

The Pontifical Roman Universities and their potential and projects

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Esteemed Mr. Tibor Navracsics, European Commissioner for Education,
Culture, Youth and Sport,

Excellences,

Authorities of the Congregation for Catholic Education and of the Italian
Ministry for Education, University and Research,

Colleagues,

Students, Staffs and friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

above all I want to express my gratitude for the organization of this important
event, on behalf also of the other Rectors of Roman Pontifical Universities and
Institutions that I have the honor to represent here.

Our Conference collects 23 Institutions here in Rome – 7 Pontifical Universities,
2 Pontifical Athenea and other Ecclesiastical Faculties and Institutes. The “system” of
our Institutions is like a *special mosaic*, not only because the majority of them are
connected with some of the most important Church organizations and religious catholic
Orders and Congregations, but also because – especially during these last decades –
new Faculties have been added to the classical ones (Theology, Philosophy and Canon
Law) and we have now an increasing number of lay students, male and female.
Actually, for instance, we have also Programs in Education, Communication, Social
Sciences, Psychology, Ancient and Modern Literature, Archaeology, Sacred Music,
Civic Law, and many others like studies on Family, Eastern, Biblical and Islamic
Studies, Child protection, Church management, etc.

One of our main and common feature is *internationality*, due to the presence of professors and students living in Rome or around Rome but coming from all over the world. Also in my University, for example, this academic year 2018/2019 more than 40% of the total number of students are not Italian and comes from foreign countries, some of them from Europe but the majority from other continents. In a certain way we can experience that a “world human family” is not only possible, but can be real, and in this sense we share very much from the beginning the “spirit” of Erasmus, because is something that we normally experience. And it is also very important to realize, with our teachers, students and staffs, that we are facing challenges and questions – like the ecological or economic crisis, that have some deeper roots in a cultural crisis – that are impossible to be solved by alone: only all together we can find the adequate solutions. For example the challenge of comparing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the Agenda 2030, especially the fourth, “Quality Education”, with the promotion of the Integral Human Development as it is defined in the Encyclical Letter by Pope Francis *Laudato si*, it’s not simple, but it is also a fascinating task that we are happy to live and to share with others.

As our “roadmap” we are involved in working according to the new Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium* published by Pope Francis on December 2017. It requires us a “courageous renewal” to ecclesiastical studies, and our Institutions are called to be “a sort of providential cultural laboratories” in order to contribute to “changing the models of global development”, “redefining our notion of progress” and to “promote leaderships capable of striking out new paths”.

We have received by this Document 4 criteria. The first, fundamental for our identity, is the centrality of the – I quote – “ever fresh and attractive good news of the Gospel”. At its light, we have something specific to offer to the culture and to the international University system. The second is the “wide-ranging dialogue”: so we have always something to learn from everybody. The third one is interdisciplinarity and cross-disciplinarity as approaches that recognize an intrinsic relation and an order among the disciplines. In fact “there is a vital intellectual principle of the unity in difference of knowledge and respect for its multiple, correlated and convergent expressions”. That’s the meaning of the word: “uni-versitas”. The fourth is the urgent need for “networking” between Institutions. A nice example of “networking” is also this kind of growing relationship and collaboration among our Institutions. One example is our Joint Diploma in Integral Ecology, a collaboration started two years ago that involves all the Roman Pontifical Universities and Athenea. And other new partnerships and Joint Degrees and Diplomas are coming soon.

For these reasons and many others, and in such context, we are very interested to join more deeper – and we assure all our collaboration for achieving this goal - the Erasmus Program and its wonderful and fruitful opportunity for student’s mobility, in the same line of the Bologna Process and Lisbonne Convention, and also of the so significant recent Agreement between Italy and Holy See signed last February, and we thank again for this.

In the perspective of fostering the “culture of dialogue” and the reciprocal collaboration, Pope Francis – during the Speech at the Conferral, in Vatican, three years ago, of the CharleMagne Prize – spoke about the “new European humanism”, about a new “European Project”. In the occasion of 60th Anniversary of Treaties of Rome, He noted in fact that the Founders of the European Union «laid the foundations for a bastion of peace, an edifice made up of states united not by force but by free commitment to the *common good* and a definitive end to confrontation». The Pope concluded his Speech as follows: «I dream of a *new European humanism*, one that involves ‘a constant work of humanization’ and calls for ‘memory, courage, [and] a sound and humane utopian vision’. [...] I dream of a Europe that cares for children, that offers fraternal help to the poor and [...] newcomers. [...] I dream of a Europe where young people breathe the pure air of honesty, where they love the beauty of a culture and a simple life undefiled by the insatiable needs of consumerism, where getting married and having children is a responsibility and a great joy, not a problem due to the lack of stable employment. [...] I dream of a Europe that promotes and protects the rights of everyone, without neglecting its duties towards all. I dream of a Europe of which it will not be said that its commitment to human rights was its last utopia».

Mr. Commissioner, and all the Authorities among us, please consider us and our Institutions fully and passionately engaged, also collaborating for a permanent and more stable participation to the Erasmus Project, in working to help our students and the future generations to make that this “dream” could become true.

Thank you.