

## **Academic co-operation and mobility in Europe : how it was, how it should be**

Dr Andris Barblan  
Secretary General  
European University Association

Rather than analysing European academic cooperation and mobility for their own sake, the following pages try to set interuniversity developments in their historical context, as higher education is but one area where political and economic change press for transformation – often in ways similar to the evolution existing in other fields of social service, be they private or public. As a powerhouse of knowledge, the university should be able to make sense of social change and scientific development. Has it managed to do so over the last fifty years, thus contributing to the cultural and economic integration of Europe? Considering the complexity of the influences that shaped university life since World War II, this paper tracks facts and trends from a personal point of view, that of an historian and 26 year administrator of the NGO set up to develop the European dimension of higher education. This NGO was known as the CRE from 1959 to 2001, and is now the European University Association.

### **The post-war context**

In 1955, when the rectors, vice-chancellors and presidents of European universities met for the first time in Cambridge to reaffirm the potential of international cooperation between their institutions, the European movement was just recovering from an important setback. In 1954, nine years after the end of World War II, Pierre Mendès-France had failed to convince the French Parliament of the need for a defence policy encompassing victors and losers in a single community of European security - although all countries concerned were already part of NATO, the Alliance created in Spring 1949 on the basis of the Western European Union, itself an organisation set up in 1948. The *Atlantic Pact* had made possible, thanks to Marshall Aid from the US, the fulfillment of the European Recovery Programme whose goal was the political and economic integration of Western Europe.

The early fifties had been witnessing heated political discussions about the way to achieve that integration, a debate opposing “unionists” and “federalists”, while simultaneously the European Movement was getting stronger: indeed, in December 1947, the *International Committee of the Movements for European Unity* had brought together the United Europe Movement, presided by Winston Churchill, the European Union of Federalists, the French Council for a United Europe and the Economic League for European Cooperation. In October 1948, building up on the impulse given by the Hague Congress, that Committee had become the *European Movement* when joined by the International Committee for the Socialist United States of Europe. Inside and outside the Movement, fierce exchanges of opinions argued the case for or against the political, economic, social or cultural integration of the continent.

In May 1949, following resolutions of the Hague Congress, the Council of Europe was created, as a forum of national parliaments and a committee of ministers, Britain included. A year later, Germany had become an associate member of that Council when Robert Schuman, on Jean Monnet's advice, proposed to place all French and German production of coal and steel – the tools of a war economy - under the jurisdiction of a single common authority, thus making impossible a new conflict between the two nations. The idea, enlarged to Benelux countries and Italy, led to the Treaty setting up the *European Coal and Steel Community*: it was signed in April 1951 and the High Authority, headed by Jean Monnet, started work in August 1952. By Spring 1953, a common market for coal, iron ore and steel had been set up between the “Six”. Should not this model be enlarged to transportation, production and distribution of energy, and agriculture? To complete the reorganisation of Western Europe, and if Germany were to re-arm, would not a *Community of Defence* keep it in check by making security a European matter requiring restricted national sovereignty? The latter plan was defeated in 1954, replaced in 1955 by a re-inforced Union of Western Europe in a NATO framework, West Germany becoming a full partner of the Brussels Treaty. From then on, work focused on economic cooperation until the Treaty of Rome was signed by the “Six” in March 1957.

Resistance to the Common Market – also expressed by the discussion on the potential of a wider free trade area encompassing Britain, Switzerland, Austria (that had been re-united in 1955), Portugal, Greece or the Scandinavian countries – mellowed in 1956 when Europe proved how weak it still was in terms of world politics, France and the UK failing to reconquer the Suez Canal or Western Europe to support the Hungarian insurgents against the Soviet troops entering Budapest. Indeed, the division of Europe, symbolised by the 1948 communist take-over in Prague, had been consolidating after Stalin’s death in 1953 and the various movements of opposition to the police state and to foreign domination that developed thereafter in Eastern Germany, Poland or Hungary could be understood as nationalist reactions to Russian authoritarianism and imperial ambitions – the latter being spectacularly manifested by the launch in 1957 of the *Sputnik* satellite that started the “space race” with the United States of America.

### **The Europe of culture**

During the War, the Allied governments had become conscious that, if peace were to be given a chance, this would mean engaging the minds of the citizens of all nations. International intellectual collaboration had been a minor part of the work of *League of Nations* after World War I. This would not be repeated after 1945 as UNESCO was launched to play a central role in the new world structures, in particular as far as the global cooperation in education and science was concerned. For science, in 1946, UNESCO proposed establishing special links with ICSU, the International Conference of Scientific Unions created in 1931. In 1947, as an echo of the Multilateral Conference of Universities convened in Paris in 1937, a conference in Utrecht opened the way for the creation of the *International Association of Universities*, formalised in 1950 at Nice, an association whose International Bureau of Universities was to become the higher education arm of UNESCO. A large number of IAU funding members were European universities which could also envisage developing cooperation on their own continent.

At regional level, the Western European Union, although a military institution, had set up a Committee for intellectual cooperation. The Hague Congress, however, had recommended not only the creation of the Council of Europe as the political arm of the European Movement but also action in the field of culture. Thus, in October 1949, a European Cultural Conference was held in Lausanne from which emerged the *College of Europe* at Bruges and the *European Cultural Centre* in Geneva. The Centre, under the leadership of Denis de Rougemont, initiated European networks of cooperation among institutions and people interested in similar activities, such as music festivals, European institutes, European education teachers. It contributed to the creation in 1954 of what was to become one of the largest cooperative ventures in European science, the CERN. The same year, to help support this work – that was completed by the *Dialogue des cultures*, i.e., large conferences trying to define the specificity of European culture vis-à-vis other world civilisations –, the Centre also launched the *European Cultural Foundation* on the model of large US foundations, an institution that soon moved to Amsterdam where Prince Bernard, one of its governors, could secure regular funding.

### **Academic cooperation**

It was not the Centre, however, that initiated renewed cooperation in higher education but the Cultural Committee of the Western European Union when it sponsored the 1955 conference of European university leaders convened in Cambridge under the presidency of the Duke of Edinburgh. A little less than hundred participants from 15 countries joined that meeting, the first General Assembly of what was to become the CRE, the *Conférence des Recteurs Européens*, an organisation whose institutionalisation was decided at the second conference of university leaders convened in 1959 in Dijon. Indeed, it is only in 1964, at the third conference, in Göttingen, that the constitution of the *Standing Conference of Rectors and Vice-Chancellors of European Universities* was formally adopted and the seat of the organisation placed at the University of Geneva, the Rector of which, Jaques Courvoisier, had just been elected the President of the new association.

One has to remember that mobility in post-war Europe was not easy considering the lack of appropriate facilities, the insufficiencies in transport infrastructures, as well as the border and exchange controls prevailing everywhere. Moreover, many of the academic links usual in traditional university life had been severed by the world conflict. Recreating a European academic community was certainly no simple task. Models of interuniversity cooperation did exist, however, like the British and the Austrian conferences of university leaders, at national level – both dating from before the first World War, or at international level, the *Association of Commonwealth Universities* that began activities in 1913. No wonder then that the restructuring of the European academic community started with the support of the United Kingdom where universities had suffered little destruction, had retained prestige and had kept a strong sense of tradition.

In Cambridge, participants discussed the main tenets of the European university, its need for autonomy and intellectual independence (both concepts had suffered from nationalist war organisation), its mix of services (general culture balancing utilitarian specialisation), the selection, training and welfare of its student body, in other words the university's role in European society.

After this reference to the continuity of the intellectual adventure beyond political upheavals, cooperation was furthered especially by the French and the Germans, following their political alliance in the building up of an integrated Europe, a collaboration embodied by Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle, who had come back to power in Paris in 1958 to found the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic and bring to a close the Algerian war as well as the French imperial history. The initiative for further cooperation in higher education moved from Britain to the continent, where France and Germany were committed to growing and closer cooperation at all levels of common concern, technical and operational – also in higher education. Thus, the topics of the two CRE Assemblies in Dijon (1959) and Göttingen (1964) were much more down-to-earth than in England in 1955: considering the shortage of scientists and technologists in a fast developing society, participants asked how students could be trained as “Europeans” in terms of humanities, social sciences and economy – reflections which, in 1959, at the beginning of the Common Market adventure, also implied for the universities a civic responsibility for the making of Europe. In 1964, the optimum and maximum size of the academic institution was at the centre of the debate, a size relative to society’s expectations, to the students’ growing presence in higher education institutions, or to the quality of research and of service to industry.

Indirectly, the differences between a closely knit Europe of sovereign nations (that inspired the creation under British leadership of the European Free Trade Association as a counterpoint to the Common Market) and a Europe whose member countries were ready to abandon part of their sovereignty to achieve common aims (the Community of the “Six” countries that had been directly involved in the war feuds) was reflected in the university association : should it reflect convergence of higher education policies or push for change in national systems, i.e., foster the European added value in teaching and research ? Should it be active or pro-active ?

An answer was to be given at the fourth Assembly invited to sit in Bologna, the oldest university of Europe, in 1969 : a re-definition of autonomy in developed societies was to determine the capacity of academia and students to influence science policy and career training. Indeed, the CRE was already playing its part in the political debate, its Committee (whose delegates were representing national systems of higher education) acting as the non-governmental side of the *Committee of Higher Education and Research* of the Council of Europe, a committee where each country was allowed two delegates – and, at the time, two independent votes: one was representing the authorities, the other the world of higher education. That Committee, meeting twice a year, was reporting to the Ministers of Education of the Council and discussed topics of common interest to the 22 countries then members of the organisation.

Because of the 1968 student troubles, particularly intense in Bologna, the window of efficient communist local government in Italy, it was decided to meet in Geneva instead. By this time, CRE had become institutionalised but its ability to weigh on political decision-making was being questioned by the wave of student unrest that destabilised many of its members, since individual institutions or parts of national systems of higher education were being disrupted. For example, the Edgard Faure reforms, in France, shattered a system that had evolved little since the 19<sup>th</sup> century : the map of higher education changed in a few months and new universities were born all over the country – often along disciplinary and ideological lines – to cater for the massive training needs of the post-war baby boom generation. All countries were affected by

transformation as the demand was more or less similar everywhere: indeed, by the mid-sixties', the European higher education system had reached a threshold in its growth and the academic institution had to care for new groups of students, for new career paths, for new relations with industry and the community.

