

Dear representative of the European Commission, Dear Rector of Mainor Business College, other distinguished guests, and most importantly, dear colleagues and if I may say, friends of SPACE

I have been asked by the Board to talk to you about twenty years of SPACE.

In ten minutes, and on a sunny afternoon, and with a pleasant evening in the prospect, I feel I have to watch the time.

I vaguely remember speaking in Hasselt, in 1999 when we were celebrating 10 years of SPACE, and again in 2004, at the 15th year of existence, when we met in San Sebastian. I have no recollection of the celebration of 5 years of existence, which if my records are all right, was at the General Assembly in Toulouse, but probably we were then too busy trying to survive.

I do hope however that next time you chose a nice and fresh looking young lady for the occasion.

As this is the closing of a Conference organised by the SPACE association, and not an address to the SPACE General assembly, many people would not know what I am talking about if I was quoting names like Jean-Marie Dejonghe, Donald and Jutta Ross, Roland Van Coppenolle, Arrantza Larras, Ghislaine Cellier and so many others, who are now more like distant memories, however dear they are to many of us.

Their names and portraits are in the SPACE memorial book that was issued when we were celebrating 15 years of SPACE.

As an organisation, we are an international not-for-profit association according to Belgian law, whose objectives according to the legal requirements are to be of a philosophical, pedagogical or cultural nature, a vague notation that could only have come from a dull Belgian brain, but which seems to be extremely useful for organisations that are based in Brussels. The nearness to the official European institutions has bought with it a proliferation of such associations and SPACE and my own organisation EURASHE are part of them.

The origin of the network is that before being a privately-run and sponsored network of accredited institutions (our present status) we started as an Erasmus ICP (Interuniversity

Cooperation Project), in which only some of our members could officially benefit from EU funding, namely those that had university or semi-university status.

Others were kept on board, on a basis of breaking down expenses, and sharing the small revenues, irrespective of the status of educational institutions, and while dutifully respecting the strict guidelines for the use of the Erasmus grants.

I am convinced that in those days, with the very meagre membership fees that were then charged, we would otherwise not have survived. The system of ICP continued to exist till 1998, which means that for a period of 8/9 years the network was supported by EU money, paying for staff and student exchange, and which enabled us to survive at low costs for the member institutions. It also gave us an 'official status' within these institutions, and explains why in SPACE we now have this odd mix of post-secondary institutions next to Universities of Applied Sciences and full-fledged universities, through their business faculties.

Business faculties, because there we have another duality that came into existence, when next to languages, another focus came into the network with the Business diploma, apart from the Languages qualifications. It is in the larger context of this second major discipline, Business and economics, that the concept of an annual theme-bound and paper-based conference has come into existence.

As another special feature of SPACE I would certainly have to mention the numerous committees, I have lost track of how many there are at the moment, which serve the unique purpose of serving our large membership, in diverse needs, next to the on-line courses, IT provisions, etc.

Though the above mentioned dualities (Business versus Languages; the different types of institutions) may seem cumbersome and has caused frictions in the past, it has always been with us and it is my impression that in many cases their interests have become intertwined, not to mention the abundant personal contacts across the divisions in types and disciplines I have mentioned.

What some of us tend to forget is that there is a great potential in this diversity in SPACE, in terms of types and levels of trainings, and provision of courses and also in terms of types of institutions. In the workshop where I was making a contribution yesterday, I was referring to a trend in higher education, to map and classify higher education institutions according to a set of categories, such as research-oriented (fundamental against applied research), lifelong

learning strategies, regional versus national or international orientation, closeness to the world of employment, etc.

The potential for those institutions which have now become the a-typical SPACE institutions here, which offer the intermediate qualifications, next to first cycle degrees, lies in the new focus of lifelong learning in European policy making, in which the vocationally oriented colleges and institutions can play a prominent role. And with this can come the money from projects, as lifelong learning, together with applied research and its technological applications, are all three a special focus in the Communiqué the Ministers of Higher Education, of the 47 Bologna countries will be releasing at the Ministerial summit in Leuven next week.

Yesterday at the closing of the plenary morning session, you may remember that we were giving a clear and unequivocal message to a staff member of the European Union delegation in Estonia, a person seconded from the DG Translation, namely that associations like ours, who exclusively function on voluntary membership, badly need the recognition and support from the official authorities, and in the first place at the European level, as this is where we situate our *raison d' être* and the place where we develop our activities.

We did not count the hands that were raised yesterday, when the question was asked who in the audience had been involved in EU funded projects in the years involved in SPACE, but I do recollect it was the vast majority in the audience.

Again, I think with the new European priorities that have been determined for the post-Bologna era which will take the Bologna reform from 2010 till 2020, we should certainly be aware of the great potential for our network here.

The future of SPACE:

Now we are approaching a membership of 100, and are present in around 30 European countries, which makes SPACE truly representative, and therefore meeting an essential eligibility criterion for comprehensive and Europe-wide projects. This as far as projects go, but what about the SPACE exams, for so long a flagship of SPACE?

A major step forward in the creation of the SPACE exams came when members started to give credits to the SPACE subjects and for some even an entire curriculum, but it remains a sore that for cultural and legalistic reasons this solution could not be implemented, in a number of countries, for SPACE members organising common examinations.

If there is one thing that has grown more important in the EHEA (of which SPACE is a part, through EURASHE), it is the institutional autonomy to decide on its own curriculum, tailored to the demands of the labour market, which also facilitates the creation of joint curricula.

For those countries where such institutional autonomy is not to be achieved in a foreseeable future, could not be a following step that SPACE creates an organ which is an internal validating body for subjects on the SPACE curriculum, which would certify and validate in institutions in these countries, subjects as compatible with average criteria found in SPACE members institutions offering exams.

Such a body could in a further stage, seek an official status, and become a sectoral validation body.

How to move forward with the network, while keeping this family like atmosphere and combining this with the professionalism that the new setting of SPACE requires?

The course we have taken, with these highly successful Business Forums, leave us no choice but to opt for true professionalism, and recent troublesome experiences appear to prove this.

We should feel confident that the friendship and the conviviality will remain, because the people remain the same, even if the basis for cooperation may change,

As a network we have had our share of problems and tragedies, most recently the untimely death of our beloved previous President, John Troy, from Napier University in Edinburgh. The memory of John's character, with his genial disposition, combined with work ethos, dedication to the sake of education is already part of our common history of SPACE.

The way to look forward, could be to further develop those areas which I have just mentioned and be confident about what the future will bring. This also holds for the change of management that has been decided now, with Regitze and Luc as CEOs, and with a new Presidency under Danute, not the least at a moment when we are taking leave of our beloved

past secretary general, Greta Vandeborne, who has been for so long the true image of the SPACE network, and one of the strongest features of the SPACE brand, if you forgive me for speaking in those terms.

But on this important item at the end of again a very successful conference of SPACE I would like to leave the floor to someone else.

Thank you for your attention.

Stefan Delplace

Secretary General EURASHE

Board member of SPACE