome to the participants here convened today I do not want to discuss the topics in your agenda, that will be extensively treated by the eminent personalities sitting around this table. I would like instead to draw your attention on the results achieved in the field of the inter-university co-operation in the framework of the AII and on the possibility of synergies offered by the parallel action taken by the Central European Initiative.

Let me first of all underline that, in terms of both achieved results and on-going activities, we consider UNIADRION of a major importance in the more general frame identified by the Conference on “Development and Security in the Adriatic and the Ionian” held in Ancona on 20 May 2000. The so called “**Ancona Declaration**” recognised in the inter-university co-operation as one of the lines to be implemented for fostering peace and security in the Adriatic and Ionic basin and, at the same time, for helping the political and economical stability in the sub-region. In that occasion one of the four Round Tables outlining the programmatic lines to be implemented by the AII was fully dedicated to the discussion of the programmatic background to be considered for the co-operation among Universities and other Higher Education Institutes of the AII Member Countries. The conclusions of this Round Table stressed the importance of starting a comprehensive scientific co-operation along a number of high priority development activities related to: the valorisation of the common cultural heritage, the development of the Information Society and, more generally, the identification of the guide-lines to be followed for a proper economic development preserving human health and environment as the first step for assuring a real sustainable development.

The Ancona Declaration, signed by the Foreign Ministers of the AII Member countries at the presence of the President of the European Commission, has to be recognised as the first, important political moment. However, at that time, everybody was fully aware of the necessity of assuring to the Initiative a proper implementation pace, thus translating into concrete activities the political decisions. To-day we fully recognise that the reaction of the Universities was positive and immediate. On December 15-16, 2000, just a few months after the Ancona Conference, the Bologna University, in a strict co-operation with the Ancona and Trieste Universities, organised in Ravenna an important meeting with the presence of the academic representatives of all the seven AII Member Countries: Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Greece, Italy and Slovenia. The signature of the “**Ravenna Declaration**” by more than 20 Rectors and a number

of Institutional representatives has to be considered as the formal and substantial act engaging the academic community of the AII in a strict co-operation. In the Declaration **UNIADRION** Program was recognised as the first, important step for the realisation of a virtual regional University, the informatic network needed for tuning the different co-operative initiatives: common projects identification and implementation, professional and academic higher education Courses, modern distance learning activities. UNIADRION is now an important reality in terms of both achieved results and on-going activities. An Executive Secretariat has been established in Ravenna, helping the proper development of the activities, assuring all the needed information, promoting a broader participation of the academic environment to this unique co-operative system. As a matter of fact a first set of Projects and higher education Courses are under implementation counting on the financial help of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of the Italian Ministry for Education, Higher Education and Research. It is our intention to favour as much as possible the further development of the UNIADRION Program in terms of both financial support and coherent institutional and political frame.

A few considerations about the future perspectives could favour a better understanding of the expected geo-political frame we do expect for the coming months, thus offering to the inter-university co-operation a reference point for its further development.

Coming back to the Ancona Declaration, we can recall here the clear intention of implementing the AII in a full coherence with the bilateral, sub-regional and regional initiatives and programs carried out in Central and South-eastern Europe by the different Organisations and Institutions, also having in mind the policies envisaged by both the “Stability Pact” and the European Union. No doubt that the proper development of the AII calls for a high degree of coherence and synergy with the above recalled initiatives and programs. The importance of this approach is self-evident if we consider the more general objectives of the AII: co-operation in the fields of: economy, tourism and maritime transport; environment protection and safeguarding of the resources; fight against the organised crime. However, the same necessity is recognised for the inter-university co-operation itself, especially when parallel academic programs are under consideration for future implementation. The one offered by the **Central European Initiative** (CEI) deserves to be recalled here as a clear example of the importance of a synergetic and co-ordinated approach.

In the more general frame of the different regional co-operations, the CEI is the oldest and largest Initiative which emerged in Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the communist system. The CEI counts now 17 State Members (Austria and Italy from the EU plus 15 countries from the above mentioned region), committed to the implementation of a number of Programs and Projects in various fields of activities which, as a whole, intend to contribute to the success of a comprehensive strategy based on the principle of cohesion and solidarity. As a very first observation we can underline that six out of the seven Member Countries of the AII (the seventh being Greece) are CEI Members too; thus some forms of co-operation between the two Initiatives can be regarded as a kind of natural and logical need. However, more finalised and stricter considerations underline the opportunity of a coherent development strategy.

The CEI mandate itself, covering a number of programmatic lines (of scientific/technological, industrial, cultural, economic and political nature), recalls the different “dimensions” under which the Initiative can be recognised and presented. For sure the “CEI political dimension” is of a major importance, simply if we consider that once per year the Heads of Governments of the 17 countries (and Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the same countries as well) meet themselves in an “ad-hoc” Summit, thus identifying an unique table for discussing the basic items related to the economic and political development of the region. However other “dimensions” are important too, the “Scientific” and the “Academic” ones among them. This means that the CEI recognises as a relevant part of its

mandate the activities focused to promote and implement co-operation and networking among the Research Centres and the Universities of the Member Countries. In November 2001, on the occasion of the Trieste Summit which concluded the year of the CEI Italian Presidency, the Prime Minister of Italy announced the intention of the Italian Government of creating a higher education Institution, the CEI University, aiming to offer to the young generations of the CEI Member Countries new and finalised opportunity of academic and professional education. This “declaration of intention” of our Government is now a precise plan of action that will be discussed and approved in the next months by the CEI. The Secretariat will be hosted by the University of Trieste and two courses of specialisation are ready to start Even if it is premature to anticipate here all the lines of this still on-going organisational process, it appears evident the importance of establishing proper synergies and, should it be the case, complementarily between the CEI University and UNIADRION, in the more general frame of the promotion of the academic co-operation within the region. It seems to us that the experience gained through the UNIADRION program could help the “constituent phase” of the CEI University. In particular the “network” based approach followed by UNIADRION, by the establishment of appropriate “focal points” in the different AII Countries, represents a model which deserves to be considered with attention, for many reasons, not only on the side of the operative requirements and opportunities. The UNIADRION model, in particular, demonstrates that a network based structure also assures a balanced visibility to all the partners, thus practically overcoming possible difficulties related to the identification of the reference site for the Institution itself.

I want to recall that on October 29 we had in Trieste an Informal Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the AII chaired by the Italian Presidency of the Initiative and namely by Prime Minister Berlusconi in his capacity as the than Acting Foreign Minister. It was an important occasion for an overall evaluation of the results obtained and of the foreseen activities. In the field of the inter-University co-operation it was welcomed -and I quote the Press Communique’ of the Meeting- the start-up of the work of UNIADRION and was expressed the intention of the Italian Presidency to work to enhance and expand its activities. We are sincerely grateful to the AII academic environment, here properly represented, for the unique availability and professional expertise they have shown in preparing and implementing the UNIADRION activities.

In concluding these few remarks, let me wish all of you a very fruitful work today and tomorrow.

Thank you Madam President thank you Ladies and Gentlemen.

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