Simultaneously, the hardships of post-war reconstruction were being overcome by a flourishing economic recovery that allowed for the democratisation of European traditional societies – new groups were accessing to wealth and requesting a say in the decision-making process. In the universities, that led to the excesses of government through assemblies but also to organised participation in collegial decision-making, for instance in the Netherlands. Attempts were made to look at higher education as a whole, the universities being only one sector of a more global system of learning. The limits between academic and professional teaching were being blurred – for example in the German *Gesamthochschulen*. So many of the classical references of academia disappeared at the time that, by 1974, when the universities were still adjusting to the new constraints of mass education, the CRE Assembly that convened in Bologna could only take stock of the change and reforms that had been happening all over Europe while trying to imagine how this would affect higher education in the following years.

### **The actors of academic cooperation**

Who was in charge of academic cooperation and mobility ? Mainly the leaders of individual institutions, all the more so since, in traditional universities, they had little power apart from representative duties. Thus, in the fifties and early sixties, it was obvious that international relations were the task of the academic head, often a well-known scientist whose prestige could serve the institution's external linkages, nationally or internationally. *Primus inter pares*, the elected institutional head was usually given a short mandate that did not offer enough time to shape a policy independent from that decided by the Senate. In those days, universities were rather small, and collegial governance allowed their elected leaders to take detached views of the role of their institution – also in European affairs. Moreover, because of the difficulties of reconstruction and the many administrative and financial obstacles making travels difficult, staff and student mobility was minimal – hence the importance of network cooperation, particularly in scientific research, like the CERN in Geneva. Hence, in the early days of CRE, the key organ of the Association was the *Permanent Committee*, the only international forum where universities could compare notes on their evolution,

After 1964, that committee was used to prepare university positions before discussing higher education policy with ministerial delegates in the Committee of Higher Education and Research (CHER) – often the same people whom the rectors would meet at national level. In fact, each session of the CHER was preceded by a one day encounter of the university delegates – the CRE Permanent Committee - in order to develop converging views when meeting the governmental representatives. The European added value corresponded to the common ground defined during these six-monthly sessions. Apart from General Assemblies, and until 1969 and the repercussions of student unrest, there was no discussion of common problems shared by all CRE members. Nevertheless, there was a general consensus about the function of universities in

society and the expected trends affecting academia and there was little need to assert one's own views about the contribution of higher education to European development.

However, with the many and often diverging roles forced on academic institutions by mass higher education, a trend calling for international comparisons arising from the growing facility of exchanges among institutions of higher education, at least in Western Europe and between Western Europe and North America (as soon as money convertibility had become the rule), CRE's subdued political presence was felt to represent a rather discrete – even minimal – service to the members. Combined with the fact that the Council of Europe represented only the Western part of the continent, it was decided in 1969 to distance CRE from the Council and to reaffirm the pan-European ambitions of the association. As a result, the sessions of the Permanent Committee became self-standing, focusing on comparative academic development, and, to encourage participation, it was proposed to have them coupled with thematic seminars – restricted to some 60 participants only - in which key questions of university governance would be discussed. These seminars were described by some as "continuing education" for academic leaders who, after the reforms resulting from the 1968 student troubles, were asked by new regulations to get more and more involved in the detailed management of their enlarged institutions. This also had the consequence, very often, to change academic leadership, many of the prestigious scientists of older days being reluctant to commit four to eight years of their life to university administration – at the risk of jeopardising their scientific career. Hence, in the 70's, strategic management became the locus of convergence for a new "breed" of academic leaders, usually younger staff members interested in the university as an enterprise. For them, often with less global research links than their predecessors, policy-making at international level had become a rather esoterical question. They were more interested in the practicalities of access, recognition, educational efficiency, institutional decentralisation or the integration of minority students – all questions met first and foremost at institutional level and in a national context. Comparisons helped to relativise one's own problems rather than to find common solutions. The future looked very much like the extrapolation of present realities: hence the topic of the Bologna Assembly in 1974 – *The European Universities : 1975-1985*.

This collective foresight exercise had been overshadowed since 1969 by another question, long muted but now coming to the fore : *What is Europe ?*, an essential matter for European cooperation and mobility.

### **The European question**

Indeed, 1968 had also been the year of the "Prague Spring" and, three weeks before the Geneva Assembly in early September 1969, the Soviet tanks rolled in Czechoslovakia to re-establish a regime more pliant to the wishes of Moscow than the rule of Alexander Dubcek. Apart from welcoming refugees, the Western democracies did not move, abiding by the division of Europe that had been born out of the Yalta Treaty. Many, especially among intellectuals, could feel that, by omission, they had betrayed their proclaimed ideals of democracy and human rights, the same noble aims that were being used as references in the administrative and organisational reforms of higher education in Western Europe. Crudely said, could Europe East of the iron curtain still play a part in regional integration or should the concept of Europe be monopolised by

the members of the Council of Europe - if not by those countries building the European Community only?

Indeed, the European ideal seemed incompatible with the Communist objectives of building an international society much larger than the European continent. However, the cost paid by the Communists to bring the war to a close – in the Soviet Union or among the resists to Nazi occupation in the West – had rendered communist parties full if difficult partners in the democratic development of Council of Europe member countries, France and Italy in particular. Should they remain deprived of national responsibilities when they were proving good management abilities at local or regional level ? Would their allegiance to international ideals prevail over national loyalties in case of crisis - not to speak of European allegiance ? Such was the dilemma that was to be solved by the “compromesso storico” that envisaged power sharing between Communists and Christian Democrats in the Italian Republic.

The possible cooperation between Peppone and Don Camillo – to mention the popular characters of Guareschi’s novels - was not a matter of urgency in the Po Valley only, but also a problem of European importance. For instance, the radical changes in Iberian politics were stumbling on a similar question: what responsibilities to entrust to the representatives of Communist ideals in Portugal and Spain after the regimes installed by Salazar and Franco had disappeared in 1974 and 1975? Would European leftist groups remain simple puppets in the hands of the Soviet leadership ? Or was such an evocation of national disloyalty only an aspect of NATO propaganda against Comecon countries, particularly at a time when, in Moscow, *détente* was becoming a key word for international strategies? Indeed, cold war politics were to be replaced by *regulated competition* between two concepts of social organisation – as applied to the political, economical and cultural domains. But was that just another way for the Soviet Union to play Great Power politics while maintaining the division of Europe into two opposing blocks? Indeed, to test the matter, Western countries agreed to set up the CSCE (the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) with their Eastern counterparts and to launch negotiations that led to the 1975 Helsinki agreements – a whole section of which dealt with intellectual cooperation and the mobility of persons over the East-West divide, a matter of importance for universities which, like in the CRE, claimed to consider Europe as a single whole from the Atlantic ocean to the Ural mountains.

In short, after the crackdown in Prague in 1969, the two groups of nations were still playing off each other, competing and cooperating - through their surrogates in many parts of the world but also directly in international arenas where codes of peaceful confrontation had slowly evolved over the years. This was particularly true for UN institutions, where the Soviet countries were developing closer contacts with the booming economies of Western capitalism.

In the field of higher education, UNESCO became a focus for East/West governmental talks, inter-university collaboration being considered as a public responsibility and knowledge development as a tool of social development whose importance justified state steering, if not governmental control. In such a context, private efforts based on the institutions of higher learning themselves (like those made by CRE) seemed to politicians at best marginal, at worst, annoying. As a consequence, various suggestions were made to streamline action in higher education and research, with the aim to encourage their contribution to the solution of urgent problems, political

or economical. One such plan led to the creation of the United Nations University, more a thinktank for the UN system and a network of institutes focusing on research applied to the problems of poverty, hunger and conflict resolution, than a usual university with students and professors.

In 1971, the CRE was thus consulted on the creation of the *United Nations University* since, in 1967, CRE had been granted consultative status at the UN Social and Economic Council in Geneva (Ecosoc) and at UNESCO in Paris. A year later, in 1972, CRE opinion was asked for another governmental project, the setting up in Bucharest of CEPES (the *Centre Européen pour l'Enseignement Supérieur*), the forum where public university policies could be compared on both sides of the Iron Curtain. After reflection, the CRE decided to encourage the development of these new bodies even if CEPES could become a competitor in interuniversity cooperation, all the more strong that it would benefit from public support on which the CRE could not count as a non-governmental organisation (NGO). The new Centre, however, would have the capacity to stimulate official linkages with “socialist” academics and institutions with which CRE had more difficulties as a private association of university leaders. Thus, collaboration with CEPES represented a welcome way to keep alive the potential of joint activities in a wider Europe.

Simultaneously, preparations were progressing for the Second Conference of Education Ministers of the UNESCO European region – an area covering the European countries from Portugal to the Russian Federation of Soviet Republics as well as the US, Canada and Israel. The meeting was held in Bucharest from 26 November to 3 December 1973 and, under Soviet aegis, proposals were made for the creation of a government-sponsored organisation of universities in Europe of which Russian institutions could feel an integral part. The Yugoslav delegation, however, introduced in the final recommendation a sentence indicating that such a new association should be established “by using the existing structures”. The CRE, as such, was not mentioned but the Board and Committee decided that the only “existing structures” in European interuniversity cooperation was the CRE. Therefore, to follow the recommendation of the Ministers in Bucharest, it was proposed to revise the Statutes of the Association by discussing the modifications desired in particular by the non-member universities of Eastern Europe. One has to remember, however, that in the early seventies, among the 300 members of the CRE originating from 25 countries, there were universities from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia. Thus, for the CRE, opening further was in keeping with its traditional policy even if the association could regret that the pressure for change should be coming from the governments of the region. In September 1974, the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the CRE in Bologna, authorised the Committee to prepare such a revision and, at the close of their meeting, its participants convened again as a conference of equals with representatives of non-member institutions in Eastern Europe under the leadership of the Rector of Bologna, Professor Tito Carnacini; the conference decided to set up a Study Group in order to explore the potential of enlarged interuniversity cooperation throughout Europe. Based on its findings, the Study Group would meet the Commission appointed by the CRE Committee to discuss changes in the Statute. These negotiations were to be brought to a close at an extraordinary General Assembly of the CRE due to be held in Vienna on 7 June 1975, before the IAU General Assembly in Moscow in August, when the *Association of European Universities* would be set up as a contribution to the

Helsinki agreement that, later in the year, was to define the conditions of further *détente* in Europe – in particular as far as mobility and intellectual cooperation were concerned.

