



Dear colleagues,

Our network, since its establishment in 1990, has been a fertile ground for debates on the strategic agendas of our Universities, and a valuable resource for their Rectors and their International Relations Officers. Under the energetic Presidency of Arthur Mettinger --- to whom we owe a heartfelt "Thank you!" --- we have pursued several important initiatives: student conferences and the Bologna Lab, University governance and branding, urban studies, mobility and so on. We have also capitalized on our diversity to foster a tightly knit network and become an influential component of the European University Association. And this is how it should have been, given that we represent some of Europe's historic Universities.

As I assume the presidency in January --- and please allow me to thank you all for your trust --- I would like us to promote further and expand our collaborations, as we had been doing over the years, but also to work on themes that are on the top of our Rectors' agenda. Together with the Steering Committee we will hammer out an agenda on some major strategic initiatives:

*Internationalization and mobility:* While we continue to encourage a bottom-up approach, we should also select a theme where we want to work together, and encourage mobility to promote the theme. One theme could be on *Quality Culture* at both the administrative and academic levels. A Workshop on Quality Culture will bring us together to share experiences.

*Education:* The Bologna Lab should be extended to Doctoral studies, since it is at the Third Cycle level where we stand to gain most from working together. The successful Student Conferences can be extended to a UNICA student competition. We will launch a *UNICA Entrepreneurship Competition for Students and Young Researchers*.

*Research and Development:* We represent some of Europe's leading research Universities, and this should be reflected in our activities. A *PhD Working Group* and a *Research Officers Group* could promote joint PhD programs and collaborations in lobbying in Brussels for our research initiatives.

*Links with society:* We are the Universities of the Capitals, and have been playing an important role in urban development. At the current historical moment though we could play a role in transforming our cities into Knowledge Regions. The dual theme *Urban development-Knowledge regions* will serve in strengthening our links with society. Within this dual theme the links of Universities with industry could play an important role. I would like us to setup a working group to study the role of *Intermediaries between Universities and Industry*, and assist our members in taking initiatives in their local settings.

*Strategy and Policy:* The need for full cost accounting goes hand in hand with University autonomy and accountability, and we should work together in this direction. However, autonomy is but the means to an end, and our presence in our Nations' capitals, near the seat of power, puts us in a unique position to lead discussions on this issue. We will organize a Rectors Seminar to assist our members in moving towards full cost accounting and pursue a structured dialogue to link accountability with autonomy.

This agenda capitalizes on our strengths and shows that UNICA brings together not only some of Europe's oldest Universities but also some of Europe's most dynamic and young-at-heart Institutions.

Of course, the role of UNICA President is foremost to maintain an environment where informed and energetic dialogue takes place, joint initiatives are undertaken, and resources are made available to our Universities and their leadership that add value to their mission. Anything we achieve will come from joint work, enthusiasm and collegiality. I look forward to working with all of you in the coming years to promote the UNICA mission.

With my warmest wishes for the Holiday Season

Stavros A. Zenios