Twenty seven years of MAGNA CHARTA UNIVERSITATUM

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Magna Charta Universitatum signed by  
388 rectors and presidents of universities

Until now Magna Charta Universitatum has been signed by 802 Universities from 85 countries
Introductory remarks;  
world and universities 1988

Globally, Europe in particular:

• Strong ideological conflicts, resulting in divisions and isolations in many domains, HE and research in particular;

However:

• Cold war was closing to the end;
• Berlin wall as a strong symbol of deep division lined along the heart of Central and South Eastern Europe, will be overthrown one year later;
Introductory remarks; world and universities 1988

New circumstances and new demands for universities:
• Tremendous increase of numbers of students worldwide;
• Research and technological development: more and more concentrated to universities;

Enlarged mission of universities:
• proponents of democratic and ethical values;
• formation of new generations of citizens for modern multicultural democratic societies;
Motivations, aims of initiators

• **To reconcile** traditional values and academic integrity of universities with new times and demands;

• **To point out:**
  - that these values are not outdated, 
  
  *but on contrary*

  - that they remain equally actual and unavoidable today, in the search for answers to new demands;

• **The Charta** from 1988 sends **the message** that the future vitality of university, as the oldest permanently existing institution, is in full harmony with its most durable and splendid basic values
The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organized because of geography and historical heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching. To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power.
Teaching and research in universities must be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind changing needs, the demands of society, and advances in scientific knowledge.
Freedom in research and training is the fundamental principle of university life, and governments and universities, each as far as in them lies, must ensure respect for this fundamental requirement. Rejecting intolerance and always open to dialogue, the university is an ideal meeting ground for teachers capable of imparting their knowledge and well equipped to develop it by research and innovation, and for students entitled, and able and willing to enrich their minds with that knowledge.
A university is the trustee of the European humanist tradition; its constant care is to attain universal knowledge; to fulfill its vocation it transcends geographic and political frontiers, and affirms the vital need for different cultures to know and influence each other.
The end of the last millennium; First decade of MCU

• **The Charta** was launched in the predominantly Eurocentric environment (although with the presence of universities from all continents);

• Next decade (< 2000): new global trends, changes, and initiatives (*which confirmed the relevance of the Charta itself*);

**Europe:**

• Establishment of **European Higher Education (and Research) Area [EHE(R)A]** (*with the gradual inclusion of transitional states from the Eastern, South-Eastern, and Central Europe*);

• 1999: Bologna Declaration, signed by ministers in charge for HE from 29 European countries;
The end of the last millennium; First decade of MCU

Globally:

- Intensified transnational and transcontinental collaboration and mobility of students, researchers, lecturers, etc;
- Fast development of new Information Technologies in studies, research, and communication, which enabled the above trends;
- The globalization of “HE market”, including the provision of new modes of studies in the formal and informal Tertiary Education, and in the Life Long Learning;
- Enlarged omnipresent interest to learn about, and to apply the experiences and good practices of others.
2001:
Initiators of the *Charta*, together with other associations and partners*, decided to establish Magna Charta Observatory, a body which will continue with activities connected with Magna Charta Universitatum;

*International Association of Universities, European Association of Universities, Council of Europe, European Student Union, etc*
Magna Charta Observatory today

**Governing bodies:**

**COUNCIL** (up to 15 members, representing different organizations, generations, and world regions)

**PRESIDENT**

**SECRETARY GENERAL**

*Permanent meeting place* and *Office* (with administrative secretary) - **BOLOGNA**

*Financing* - Mostly (and permanently) by **Italian Government**, through the **University of Bologna**
Activities of the Observatory

• Promotes the MCU and its principles and values worldwide;

• Works towards the enlargement of the family of universities signatories of MCU;

• As an observer, permanently monitors and analyses the level of institutional autonomy and academic freedoms of its members, taking actions in cases in which they are endangered;

• As an advisory body, participates and assists in national and regional debates on the development of Higher Education;

• As the member of wider network, takes stock of the debates on the global trends of Higher Education, taking particular care on the role of universities in new circumstances and conditions;
Activities of the Observatory, cont’d

- **As a think-tank**, organizes, and co-organizes conferences, workshops, and seminars devoted to the actual and open challenges related to the role of Higher Education and Research, and to the role and duties of universities in contemporary societies and in their democracies;