If governments were trying to bridge the gap dividing the two sides of Europe, they were also active at a sub-regional level, in particular in Western Europe. Thus, in the late sixties, CRE was also asked its opinion about the creation of a university institution under the aegis of the European Communities. CRE members, who represented many other countries apart from the six nations of the Common Market, were most reluctant at the creation of a supranational University, which could become a key reference in Europe for national or regional institutions of higher learning, a kind of model establishment that would attract the best minds and offer the most prestigious service, an institution which would be emulated all over Europe, in the EC and beyond – thus offering a focus for academic convergence, at least for the whole of Western Europe. The European dimension of teaching, however, was considered important as the continent needed citizens and intellectual élites aware of their common heritage: was a super-university indispensable to meet such an objective ? The CRE Committee claimed that some kind of research thinktank (very similar to the UNU at world level), open to graduates wishing to explore the European dimension of their topics of interest, would be sufficient. As this university position coincided more or less with the ideas prevailing in national authorities not ready to abandon their traditional prerogatives in the education field, the Commission in Brussels accepted to reduce the ambition of the first plans in order to create the *European University Institute* in Florence – in close cooperation with existing universities which often, for a seconded staff to the Badia Fiesolana.

A similar type of arguments was also used in the debate concerning the setting up of the *European Science Foundation*, at first considered as an organisation meant to emulate the National Science Foundation in the US: i.e., an institution that would be awarding grants and distributing funds in the countries linked to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, thus developing common criteria leading to common policies in the development of European research. CRE was again asked for its opinion. Mistrusting any supra-national institution, universities generally considered, like in the case of the Institute in Florence, that ESF role was to focus on the development of the European dimension of intellectual cooperation simply by coordinating the national councils for research so that their grant policies would converge into some kind of global understanding of the European value added by cross-border cooperation in research activities.

Thus, in the history of CRE, governments were taking the initiative again: they had done so in the early fifties to engage institutions in academic cooperation; this had led to the first meeting of rectors in 1955 and to the creation of the association in 1959. During most of the 1960's, efforts had been made to assert the *collective autonomy* of academic institutions vis-à-vis the governments, for instance by becoming the counterweight to governmental representation in the CHER at the Council of Europe. The 1968 disruptions proved how weak this attempt had been at building a sense of academic community in Europe. When CRE decided in 1969 to sever the institutional links existing with Strasbourg, it represented a courageous initiative as it forced on the universities the need for a commonality of purpose at a time of fragmentation and growing diversification of higher education. But destabilisation had touched the association too and the European credibility of the organisation was being challenged by the difficulties met to welcome

new members in the Eastern part of the continent. In other words, CRE was not strong enough as a NGO to live up to its political ambitions. As a result, Greater Europe, instead of consolidating the European Rectors' Conference, evoked the creation of competing groups, the CEPES as part of UNESCO, on one side, the new association asked for by the Ministers of Education of the European region, on the other. Indeed, governments could impose their agenda because the CRE had not reached a level of development – and of internal consensus - making it strong enough to face on its own terms the difficult requests emanating from public authorities. Especially at the beginning of the seventies, when higher education budgets, partly because of the 1973 oil crisis, were being cut everywhere despite growing numbers of students, leaving institutions of higher learning all the more dependent on their national governments. As a result, the CRE had to be reactive rather than pro-active; this was the gist of the debate in Bologna in 1974 : how to maintain specificity while accepting the agenda of the Ministers' meeting in Bucharest to organise *détente* their way ?

In such a context, the 1975 extraordinary General Assembly could only widen the gap between those members (mainly from Mediterranean Europe and partly from Germany), convinced that changed attitudes in communist countries and parties were allowing for renewed and trustworthy cooperation between all parts of Europe – a political bet – and those members (mainly in North Western and Northern Europe) reluctant to indulge in collaborations closely supervised by governments. The nine months between the Bologna meeting and the Vienna Assembly were not sufficient to bridge such a gap, all the more so as the Study group was comprised of those members – and non-members – who were committed to facilitating the inclusion of universities not yet affiliated to the CRE. The debate in Vienna centered on the continuity of the CRE as an organisation in the new *Association of European Universities* to be constituted in Moscow two months later. Members of the Study group had come to the conclusion that those members joining the Association in Moscow could consider the organisation as new from their point of view, the old CRE members could consider that the Association of European Universities, of which they were becoming automatic members, was indeed the legal successor of the CRE. Such an ambiguity was refused in Vienna and when it became clear that the need for legal continuity reflected the majority opinion, the supporters of the compromise left the meeting, thus making impossible any decision for lack of a quorum. The remaining participants then voted a resolution asking the Board to “ensure renewed negotiations with our partners in Eastern Europe”. As a result, the Russian universities broke all ties with the CRE while the Rumanian, Czechoslovakian and Hungarian members resigned. The six member universities from Poland, however, became dormant members. On the eve of the *Solidarnosc* movement, i.e., in the late seventies, they paid all their fees in arrears, thus indicating that there had not been any interruption in their belonging to the CRE since 1975. As for the universities in Yugoslavia, those which had not yet asked for CRE membership did so.

In other words, the question *What is Europe?* had been answered inconclusively if one remembers the hopes for extension that had been expressed in 1969. Six years later, the CRE was more western European than ever before and had not turned into an early proponent of the *compromesso storico*. Its membership covered the countries members of the Council of Europe, as before, but the *lien privilégié* with the CHER had been lost. In short, a failure for all concerned

as most members agreed on the need for wider representation even if they differed on the way to reach this goal. In 1979, after four years of consolidation based on the internal reinforcement of basic activities, the Helsinki General Assembly confirmed the choice remained implicit in Vienna by electing for President Gerrit Vossers, the Rector of the University of Eindhoven, one of the proponents of CRE continuity against François Luchaire, President of Paris I, who had been a key member of the Study group negotiating the metamorphosis of the CRE into an Association of European Universities. To stress the point that the opening - or not - of the CRE to enlarged membership reflected a deeper rift in Western society concerning the role of the Communists in Europe, it is to be noted that François Luchaire, in 1973, had signed the *Programme commun*, on behalf of the radical party in France (*radicaux de gauche*), a document that brought the French communist party into the democratic process that led in 1981 to the election of François Mitterrand, the leader of the Socialist Party.

### **From academic cooperation to mobility**

From 1955 to 1975, academic cooperation had developed mainly at institutional level, the leaders of the universities carrying the burden of international relations, expressed in bi-lateral agreements spelling the possible extent of cooperation between their own establishment and its foreign counterpart. Multilateral collaboration existed through international organisations, such as IAU or the CRE, but rarely implied university members other than the rectors, presidents or vice-chancellors. UDUAL, in Latin America, another regional organisation, had already developed deans networks so that those responsible for teaching and research in a discipline would meet regularly to compare notes and discuss potential cooperation. Because of its pan-European ambitions and the East-West divide, however, such a development was impossible in Europe as a region. This was recognised early as the CRE was clearly thought of as one group of leaders, meeting as persons because of common functions rather than as delegates of their universities. Student unrest in 1968 proved that other members in the institution could claim representation for its present needs and future development: indeed, hierarchies went toppling down after 1968 while new structures of governance and democratic participation were set in place. As mentioned earlier, such changes called for a new generation of leaders, people much more involved in institutional operations than their predecessors. Thus, in Vienna, the proposed change of name of the CRE (a club of rectors) into the Association of European Universities (a network of institutions) proved no real bone of contention – even if, because of the meeting inconclusiveness, the new name became law in 1989 only.

By 1975, the universities had integrated the changes needed for the mass higher education called for by the equalitarian requirements of 1968; they had also learned to cope with changed teaching requirements while receiving less support per student: this had contributed to the need for new decision-making structures as well as the growth of new institutions that were competing with older universities. Indeed, the academic landscape had changed fully. As a result, the second phase of the development of CRE as an organisation (in fact, until the early nineties) was very much built on meeting the needs of the leaders as heads of universities – in terms of management, strategies and the dilemmas of institutional development. On the basis of such operational growth, university autonomy could be claimed vis-à-vis subsidising governments and, in the

association, collective autonomy could be re-inforced so that, in the long run, the re-integration in the European academic community of Central and Eastern European partners would be seen as normal – universities as famous as Prague, Halle, Leipzig, Budapest, Pecs, Cluj, Cracow, Warsaw, Vilnius or Tartu having all played key historical roles – similar to that of Western institutions - in giving their countries cultural references making them full members of the European family of nations. This would be all the more natural that they also would have to answer growing student demand and face budgetary marginalisation in state appropriation.

Thus, in the seventies, the emphasis on institutional building was first translated into university to university collaboration, moving slowly from central management agreements to departmental joint ventures.

At a lesser degree, that was also true for Eastern universities. In so far as nationalist references were undermining internationalist claims for a “socialist” Europe, there were indeed possibilities for real academic cooperation linking institution to institution. This would take ten to fifteen years, however, even if, already in May 1976, the Rector of Trieste and the Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities had invited – with CRE’s blessing – universities from both sides of the East-West divide to discuss the impact of the Helsinki agreement on development studies, certainly an area of interest for possible cooperation. The results of that “autonomous” meeting were presented at the 1977 bi-annual conference of the CRE organised in Athens, which centered on a consultation of the members on how to improve collaboration – with members and non-members - at all levels of institutional development. As a whole, they did not feel much concerned ...

These efforts had been reported to the *Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe* when the CSCE met in Belgrade in 1977 to take stock of the implementation of the 1975 recommendations made in Helsinki. In 1978, the Rector of Warsaw University repeated the invitation made at Trieste and offered a platform for the discussion of the impact of the Helsinki agreement on environmental problems and higher education. To reaffirm the convergence of the spirit of the 1975 agreement with the open door policy of the CRE, the organisation also accepted the invitation to organise in 1979 its 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in the capital of Finland.

In other words, after 1975, institutions had to start a process of re-discovery of the other, also in Western Europe where an important rift between North and South had become apparent. At first, the CRE kept a low profile - also because of financial difficulties born out of the costs of the Vienna Assembly and its preparation. However, it kept organising the bi-annual conferences that brought together rectors from several countries in order to compare common problems from their “non-specialist” viewpoint, each session being facilitated by a member. This showed the multiplicity of experiences existing in Europe as far as institutional development was concerned. The discussion also called for some reflection on the commonality of the situations prevailing in various parts of the continent if European trends were to be made apparent. This CRE turning in on internal academic problems was only slightly compensated by participation in external discussions held by IAU, the CHER or UNESCO. There was also contribution from members in the early development of the *Joint Study Programmes* (JSP), organised by the Institute of Education of the European Cultural Foundation in Paris, programmes that were experimenting the ideas that were to become central to the ERASMUS programme launched by the Commission in

the second half of the eighties. Moving from the level of institutional responsibility, JSP's were indeed entering the universities at the level of the departments that ensure the teaching of various disciplines whose international and multilateral *rapprochement* was being encouraged. This was to prove the main booster of academic cooperation in the late eighties and the nineties. In the late seventies, their future impact was not apparent yet and, in the CRE, work still concentrated on the global institutional responsibility of the academic leader for the university's place in society.

If, from 1975 to 1979, the CRE licked its wounds, from 1979 to 1984, under President Vossers, it became *pro-active* again. The 7<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Helsinki had asked "to increase the direct involvement of members in analytical processes by stressing, in particular, the regional and sectorial dimensions of universities as institutions". Next to the forum represented by the bi-annual conferences, smaller *seminars* were organised to study daily problems of management, thus making participating university leaders aware of the convergences and divergences characterising European university policies. Five management seminars for newly appointed executive heads were thus offered during the quinquennium in conjunction with the IMHE programme of the OECD, a new partner for the CRE. Another four meetings were organised in conjunction with national rectors' conferences wishing to give an international perspective to a burning issue at the fore in their country. CRE was setting up the European visiting team while the national conference was organising the meeting with its members. Thus, in 1981, at La Rabida, in Spain, the problems of university autonomy, as dealt with by the new university law, were set in the context of practices prevailing in other countries of the continent. The same topic was discussed a few months later with the universities of Turkey where important changes in the law were also being planned. In 1983, regionalisation at a time of economic recession was the subject of yet another meeting with the Spanish rectors, this time in Cordoba while, in the Autumn at Dubrovnik, the rectors of Yugoslavia asked their university management system to be compared with academic decision-making in other European institutional settings.

In all these sessions, the underlying motive was the *new identity* of the university in a mass higher education system. Moreover, could the universities have a common European specificity in a changed social context ? The Board, in 1981, set up a *consortium of researchers* to answer that question. Seconded by member universities, they embarked on an interdisciplinary enquiry to set the present situation in its historical context: after all, it was not the first time that academic institutions had to transform in order to adapt to new social conditions. As a result, these experts proposed to analyse the evolution of the universities' social function. In 1984, for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the association, CRE presented its members with a *Historical compendium of the European universities*. This represented the preliminary stage of a much more ambitious *History of the University in Europe*, a four volume work using similar analytical grids to describe the evolution of the university in European society during the late Middle Ages, the Early Modern period (until the French revolution), the industrialisation and colonial period (until World War II), and the post-war years. Although with much delay, the first three volumes have reached publication stage at Cambridge University Press – while German, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Chinese translations are being made. The last volume is still in preparation. The hope of the Committee in the early eighties was to develop a model of interuniversity co-operation in which

the CRE would be the catalyst of new ideas, the sponsor and coordinator of studies led with the help of members and the support of external funding agencies.

In a way, the universities were learning how to “read each other’s context” and to recognise the problems of sister institutions while becoming aware of their own specificity. Institutions were not required to change in function of international developments, simply to become aware of their place in the system of higher education in Europe. CRE’s role was that of a *broker* bringing partners together without taking sides. This was certainly a necessary first step in the field of international relations – then, as it is now. It justified any position taken by the association as a whole, even if such papers tended to remain rather superficial as long as the members did not go into converging changes expressing the European commonality of their varying situations. In February 1980, in Hamburg, the CSCE organised a *Scientific Forum* where the CRE presented such a memorandum on the conditions of international research development. A few months later, in June, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference of the Education Ministers of the UNESCO European region met in Sofia where they were presented with the CRE account of the East/West negotiations engaged by universities since the 1973 recommendation in Bucharest. In paragraph 94 of their final report, the Ministers accepted the *status quo* and indicated that any wider participation of universities in European integration should use the channel of the CRE to move forward as quickly as possible.

What could have appeared as a victory for the proponents of continuity, however, was difficult to turn into enlarged CRE membership of Eastern universities. A special meeting of the Board had been convened in Geneva in June 1981 to explore new forms of collaboration; rectors of the universities in the capital cities of countries not yet represented in the association had been formally invited. As none answered positively, the meeting had to be postponed while links were kept through visits to regional rectors’ conferences, like the Balkanic one, and through attendance of the Dubrovnik seminar, *Univerzitet Danas*, or participation in the work of CEPES.

The difficulty to move forward was certainly increased by the current political situation at the time. One of the indirect results of the Helsinki agreement had been the development of the *Solidarnosc* movement in Poland that led in 1981 to a union supported government that was working for the democratic and economic transformation of the country. New laws were voted, in particular in the field of higher education. Would the example of Poland be followed in other parts of “socialist” Europe or would the transformation be stopped – like in Prague in 1969 - before it proved too dangerous for the system as a whole East of the Iron Curtain ? When General Jaruzelski seized power in 1982 and tried to turn around the achievements of *Solidarnosc*, CRE immediately asked members to reinforce their linkages with Polish universities while the President and Vice-President visited the Universities of Warsaw and Cracow to indicate clearly their support of the democratic organisation of higher education. In the event, the law was not replaced even if it was interpreted in a restricted way and if some of the leading proponents of reform were kept under house arrest for a few years. In the West, the 1981 government of François Mitterrand included Communist Ministers but, in Italy, with the assassination of Aldo Moro in 1978 and the train attack at Bologna station in 1980, the Red Brigades had been putting in jeopardy all attempts at power sharing between Christian Democrats and Communists. In brief, the political

situation was too volatile in Europe to allow for institutional cooperation between universities from the two sides of the continent.

Then, on the basis of contacts made at the IAU - on the Board of which CRE was represented as an associate member - new collaborations were extended to other partners, the American Council of Education, in Washington, the Inter-American Organisation of Universities in Québec, or the UDUAL, in Mexico, whose President and a delegation of seven Latin American rectors met the CRE Board for a three-day session in Munich in 1983, on the eve of the IAU mid-term conference. Was not Latin America one of the world regions least known to non-Iberian universities in Europe but, also, one of the most "European" in terms of academic organisation and culture ? Would not such commonality justify a programme of cooperation open to members of the two associations ? The idea would need another four years to be realised. In Europe, CRE co-sponsored conferences open to its members such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress for Engineers' Continuing Education organised by SEFI (the *Société européenne pour la formation des ingénieurs*), or took an active part in the evaluation meeting of the *Joint Study Programmes* (Brussels, November 1985?) that gave birth to the ERASMUS programme in 1987. The increasing presence of the Commission in higher education – mainly to make possible the freedom of movement of workers and professionals required by the Treaty of Rome – led the Committee members representing Community countries in the CRE to set up their own caucus to discuss European Commission matters, the *Liaison Committee* that was to become in 1995 the *Confederation of EU rectors' conferences* after having taken distance from the CRE, partly with the support of the Commission's Taskforce for Education which needed a counterpart in "smaller Europe" to consult on EC proposals in the field of higher education. To maintain a wider understanding of Europe, however, the CRE was also encouraging regular relations with the national rectors' conferences that were members of its Committee: the WRK (the *Westdeutsche Rektorenkonferenz*) had already organised in earlier years meetings of the secretaries of national conferences in Lindau, South of Germany. The idea was revived and CRE sponsored meetings held in 1979, 1980, 1983 and 1984 to monitor the potential of convergence in higher education policies throughout Europe. Thus, in a continent officially divided into two parts still, academic cooperation, to become credible, had to distance itself from its East/West "obsession", on one side, links to socialist countries becoming relative to university cooperation with the rest of the world, and, on the other, to anchor its European development in the similarities of national transformations in higher education – be they encouraged by the European Commission or the governments of the various countries on the continent.

### **Hatching a European academic community : from 1984 to 1989**

In Athens, the 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly elected as President, Carmine Romanzi, the Rector of the University of Genoa. An Italian war hero, a microbiologist of high repute in his country, an offspring of a family of university teachers going back to the early years of the Universities of Bologna and Naples, a long time rector of his University and the politically well-connected President of the Italian Rectors' Conference, he was embodying the balance *between tradition and progress* - the theme adopted by the Committee for the quinquennium. His glorious past was no reason for procrastination but, on the contrary, an obligation to move, adapt and change. If Gerrit

Vossers, his Dutch predecessor, had presided over the CRE developing as a *broker* between its members and its partners, recognising each other's existence, the new President would take the organisation one step further and develop its *mediating* role. After a period of "reading each other's situation", members would be invited to facilitate each other's development through common activities – thus, hatching a sense of common responsibility that would make possible belonging to the same cultural community, a community where universities are the locus of European integration.

This was the meaning of the festivities organised in 1988 for the 9<sup>th</sup> centenary of the University of Bologna, also the *Alma Mater* of the Universities of Europe. Following Giosuè Carducci's lead – the poet and professor of Italian literature who master-minded the 8<sup>th</sup> centenary celebrations around the role of universities as the common institution of Italian unity -, the universities were to be recognised a century later as the institutions common to all countries in the region, indeed the crucible of Europe in the making. With support coming mainly from the Italian government and of Fiat, Fabio Roversi-Monaco, the Rector of the University of Bologna, and Giuseppe Caputo, his advisor, proposed a full programme of activities over more than a year, refurbishing and opening academic buildings, organising scores of scientific meetings, granting honorary doctorates not only to famous scientists but also to political figureheads of the continent - from the Pope to Mikhail Gorbachev. The idea was to re-affirm the political function of the university in the intellectual development of society – the leaders of the various governments of Europe recognising the critical role of academia in the shaping of the ideas that led to the integration of the different cultures of the continent into a harmonious European whole. Hence, the proposal to draft a document of reference on the universities' European identity, the *Magna Charta Universitatum* written under the aegis of the CRE, its President being the first signatory of the document on 18 September 1988 during the crowning ceremony of the centenary celebrations. This festive act involved some 430 university rectors from all over Europe, West and East (Russia included) – and from other parts of the world too – who solemnly signed the Charter while the traditional partners of academia were witnessing this symbolic assertion of university autonomy and academic freedom, the authorities being represented by the President of the Italian Republic, several Ministers, a host of Ambassadors as well as by Church prelates and the City leaders.