- Takes care on publishing activity related to these events, editing and publishing proceedings, monographies, and authors’ analyses related to the above activities.
Magna Charta Anniversaries; Septembers in Bologna (or elsewhere)

2015: Values beyond 2015: the global challenge for universities and their students
2014: University Integrity – Society’s Benefit (Uppsala)
2013: Universities, Students and Societies
2011: Contemporary Threats and Opportunities: Academic Freedom and Institutional Autonomy within the Context of Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Rankings
2010: Making The Magna Charta Values Operational - Theory and Practice
Recently the Observatory has been particularly engaged with a wider range of stakeholders in questions of the operationalization of fundamental values of MCU

**Events:**

- Global Meeting of Agencies in Montreal, Canada
- Ministerial Biannual Conference on Bologna Process in Yerevan, Armenia
- Conference on university integrity in Uppsala, Sweden
- Advisory meetings in Minsk, Belarus and Tetovo, FYROM Macedonia
From 2014:

new President, Prof. Sijbolt Noorda
(former president emeritus of University of Amsterdam)

and

new Secretary General, mr. David Lock
Sijbolt Noorda, 2014:

- Magna Charta tries to find ways to promote serious thinking, talking, working on values and virtues
- *It’s not the answer to all questions and challenges*
- *but a conditio sine qua non, something crucial and indispensable*

Common and continuous efforts are wanted ...
David Lock, Report 2015:

• ... the Observatory is adopting a **transitional mode of operation**. It is conscious that its history has been relatively Eurocentric and increased globalisation and internationalisation make it desirable to operate in a more truly global way;

• Observatory: “a small boat, with a very large sail’;
  The winds blowing into the large sail are however stronger and to continue to navigate the journey ahead the Observatory will need the strong support of all its signatories and those wanting to commit their organisations to the fundamental values which give that boat stability.
World Map;
Countries with universities - signatories of MCU
• New countries this year:
  Belarus, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea and Jordan;

• Remaining “Grey zones”:
  Africa, Middle East, Eastern Asia, Central and South America;

• Modest presence of China, as well as some other leading countries in their regions ...;
Signatories from Americas

- **North America**: 30 (USA 21, Canada 9)

- **Latin America**: 63 (Brazil 11, Argentina 13, Colombia 21, ...)

- **Four universities from Mexico**:
  - Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara, September 1988, *founder*
  - Universidad Intercontinental, September 1988, *founder*
  - Universidad Veracruzana, September 2007
  - Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, September 2015
American presence in the Council

• **Dr. Robert Quinn**, Executive Director, Scholars at Risk Network, New York, USA

• **Prof. Hans-Peter Knudsen Quevedo**, President, Universidad del Rosario, Colombia (until 2015)

*President and Council are in search for future members, since some of actual members have finished, or are finishing their second term;*
Recent contribution from South America: 
Anniversary Conference, Bologna, September 2015

- Marco Antonio Zago, Rector of the University of São Paulo, Brazil: Three challenges for promoting the values and principles of the Magna Charta in the Latin American universities:
  - didactic, financial and administrative autonomy (violations – various pressures by companies, government rules and regulations);
  - assurance of universal access (frustrating social mobility);
  - quality of education based on the links between teaching and research (not only teachers should also be researchers, but also the teaching should be a research based process).
Concluding comments

• Actually MCO continues by initiating discussions on pertinent topics which appear, and will certainly appear, to be crucial challenges in the future evolution of Higher Education Institutions, in particular of universities;

• In this context basic university values, as exposed in the Magna Charta, are under permanent critical considerations; up to now they always showed their relevance and vitality;
Characteristic recent confirmation of this impression -:

**YEREVAN COMMUNIQUÉ**

*of the EHEA Ministerial Conference, May 2015*

- ... coordinated reform of our higher education systems ... is based on public responsibility for higher education, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and commitment to integrity;
- The EHEA has opened a dialogue with other regions of the world and is considered a model of structured cooperation;
Concluding comments, cont’d

• The Observatory is a relatively small but persistent spot in the global HE landscape, able to create new attitudes and diffuse them at wider scales;

One topic is for years on the agenda of the Observatory:
• How to extend its activities to distant parts of Globe (in spite of rather modest available financial means)?
• European ministers emphasized that leading European institutions have the same intention;
• It will be of utmost importance to achieve affirmative resonance with our potential global partners;
Thank you!

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