For the CRE, the involvement in the Bologna centenary was but a part, although essential, of a full programme of activities analysing the constructive tension born out of the university polarisation between tradition and progress : academic excellence, new information technologies, university/industry relations, internationalisation, academic leaders as agents of change were all topics discussed during the quinquennium. As a result, in October 1985, the Committee asked governments to invest in communication networks as the support of interuniversity cooperation and, a year later, pressed European authorities to launch the ERASMUS programme of academic mobility and to by-pass last minute objections. By then, CRE members, made aware of comparable needs, could imagine areas of commonality in actions leading to the further development of their shared identity. Acting as a facilitator pointing to fields of potential collaboration, the CRE explored the feasibility of various programmes which were proposed to the attention of members :

- In 1985, following the Cordoba seminar of 1983 on regional institutions of higher education, a series of seminars were organised on the *survival conditions of newly created universities* : six institutions acted as a core group and invited another twenty to discuss specific aspects of their development, the basis for a March 1986 report to all members entitled “From infancy to maturity: creating a university”.
- In October 1986, the Madrid General conference - opened to all members - discussed the universities’ links to society, in particular to industry, with the help of the former Research Minister in France, Hubert Curien, but also of top managers from ICI, IBM-Europe, Hewlett-Packard, Olivetti or Telefonica. In 1987, the Committee, taking account of the new links set up with leading manufacturers in communication technologies, decided that CRE would become one of the founding members of the *Euro-PACE programme*, proposing advanced continuing education for industry, a programme steered by a Directing group led by Hubert Curien and where Gerrit Vossers, the CRE former President was representing the university world next to a delegate from SEFI, the other eleven members representing as many leading industrial firms in Europe. Several of these industrialists were also members of the *European Roundtable of Industrialists* (ERT), an association created by Per Gyllenhammar, the then President of Volvo in Sweden. The ERT working group on education was chaired by the President of Nokia, Kari Kairamo, who organised in September 1987 an exploratory meeting in Helsinki with a delegation of the Committee. This led to the creation of a *CRE/ERT University/Industry Forum* that was launched in Bologna on 16 September 1988 with a keynote on industry’s expectations of universities by Giovanni Agnelli, Fiat. The Forum first met in February 1989 in London and then in July in Paris, bringing together a small group of ten to twelve university and industry leaders under the presidency of the CRE Vice-President, Professor Hinrich Seidel, from the University of Hannover. On the ERT side, Kari Kairamo, from Nokia, had been replaced by Olivier Lecerf, the President of Lafarge-Coppée. The group decided to focus activities on adult education, a key area for university /industry cooperation in Europe: the Forum studies were to lead to common positions to be presented to the European Community and to national governments.
- In November 1986, in Ravello, South Italy, at the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fulbright Programme, the CRE co-sponsored with the University of Salerno a conference where 12 representatives of US and Canadian university associations joined as many delegates from European universities to discuss how to develop a *transatlantic dialogue* at a time when American interest was moving away from Europe to other world partners, Japan in particular. Little came out of this meeting but, in 1987, the Vice-President of the American Council of Education (ACE) joined the Hamburg seminar for newly appointed executive heads and picked up the project so that, in October 1989, a new session of the transatlantic dialogue, under CRE /ACE sponsorship, was organised in Hartford, Connecticut, the first of a series of meetings organised every two years in alternation with Europe and America.
- In early April 1987, following new discussions with UDUAL members at the 1985 IAU General Assembly in Los Angeles, some 30 European and Latin American rectors met in Buenos Aires to define the area of their possible cooperation, e.g. university management and institutional development – burning issues for several countries in Latin America that had

recently returned to democratic structures of government, like Argentina, where the results of the discussions were presented to the newly elected president of the Republic, Raul Alfonsin. The debate had been facilitated by a former Minister of Education in Spain, then professor at the Autonomous University of Madrid, Federico Mayor Zaragoza – who was to become the next Director General of UNESCO where he proved always supportive of the new programme, which became to be known as the *Columbus programme*. The programme had been presented also to Jacques Delors in Brussels by the then president of the Liaison Committee of the Rectors' conferences of the Community, Bart de Schutter, who was told in July 1987 that the Commission would support the programme – a promise made true in 1989 when 435'000 ECUs were set aside in Brussels for two years of activities with Latin American universities. Meanwhile, meetings in Campinas, Brazil (April 1988), Cascais, Portugal (July 1988), and Salamanca, Spain (December 1988), had focused activities of cooperation on *institutional evaluation in the field of teaching* and on *university/industry relations in economic development*.

- In Madrid, October 1986, and Aix, April 1987, first contacts were established with the People's Republic of China through their delegate at UNESCO in Paris. This led, in October 1987, to the visit in Europe of six Presidents of Chinese universities – who could discuss cooperation with CRE member institutions in an special session of the Committee in Ghent. In June 1988, the CRE was represented by the WRK Secretary General at a seminar in Beijing discussing the reforms of higher education proposed by the government in China. However, following the Tien-Anmen repression of student unrest in 1989, the CRE suspended that developing linkage and expressed its strong disapproval of the government's crackdown on leaders of higher education in China.

These were all new areas of concern for the CRE. The association tried to act as a stimulus for international cooperation and academic exchange in fields of growing interest for member universities: ICT, university/ industry relations, or the presence of Europe in the world at large. The on-going concern for East/West linkages remained a high priority, however, and, thanks to CEPES, it was possible to organise in April 1985, following the 28<sup>th</sup> bi-annual conference of the CRE in Vienna, a meeting of the Board in Budapest with delegates of non-member and member universities from Eastern Europe. Participants reiterated the importance for their institutions to increase contacts between the two sides of Europe. Two months later, in June, the President visited Sofia and met the leaders of Bulgarian universities – most of whom he saw again in Los Angeles with representatives of Soviet and East German institutions, at the IAU General Conference of August 1985. There were clear signs that the modalities of cooperation in higher education were being reappraised in the Soviet Union, as the presence of Russian universities in Bologna in 1988 was to indicate. Indeed, in February 1987, a conference of COMECON universities in Moscow had decided to extend the possibilities for institutional cooperation with Western universities, as part of the *perestroika* policy defended by Mikhail Gorbachev. On that basis, the rectors of the universities in capital cities of socialist Europe had asked their Polish colleagues – still members of the CRE – to organise in Warsaw a meeting on the model of the CRE bi-annual conferences. To follow up on this request, the President and the Deputy Secretary General of CRE made in May 1987 an official visit to Poland and were received by the

Universities of Warsaw and Cracow to lay down the basis of the proposed conference with leaders of Eastern universities. It was held in Warsaw from 15 to 18 June 1988 and discussed *The university as a crucible of European culture*. The more than 90 participants – 30 representing universities from non-member countries (only Romania and Albania were missing) – insisted on their belonging to a common European culture that subsumed ideological differences and made academic cooperation a necessity. The idea was to launch a programme for East/west cooperation in environmental sciences, which became the *Copernicus programme*, a tribute to the Polish hosts of the meeting.

To pursue the matter, after the the Bologna centennial festivities where rectors of most Eastern countries signed *the Magna Charta Universitatum*, the President and the Secretary general visited in October Hungary and Bulgaria – where Professor Romanzi was invited for a working dinner by Todor Jivkov, the then President of the Republic. In January 1989, both met for a working lunch in Geneva the Soviet Minister of Education, Guennadi Yagodine, who was attending the International Conference of Education. Earlier, in September, at the time of the Bologna festivities, the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Education Ministers of the UNESCO European region had met in Paris and received a memorandum of Prof. Romanzi and Prof. Bialkowski, the Rector of the University of Warsaw, who were the official hosts of the ground-breaking June meeting. This document outlined the changes since 1973 and asked for the support of the Copernicus programme. To follow on this demand, the Director general of UNESCO, on 14 November 1988, invited the Deputy Secretary General to a meeting at the Paris headquarters gathering officers of the agency dealing with environmental matters to see how universities could be involved in the discussions concerning the future of the planet in ecological terms. This contact led to a seminar involving member universities and experts, from UNESCO and other organisations, organised at the invitation of the University of Catania, Sicily, in April 1989. There, the pilot phase of the Copernicus programme was outlined, the focus being laid on law, health and economics as normative disciplines in environmental discussions, the development of the programme being given priority in the Baltic and Danubian basins – areas where Eastern and Western Europe do meet. Finally, in September 1989, the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly welcomed some 25 new members from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the Soviet Union, thus bringing to a close the saga that had begun in the early seventies.

The broker's role, developed earlier, did not disappear with the development of the mediator's function of the CRE during that period. Thus, the seminars for newly appointed executive heads were organised on a yearly basis with OECD support while the editorial board of History project had regular sessions to plan the different volumes: it also organised in Eichstätt, in Bavaria, in September 1985 a seminar bringing together researchers ready to explore a domain not yet well documented, *The Church, the State and the University in the early modern period*. The word "brokerage" can also sum up the effort made to develop a network of 20 university press editors, from East and West, the so-called *Viterbo group*, as the University of Tuscia hosted its first session in November 1987. Could they help each other in their reporting of European university affairs ? There was clearly space for cooperation based on mutual trust and the group met again in Bologna in 1988 and in Durham in 1989.

The strengthening of university cooperation witnessed from 1984 to 1989 was paralleled in the European Community – that comprised 12 member countries after Spain and Portugal joined in 1996 – by the *Single Act* proposed by Jacques Delors in 1985: a new stage was to be reached by 1992, the Community evolving into a Union. In fact the Community was asking its members to move from common projects, based on comparable approaches, to the compatibility of their decisions, i.e., to a full commitment to an integrated Europe. In other words, Europe, from being a marginal element in national affairs would become central to the development of all participating countries. By the early nineties, would the world of higher education and research, reach this new level of cooperation, “compatibility” – the normal consequence of wide “readability” and of well tuned “comparability” ?

### **Opportunities gained, references lost**

At the end of the Durham Assembly, the CRE seemed to have bridged the East/West divide and to be ready for the further consolidation of its members’ European sense of identity. Programmes like Columbus, the Forum or Copernicus were addressing current problems of the universities’ scientific and institutional development while offering discussion forums where to compare management practices and to experiment new modalities of action. The statute had been modified to ensure that the CRE Committee would become a key forum for the universities of Europe when bringing international affairs at the core of their development. Indeed, projects had been developed and new cooperative activities initiated.

However, with the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, the organisation was entering a zone of deep political and social turbulence full of opportunities and dangers, like most of its partners and stakeholders in Europe – if not in the world at large. How would the association adapt to the new situation ? Indeed, the polarisation of European politics had suddenly disappeared, sweeping away more than forty years of intellectual habits, political reflexes and cultural prejudices based on manichean fears of the other “side”. Greater Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, had become a reality but turning it into a reality proved more difficult than ever, for its sheer size opened the way to regional differentiation while, at its centre, reunified Germany had to learn a new role: become the axis of regional cooperation rather than its margin. Loyalties, national or regional, started shifting; old identities reappeared linked to long forgotten cultural myths. In fact, at a time of opening frontiers and lowering borders, Europe, rather than unite, fragmented into smaller and smaller pieces while differences in wealth – between countries, regions and social groups – were fast becoming apparent. Considering the cost of economical upgrade and social transformation in the East, solidarity was less and less of an accepted political mode and the easy solution seemed to lie in some kind of 19<sup>th</sup> century *laissez faire*. This meant focusing on the individual as the prime bearer of the future of the continent, thus reducing the time horizon for decisions to personal urgency. In a few years, Europe moved from grand ideals to the short-sightedness of precariousness, a world without common references, a society leaving groups of interest at each other’s throat, not only in former Yugoslavia but also in Western societies where crime and insecurity were extending - at least in the mind of the citizens. In such a moving context, where to find opportunities for rebuilding confidence and commonality of purpose, the ingredients of social efficiency? Was subsidiarity enough to bring decisions close to citizens in need of trust or

should new modes of concertation be invented to recover consensus and shared references? References ... but what for, for which society – in the long term?

Should not the university be the traditional centre of the reintegration of a society on the loose? Indeed, as a network of knowledge institutions, universities should prove that cooperation is possible in a European continent where work and life conditions are more and more dissimilar. Beyond the ambiguities of choice dictated by the loss of social references, the CRE, therefore, could develop the projects and programmes set up earlier and emphasise in their *potential for integration* – the key word in a society at a loss. Building on the past, this meant a three-pronged approach: to integrate in the association the universities from Eastern and Central Europe; to integrate the policies of European academic cooperation, and to integrate member institutions in the wider Atlantic context of collaborations with North and South America. In all cases, interinstitutional networks would be stressed – as they allow for flexibility and direct involvement with the problem at hand, thus representing a possible key to stability in a context of turbulence. The commitment to Europe which seemed reasonable in Durham would therefore need to become a *commitment to other Europeans*, people and institutions, if some social order were to be found again in continental affairs. Such a social order was experimented by various networks of institutions and people focusing on areas of shared concerns, commonality of identities or joint projects development. When successful, these networks institutionalised into associations rather than disappear once their initial objectives had been met, thus giving birth to a crowd of new actors in the field of higher education in Europe. CRE, one of the older players, was sought as a partner by several of those new organisations; but, to stay credible, it also had to strengthen its own programme and profile.

In August 1990, at the IAU General Assembly in Helsinki, the need for international cooperation among Eastern and Central European universities was thoroughly discussed in the wings of the sessions and ideas exchanged about the adaptation to the new context of Community programmes like ERASMUS, COMETT or LEONARDO. Collaboration in structured networks of institutions focusing for a few years on specific concerns seemed the only way to cope with the many different problems and ambitions of former “socialist” universities. Partners representing university associations, like the CRE, national cooperation agencies, like DAAD and NUFFIC, and thinktanks for European affairs, like the Institute for Education and Social Policy in Paris, then decided to set up a consortium and propose to the Commission the management of what was being discussed as the new TEMPUS programme. A bid which was won in 1991.

To mark this new dimension of European cooperation, in May 1991, the CRE organised its Spring meeting in what was still Leningrad. Participants discussed the management of quality in higher education when excellence becomes relative in a totally diversified world of higher education. In February 1993, to follow up on this commitment to the universities of the other Europe, CRE convened with the University of Saint Petersburg a seminar for CIS political and academic leaders interested in the extension of the TEMPUS programme to the Republics of the former Soviet Union – the future TEMPUS-Tacis, another set of varied networks of cooperation between institutions. To strengthen its activities, the association also needed the backing of more permanent groupings of universities. That is why, in March 1990, CRE sponsored the creation in Gdansk of the *Conference of Baltic University Rectors*, somewhat on the model of the already

existing *Conference of Danubian Rectors*, both associations becoming key partners in the development of the Copernicus programme. The Secretary General and his Deputy were also involved in the early development of the Central European University in Prague and, in 1993, CRE and ACE were asked by the Soros Foundation, the main supporter of the CEU, to make a study on the problems of university management in Russia.

In other parts of Europe, networks had also become central features of academic cooperation, thanks to the development of the mobility programmes of the European Community, all based on multilateral consortia of universities. The ERASMUS, COMETT and LEONARDO programmes had also indirect networking effects: to take advantage of EU support, many universities developed associative groupings, built around some common features (type or size of institutions, location or thematic profile, for instance). Thus were first born the Coimbra group – very much in conjunction with the Bologna 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary -, and then the Santander, Compostela, Utrecht or UNICA networks, to name but a few. These groups of some thirty to forty institutions were trying to develop a shared European profile through common activities, joint studies and convergent projects. Other groups, some already in existence, found their *raison-d'être* in dealing with specific aspects of academic cooperation in Europe. These “thematic” networks were interested in distance education (EDEN and EADTU) or in continuing education (EUCEN) and were based on institutional members while, in international education (EAIE), in research on higher education (CHER and EAIR) or in university administration (HUMANE), the participants were individual members, mainly officers in higher education institutions discovering common professional interests with a European dimension. They all developed as full organisations during the nineties.

Most of their institutional members were also affiliated to the CRE, whose remit was wider and perhaps less operational in terms of professional development. CRE had recognised their importance in the Europeanisation process of academic institutions and started to cooperate on specific projects, for instance with the Coimbra group on ICT. It also co-sponsored the 1993 conference of the International Roundtable on Counselling when, in Bordeaux, it discussed how to improve advisory services for students. It joined in 1993 the advisory council of ACA, the Academic Cooperation Association just set up between national agencies for university cooperation – most of which had been partners of CRE in the consortium for the development of the TEMPUS programme. It blessed the creation in 1991 in Amsterdam of EAIE, the European Association for International Education, and took regular part in its activities. It collaborated with EUCEN, the European Universities Continuing Education Network, and took part in the scientific council of its thematic network, THENUCE, when it was created in 1996. It developed joint projects with the Centre for the Strategic Management of Universities (ESMU), for instance on *The European cohesion of universities* North and South of the continent. In 1994, the Secretary General joined the Administrative Board of ESMU – which, with ACA, also manages the ERASMUS and then the SOCRATES programmes for the European Commission. CRE also called on the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER) to draw on its expertise in higher education for its own studies and programmes. With ERT, the *University /Industry Forum* published in 1992 a report on continuous education, in 1993 a study of the europeanisation of management training and, in 1994, recommendations for the European Commission on the

reshaping of education in Europe. In June 1992, the European Forum joined with the US Business/Higher Education Forum to organise in Brussels a large transatlantic conference on “Fortress Europe” attended by scores of industrial leaders and university officials interested in the implementation of the Single Act and the Maastricht Treaty. Indeed, in the shifting landscape of European politics, the development of the European Union looked like one of the rare fixed landmarks people could refer to – its attractiveness translating into the affiliation in 1995 of Austria, Finland and Sweden, thus bringing the Community to 15 members. The need for close cooperation on technical dossiers grew as a counterweight to the increasing inability of all participating countries to unite on a common understanding of an integrated political organisation of the region.

In other words, the integration was built on the euro-compatibility of instruments whose use required a sense of commonality which was not often present in countries still recognising each other's existence rather than adapting to each other's needs – at least at the level of the people. Progress depended much more on the goodwill of Parliaments than on the conviction of citizens – the Danes refusing the Maastricht Treaty in June 1992 and the French accepting it by a most narrow margin (51.01%) in September. The Commission in Brussels multiplied initiatives in many areas under various instrumental pretexts rather than showing the flag and calling for integration as a political necessity. The federation of the continent was progressing under the cloak of a confederation of nations, allowing Eurosceptics to point to the Eurocrats' supposed hidden agendas whose completion was presented as non democratic. Would the system grind to a halt, especially if several new countries were joining the process, mainly from former “socialist Europe”? Could EU countries impose the “acquis communautaire” in a strict way to candidates while, at the same time, hesitate on the depth and strength of the federation process for themselves? Had Europe, as a counterforce to international ideals, lost impetus with the collapse of communism? Or would it survive only as the tool of “little Europeans” (similar to the 19<sup>th</sup> century “little Englanders”) reluctant to adopt a world role based on the actual strength of the largest market of free moving goods, people and capital in the global economy?

Universities in the nineties were absorbed by the growing scale of student exchange, in particular by the success of the ERASMUS programme, the flagship of European co-operation which involved participants by the thousands. The integration capacity of the programme was based on the commitment of professors ready to compare their courses with those of colleagues in other countries and to adapt teaching so that home and guest students would develop a sense of common value – which was translated into the European Credit Transfer System. This success induced the Commission to publish in the Autumn of 1991 a *Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community*, thus launching a vast consultation on the future of academic cooperation in Europe, especially after the Maastricht Treaty would give the Commission a few rights to work on educational matters. The CRE Committee decided to prepare with the *Liaison Committee* of EU national rectors' conferences a joint answer and, after members had been consulted and recommendations discussed, conclusions were forwarded to the EU Education Task Force in November 1992 supporting, in general, an increase in co-operative activities. Advice was also given at the time on requests from the Commission on network development, support strategies for Central and Eastern European universities, about international staff

mobility or the internationalisation of university leadership in teaching and research. With Professor Antonio Ruberti, the Vice-President of the Commission, the two organisations kept regular contacts - in 1993 (in Aalborg) and in 1994 (in Brussels). In other words, the EU-limited action was more and more in need of a wider understanding of Europe, as the Eastern universities were grappling with a mix of traditional pre-war references, on one side, and of US models of modernity, on the other – experimenting market solutions in organisational development that were unknown or at least untried in EU countries. In that situation, there was a growing need for convergence of objectives between the “small European” viewpoint, represented essentially by the Liaison Committee, and the wider understanding of Europe, that had accompanied CRE since its early beginnings in the fifties.

In 1995, however, the responsibility of the student exchanges moved from the thousands of departments involved in mobility activities to the much smaller number of institutions to which these departments belonged: to simplify the organisational chart, also on the EU side, the various programmes were given a common structure, the SOCRATES framework. The focus put on the *institutional contract* in ERASMUS gave CRE, as an association of individual institutions, a new visibility in Brussels. This move corresponded to the change within CRE from the Presidency of Hinrich Seidel, the President of Hannover University and the former President of the German Rectors’ Conference, to that of Josep Bricall, former Rector of the University of Barcelona and former Vice-President of the CRE. There was certainly a continuity of purpose but also an inflexion in activities, as the Commission chose to work ever more closely with the universities as institutions and with CRE as their representative – the Liaison Committee becoming the mouthpiece of the systems of higher education, at the national level mainly. For CRE - whose new President had been closely linked to the growth of EU mobility programmes as the Spanish university representative in the EU ministerial committee steering their development - this meant, in particular, monitoring the European strategies of institutions involved in the ERASMUS programme under SOCRATES: the European policy statements required by the Commission from the 1800 institutions demanding EU support for mobility activities were all analysed and, through visits in the institutions, compared with what the universities were really achieving through their European programmes. When SOCRATES opened to Central and Eastern European institutions, the analysis was extended to these establishments too. Thus was built a full scan of Europeanisation processes in actual academic development that covered SOCRATES I until year 2000. This led to recommendations for improving the programme as a tool of Europeanisation that were regularly presented to the EU Committee of Education bringing together the representatives of the governments taking part. Thus grew the credibility of the CRE – in the Commission and in governmental circles – as a reliable partner for European integration. Other programmes were launched by CRE with the support of Brussels, for instance on the European commonalities existing in universities’ financial policies, in terms of income generation (1998) and of strategies of expenditure (2000).

In parallel, from 1995, the CRE increased its *support of member universities* – in their institutional development. In some countries, quality evaluation had been developed in the eighties already, like France, Britain or the Netherlands. Other countries were also testing the need for assessment of higher education, mainly in terms of the relevance, costs and efficiency of

academic programmes and services, rather than in terms of institutional fitness for teaching and research. The emphasis put generally on programmes reflected the need for social accountability whereas the stress on quality management supported the internal capacity for change of institutions confronted with a great variety of demands. That was the areawhere CRE launched a programme on quality strategies. Such a process oriented approach was much more open to European comparisons than the assessment of teaching programmes whose content usually depended on national regulations for curriculum design. At that level, the EU had tried, through the so-called “pilot project”, to bring together the four existing national quality agencies and governmental officiers interestedd in accountability but, as a group, they could only decide to share good practice and compare notes on their evaluation procedures – as recommended in December 1995 at the Las Palmas conference that had been opened by the President of CRE, nby then a stakeholder in the world of European evaluation. That was the origin of ENQA, the European Network of Quality Agencies set up much later, in 2000.

Institutional evaluation was the normal outgrowth of CRE’s involvement in Europeanisation processes and, from 1995, the association offered its members the possibility to review their adaptation to the needs of change – in teaching, learning or research as far as quality management and management quality were concerned. Thus, by 1998 and the 12<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, more than 50 institutions had requested reviews of their development capacity, i.e. some 10% of the membership, while universities in other parts of the world, mainly Latin America, showed an interest in testing the CRE “audit” system. Simultaneously, from 1996, CRE also offered members the possiblity to evaluate their ICT policies, 11 universities joining discussions on the use of new technologies for teaching, to be followed by another 32 in 1997 – while 5 of them were asking a full assessment of their activities in the field.

In a way, like the governments, the universities had accepted to deepen their understanding of their techniques for development, to check their costs and benefits in order to expand or reduce their progress towards European solutions that would be reached through some kind of incremental process. The European ambitions of the projects were very much subdued although, in Central and Eastern Europe, universities were trying to assess the Euro-compatibility of their many reforms after the demise of communism. In 1996, CRE was thus asked by the Commission to review the impact of 300 TEMPUS projects on management and reform in that part of the continent, a report being prepared on the basis of internal evaluation documents and on the visits of 18 institutions in 11 countries to contribute to the next stage of the TEMPUS programme. In 1997, that report was re-drafted and reorganised into a *Manual for university management* in PHARE countries, a document that was used for training workshops not only in Hungary but also in Russia – outside the PHARE region – in a seminar held in 1997 also. The involvement of CRE in the area had been prepared by the launch in 1990 of an *Academic Task Force* (ATF), the resources of which came from member universities and some governments (Austria, Sweden, and Switzerland, in particular) in order to support the re-integration into the European academic community of institutions severely hindered in their development by political conflict and lack of resources. After 1994, and the war in Bosnia and Croatia, ATF brought together on a yearly basis, in Dubrovnik or Sarajevo, the universities of the region and members from other parts of Europe to cooperate on specific development projects. For war-afflicted

universities, management seminars were organised in 1997 and 1998 in Bosnia, Austria or Catalunya, thus giving CRE enough visibility to be entrusted in 2000 the secretariat of the Higher education group of the Stability Pact. This commitment to solidarity between Eastern and Western Europe also reinforced cooperation with partners of old, like the Council of Europe or UNESCO-CEPES, or opened the gates to new ones, like the Salzburg Seminar, whose *Universities' project* helped institutions from Central and Eastern Europe, including Russia and other CIS countries, to test their capacity for reform relative to the change agenda prevailing in Western Europe and the US.

Indeed, Europe, for CRE, had always been more than the additions of internal reforms and, keeping to its traditional “wider Europe” understanding of the presence of its members in the world, the association, in the nineties, reinforced its presence in *world* higher education through various programmes.

In the late eighties, cooperation with North America was anchored, on the US side, in the American Council of Education, that helped develop the transatlantic dialogue due to become, every two years, a regular feature in the programme of the two organisations - the last one being organised in Québec in July 2001 with the help of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. The universities’ future in a transatlantic community – sharing common organisational and scientific objectives – was also the topic of a structured ACE/CRE conversation supported by the Pew Foundation and the Higher Education Research Institute of the University of Pennsylvania, both in Philadelphia, that gathered some twenty university leaders and academic experts from Europe and North America over a series of meetings held in Trento and Olomouc in 1991 and Wingspread, Wisconsin, in 1992 : this resulted in a special issue of *Policy Perspectives*, outlining the risks and opportunities linked to the massive growth of higher education and indicating the potential of development strategies common to both European and US universities.

The focus on university leadership and its capacity for inducing change in higher education institutions was also at the core of the Columbus programme linking, in the early nineties, some 30 Latin American universities with half that number of European establishments in order to cooperate on institutional development and strategies for management. From 1989 to 1993, the pilot phase of the programme was EU funded – more than a million ECUs – but also received project support from governments and foundations in France, Portugal and Spain, the latter country helping in the framework of the 5<sup>th</sup> centennial anniversary of Columbus landing in the Caribbean Islands, while Brasil, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela were also contributing to the development of the programme, by then based at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. For the first time, universities from the whole of Latin America were developing multilateral contacts and starting network collaborations on key areas of institutional development – curriculum design, SME support, ICT use – on the model of European patterns of networking. Study visits to 15 European universities were thus organised in 1990 for 30 rectors coming from all over Latin America, while European rectors were exploring the use of new technologies in Mexico in 1992. The relevance of European university/industry linkages was discussed in Caracas in 1990 and Buenos Aires in 1992. On the basis of visits by European and Latin American experts in industrial relations, these discussions were turned into common activities, workshops on intellectual property rights in Costa Rica (1990) and Salamanca (1991), training seminars on spin

off enterprises in Cuernavaca (1992) or Warwick and Twente (1993), study encounters on European models of quality evaluation in Valparaiso (1990) and Sao Paulo (1991) – all events that led to various publications, in Spanish and English. In 1994, the discussions extended to quality evaluation and to lifelong learning as areas for change in university management. The Commission used the experience gained from these activities to organise the ALFA programme, which became its priority for Latin American higher education after 1994, thus marginalising its interest for Columbus. The about 40 universities which, by then, were benefiting from the CRE programme were asked to take over the responsibility for its development and to create an autonomous network reflecting their own ambitions in transatlantic cooperation. CRE and AULA (the Association of Latin American Universities supporting the programme) would remain involved as founding fathers of the new association. By 1998, it could count on 49 members in Latin America and 21 in Europe – each paying a yearly fee of 4000 dollars to ensure the independence of the programme – also vis-à-vis the Commission that was still financing specific projects, on technology transfer or regional development for instance.

Two lessons can be drawn from the chequered history of the Columbus programme: intercontinental cooperation allowed CRE to experiment in many fields of higher education that had been mentioned as of growing interest by the EU *Memorandum on higher education* but for which it was proving difficult to find in Europe resources and partners ready to test new modalities of cooperation. This vanguard role was also deemed important enough for participating universities to invest time and money, often at a considerable level, in the success of the projects, thus validating the relevance of European experience for Latin American partners – and vice-versa as the programme was never thought of as a simple effort in development aid. In other words, European universities had to understand their own strengths and weaknesses to benefit fully from the collaborations launched with Latin America, their transatlantic partners holding like a mirror for them to become conscious of their *raison-d'être* and identity.

The Copernicus programme went through a similar development, this time focused on the 1992 Rio Summit on sustainable development: could universities, as founts of knowledge, contribute to the analysis of the dangers inherent to a short-sighted exploitation of the world resources? In 1990, CRE took part in the European region forum convened in Bergen to prepare the Rio Summit and, in 1991, it joined the working group on “education for the environment” based at the UN secretariat in Geneva, the platform for educational NGOs interested in sustainability. This led the CRE Committee to prepare and launch an *Urgent Appeal* to the governments participating in the Summit requiring public support for universities’ work in the area, a text that was forwarded by UNESCO to the Ministers in Rio. Following the Summit, the CRE proposed its members to sign at a meeting in Barcelona in September 1993 a *Universities' Charter on Sustainable Development*, outlining 10 principles for the institutional management of sustainability, a document that was endorsed by 235 universities – and which is still the basis for the activities of the Copernicus programme today. In 1991, in Angers, a group of sixty specialists from member universities also decided to draft a common course in European environmental law, a 600 page textbook that was published in 1993 in Cambridge, the French version coming out in 1994 in Paris. This material had been tested in Summer schools in Visby (1992) and Budapest (1993), as the Copernicus programme was trying to bridge the East West divide in the Baltic and

Danubian areas. In Wageningen, in 1993, a similar enterprise was launched for preparing a course in environmental economics, that was published in Cheltenham in 1994. That same year, with the support of the World Health Organisation and of UNESCO, it was proposed to prepare a toolkit for the teaching of environmental health in higher education. All these publications were tested and used in summer schools that had become yearly events in Budapest – where the UNESCO had also created a UNITWIN chair in the field – while, in Visby, a workshop was also organised in 1995 on environmental health. Like for Columbus, but a few years later, in 1997, it was decided that the University of Dortmund would take over the secretariat of a programme that should become autonomous from CRE under the leadership of a steering group nominated by the participating universities. The new organisation was born at a conference in Utrecht in 1998 and, still today, is presided by the former President of the Dutch Open University in Heerlen, Prof. Rietje van Dam.

Thus, over the nineties, CRE experimented on behalf of its members in two areas of interuniversity cooperation, transatlantic collaboration and sustainable development: both were centred on university management – although curriculum development, in terms of content, played an important part in Copernicus, for a few years, the emphasis remaining the sustainability of academic institutions as partners in ecological development. When these programmes were considered strong enough, they were spawned and new networks were born.

However, to be recognised as an important partner, any organisation needs a strong and highly visible programme of its own, in which others can join. If the period was characterised by fragmented and multiple efforts in university cooperation, an attempt was now needed to bring some coherence to these many developments: Europe had lost a long held sense of identity when the Berlin Wall fell. A few years later, could it regain some awareness of its specificity – vis-à-vis the US and the growing commercialisation of knowledge that was developing in various countries where universities were on the look-out for new resources at a time of severe budgetary restrictions ?

In September 1998, the UNESCO convened in Paris a World Conference on Higher Education, in order to put back on governmental agendas training and scholarship as top priorities for social development. To prepare that world event, each region organised conferences and, in Europe, CRE – in close collaboration with UNESCO-CEPES in Bucharest – convened in Palermo in September 1997 a European Forum not only for university leaders but also for delegates from student organisations, teachers' unions, scientific associations, industrial groups and education ministries. This large group of participants had been asked to draft the *European agenda for change for higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, that would be proposed to the World Conference a year later as the European contribution on modalities of change in teaching and learning, professional training, scholarship and research as well as the transmission of those cultural values making the specificity of Europe as a civilisation. The European question was back at centre stage – particularly as the region had to delineate at the World Conference its capacity for cooperation – and urge for competition – with the other parts of the world. The whole discussion had been prepared by numerous case studies from member universities while, in parallel, to prepare the 1998 General Assembly in Berlin, a project, with the support of the EU, was being developed to determine the expectations from regional authorities, local firms, chambers of commerce, students

and their families, secondary schools and other higher education institutions, cultural associations and other stakeholders vis-à-vis university services in teaching and research while assessing the universities' capacity to meet such demand. Four aspects of academic relevance were considered essential to enhance the pro-active role of higher education institutions in Europe: human resources development, social and cultural development, regional and economic development, as well as communication development. Surveys of members and visits to institutions allowed to draw commonalities of purpose and situation that went beyond national borders to regroup institutions according to regional specificities - peripheral regions, regions of re-industrialisation or regions of economic boom.

By August 1998, and the General Assembly in Berlin, there were thus clear signs that the loss of European meaning that followed the end of the East/West divide was being replaced by a growing awareness of a common destiny – where the deregulation of higher education was being interpreted in a restrictive way, where the role of higher education as a public good called for greater attention, where the universities' function in the integration of society was back in focus, in terms of culture, economy and social diversity. The countries of Europe had learned of each other, discovered their differences and common features, learned about the dangers of divisive allegiances that had brought hostilities and war damages back to the core of Europe when Yugoslavia broke down to pieces. The discipline asked from EU members to launch a common currency was pointing again to new federative stimuli: indeed, Europe is more than the sum of its parts and the universities were ready to make sense of this reality, now that they were aware of strong commonalities. After a detour through a commitment to Europeans, as institutions and citizens, could higher education return to a commitment to Europe, as a focus for integration?

### **The new century : Europe regained**

The economic and monetary union had been a slow process, that started in 1969 when, on 12 February, Raymond Barre proposed “a policy to meet the economic and monetary challenges of the day”. However, at the end of the century, two generations after World War II, should slow and cumbersome consensus-building be the rule again in order to achieve further integration in all fields of European activities, among the fifteen members of the Community or among the larger group of nations making wider Europe? In May 1998, a first answer was proposed for higher education by the conference organised at the Sorbonne to commemorate the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the University in Paris. The French Minister of Education, Claude Allègre, had invited his British, German and Italian colleagues to attend a symposium open to the members of the university community - students, staff and academic leaders from France and neighbouring countries mainly – where the four Ministers chaired for two days various working groups in which they could test the multiple views from the academic community before signing a Declaration which was inviting institutions and governments to “harmonise” academic services and university provision, an anathema in European jargon as the word smacks of uniformity although it should invite concertation, if the musical reference is taken seriously.

Other EU governments, from Portugal to the Netherlands, felt most embarrassed by this move from their colleagues to which they had not been associated. So, when the Italian Minister of Education, Luigi Berlinguer, proposed to hold a similar meeting in Bologna in June 1999, all

countries decided to join, all the more so as the invitation was extended to nations still outside the European Union. The host University called on its old partner of 1988 to prepare the meeting, and the Ministerial group that sponsored the event asked the CRE and the ex-Liaison Committee, institutionalised since 1995 as the Confederation of EU Rectors' conferences, to represent higher education in the finalisation of the meeting and of the draft of the Bologna Declaration that would build on and enlarge the proposals of the Sorbonne Declaration signed a year earlier in Paris. It had been decided that the Ministers would meet following a day of academic discussions among representatives of all sectors of the academic community and, on that basis, that they would give the final touch to the Declaration that was to be signed by 29 countries on 19 June 1999 in the Aula Magna of the University of Bologna where, 11 years earlier, the role of universities as institutions of European commonality had been solemnly reaffirmed. By the end of the century, the organisations born out of the post-war integration movement were full *partners* in the political deliberations concerning the future of higher education – a fact that evoked the necessity of their merger so that the universities of Europe would speak with one voice again, while representing the institutions as such – as individual members - and their organisation in national systems as well – as collective members. Two years of deliberations were needed to achieve this aim and, on 31 March 2001, the European University Association was born in Salamanca.

In Bologna, the governments had taken the initiative again while the EU Commission was somewhat marginalised to an observer status. This could look rather dismissive but it expressed the reluctance of many at the traditional approach of the Commission in consensus-building. Too slow, too cumbersome, too esoteric if the citizens of Europe were to understand the process. Thus, the Bologna Declaration proposed a simple aim: developing an open *European higher education area* by 2010. It indicated the means to achieve this goal, the use of common instruments like the a two tier degree structure (BA and MA), the diploma supplement, the European Credit Transfer System, quality evaluation or the Europeanisation of curricula. These tools corresponded to deepening levels of integration: the Diploma supplement and the BA/MA architecture invited changes at national level but were not calling for adaptation to other members' needs and ambitions. ECTS was asking for more, however, as the comparison of learning outcomes could entail changes in national curricula or institutional courses in order to facilitate mobility and, at a later stage, allow for credit accumulation. Cooperation in quality finally translated comparability into compatibility, so that trust could be given to the level achieved in the provision of higher education, all over Europe. Each stage requested greater commitment to the commonality of purpose and action in the field of higher education so that, by 2010, educational services should flow freely from one side of the continent to the other, like material goods do today. This will imply that the providers of education will draw resources (people or money) from all parts of the area - like industrial firms do today when assembling cars or telephones - in order to develop and package the most enticing products, be they courses or research projects, data or publications. But it will also mean that providers will not only be institutions resembling today's universities but also networks involving publishing houses, media companies, and other specialised communicators. Students of all ages will draw on the most convenient services, relevant in terms of their intellectual interests, career development or social commitments. And there will be common measurement to compare the value of the service, a Euro of the intelligence allowing for the compatibility and cohesion of the promised knowledge

society – the same way today's common currency binds the production and trade of goods all over Europe.

For learners, teachers and administrators, the freedom of movement in a common European intellectual space will offer *equal conditions of access* to the many providers and users of higher education, *equal conditions of support* to knowledge development, in people and institutions, *equal conditions of assessment and recognition* of services, of skills and competencies, *equal conditions of work and employment*. In other words, the tools given by the Bologna Declaration are there to invent a European model of higher education and training strong enough to allow hard discussions on choices of society, as requested by questions of substance like lifelong learning, the social contribution of students to institutional building, or the attractiveness of European higher education vis-à-vis the rest of the world, themes that were added to the Bologna process by the Prague Summit in May 2001, the first stock taking exercise by 32 governments of Europe willing to monitor the realisation of the Bologna intentions.

Indeed, because the Declaration was not binding legally, because it emphasised the importance of tools of adaptation rather than important changes of substance, it allowed a flourish of new initiatives taken at institutional, regional, national or European levels. The key leitmotiv of it all: convergence of action leading to coherence of development so that European citizens recognise themselves – and each other – as full partners in a cohesive society of knowledge. That had been very much the topic discussed by the first meeting of European university leaders in 1959 – presently seen under a new angle now that higher education institutions are being encouraged to build on their collective autonomy by “putting their act together”. Thus, from Bologna to Prague, the CRE and the Confederation accompanied the process, taking part in numerous meetings to explain its scope and purpose, to encourage institutions to enter the European movement of change and adaptation, to define the Euro-compatibility of academic action in the various parts of the continent. In this exercise, the university associations counted on the support of traditional partners, the Council of Europe and TEMPUS when the integration of South East Europe in the Bologna process is the focus of attention, UNESCO CEPES when the definition of Europe is to be fixed in function of other parts of the world, the IMHE programme of the OECD when the consequences of convergence on university management need to be discussed, the European Union when the monitoring of the Bologna process, its validation in experimental terms, and the commonalities of change call for global understanding. Stronger links with other sectors of the higher education community also mean close contacts with student organisations, like ESIB, or with EURASHE, the association of institutions for vocational higher education. A coherent and cohesive Europe also has an influence on the region's role in world higher education. Therefore, CRE and EUA, its successor organisation, is working ever more closely with ACE and AUCC, in North America, with AARU, the Association of Arab Universities or with AUAP, the Association of Universities of Asia Pacific, developing joint projects, enlarging common work in university management in terms of quality evaluation, strategies for change and cultural diversity.

### To conclude ...

From the post war Europe divided by borders, frontier check ups, the non convertibility of money – i.e., a Europe deprived of mobility in a landscape still scarred by earlier bombings – to a Union now encompassing 400 million people from Greece to Britain, from Finland to Portugal, some fifty years have passed. The universities, in their own development, have embodied most of the changes, sometimes ahead of general development, sometimes after. They suffered from the East/West divide, tried to bridge the political gap, became full partners of academic mobility, through ERASMUS, one of the most successful programmes in the field and a preview of an open Europe, they joined in the re-engineering of wider Europe, coping with its blunders, in Yugoslavia, or its breakthroughs, the TEMPUS programme. They are now invited to invent the open Europe of the mind that will shape the society of knowledge which the region is hoping to develop through the Bologna process. From the periphery of the European integration movement, universities have now moved to the core. The challenge of adaptation has never been bigger. Moreover, as higher education has never been placed so well in the jockeying for political influence, the tools for reinventing the Europe of intelligence are there. The Bologna process is strong but it could break as it is based on instrumentation processes that could fail when ideological choices will need to be done. What type of society do Europeans want? What does cohesion mean in democratic decision-making? Is the service of intelligence really a public good? These are the problems of tomorrow. The university is well placed to contribute to their solution if it keeps loyal to its identity, as the only institution that is common to all countries of the continent and the place that makes sense of Europe and where Europe does make sense.