0. The environment – the Russian and Soviet heritage

There are several academic traditions: is there one university, however? This question is central to the work of the Magna Charta, and to your reflections since credit systems suppose a common understanding of the education that is valued by the credits. To compare, one needs shared references about what the university is as well as similar concepts of what academic training represents both for learners and teachers. May I try a historical perspective?

When Peter the Great modernised the Russian Empire, he certainly focused on the crafts and technical know-how that would allow for better ships, better fortifications, better engineering, better cities. In his days, this knowledge was not provided by the universities but by schools and guilds. Indeed, it is only at the end of his reign, in 1724, that he set up an Academy entitled to explore and teach humanities, natural sciences and law, the nucleus of Saint Petersburg University. In 1755, the same disciplines – and medicine – were offered in Moscow when Elizabeta Petrovna asked Lomonosov, an Academician himself, to set up an imperial university in the city. Such institutions were asked to shape a group of learned people able to discuss and dispute other members of the Enlightenment throughout Europe. Like other universities, these knowledge providers were small, although of importance since they trained a good part of the country’s intelligentsia and future governing elite.

The service of the Empire was part of the learning, so much so that – especially after the failed December 1825 coup against Nicholas I – students, set in a military-like structure, had to behave as loyal cadets committed to the development of the country. This reminded the Imperial University in France where Napoleon had re-opened a network of institutions of higher education to offer intellectual support to his political ambitions. Even in Prussia, Frederick William III was much more interested in a university that could reinforce the grandeur of the State than in an institution focused on research seen as the matrix of strong minds: it took Schleiermacher and Wilhelm von Humboldt time and persuasion to obtain from the king the decree that set up in 1810 the University of Berlin on a humanist model of questioning. Later, research at the Friedrich-Wilhelm Universität was understood as a lever of economic and industrial power for the newly created German Empire – a utilitarian position defended at the University itself by a scientist turned industrialist, Werner von Siemens. In other words, especially in the 19th century and the interwar period, the university, as an institution, was supposed to serve the nation by structuring its identity and unique culture.

When the Soviets took over from tsarist Russia, the purpose evolved from a national to international focus – although, with the growing tensions with Germany, Stalin reintroduced a national dimension in higher education, as in many other areas of society. The fear of possible subversion represented by younger people testing new ideas remained, like in older Russia, all the more justified that in the revolutions of February and October 1917 students had taken an active part in the overhaul of the Romanov Empire. Thus, the Academy was again given the role of rolling back the frontiers of knowledge, however rather independently from the teaching provided in universities where Marxism was giving sense to a common culture – a framework specially needed since the system had been broken down into smaller institutions
specialising in one or in a cluster of related disciplines. True, academicians often had important roles in prestigious universities but the reason for their fame derived much more from research work in Academy centres than from teaching activities in higher education. At present, many universities all over the Community of Independent States share academic fragmentation and an heritage of division – if not tension - between research and teaching; both fields, however, still contribute to the strength of its paymasters, yesterday the USSR, today the nations born out of the Soviet Empire. These countries, like in 18th century Russia, point to the need for national development in order to become full actors of the global society: in other words they want ‘modernisation’.

In this context, does modernisation mean optimising the past, moving towards other academic traditions or inventing a different organisation of intelligence in order to meet best the challenges of local society or societies? If I am here, in Taraz, I suppose that you are interested to hear more about the second solution – joining with universities of other parts of the world, in particular Europe, those institutions that could be important benchmarks for Kazakh universities on their way to globalisation and universal education. In this context the name of Bologna has a double meaning: the redaction of a Magna Charta that brings together those values and principles that have built the university institution since its origins when the first university was set up in 11th century Bologna; the other document evoked by the city is the Bologna Declaration, a paper signed in 1999 by Ministers of Education from 29 European countries, eleven years after the Magna Charta had been endorsed by more than 400 university leaders. The Magna Charta is a university document calling institutions to joint awareness of their raison d’être and to social responsibility whereas the Declaration is an intergovernmental effort marking out the stages of academic convergence towards a European Higher Education Area due for 2010. In fact, the Ministers of 42 countries of Europe happen to have met last week in London to take stock of the progress of national higher education systems toward compatibility in a common European space of interest. I have been asked to present here both documents and their actual relevance for universities, in Europe and beyond – Kazakhstan included. Before doing that, I would like to answer my first question: is there one university everybody can recognise as such?

1. **Collective identity, corporate culture, norms and behaviour**

   Universities are first and foremost communities of belonging. This means that all academic institutions, consciously or unconsciously, refer to sets of norms, approaches and behaviour by which individual members feel actors of intelligence. Professors, students, administrators develop a work culture that turns them into some kind of corporation, that gives them academic identity. This is an old story; indeed, the medieval university was structured on the model of the guilds that were being born at the time as a result of the urban revolution in 11th and 12th century Europe. Guilds brought together people of the same craft – jewellery, butchery, bakery, carpentry, masonry, painting, etc… – to project and defend the interests of the profession in society. The Latin name for those associations (a term used in all documents of the time) was universitas, a word that little by little became restricted to the intellectual corporation only, the university. These communities projected and defended the interests of the group vis-à-vis possible competitors: to do so, they fixed the quality level of the goods and services the members could provide; to meet such level, they organised the training of the companions aspiring to become active professionals in their field. Newcomers had to enter the community as prentices and learn from a master who was embodying a model behaviour and was holding the know how transmitted in a few years to the prentice, until the latter could pass a final exam culminating in the presentation of a masterpiece – a proof that he, in turn, could train others at a later stage. This education could be completed by a tour of guilds of the same craft in other cities and other countries where the young craftsman was
received in the families of masters able to offer him new ideas on how to develop his competence in their common craft. Intellectual corporations had similar structure and, for them too, the term master was a descriptor of professional ability.

Thus, the guild developed the values the group members had to conform with; it organised the rituals that manifested the members’ belonging to the association: for instance, each guild had a patron, Saint Luke for the painters for instance, and festivities asserting the presence of the group in society were organised around the name day of its holy protector. There was also strong internal control so that those individuals failing the group ideals could be admonished, punished or expelled - depending on the gravity of the case. Moreover each group chose its leaders, usually among the most successful members of the guild: such a mandate was certainly prestigious inside the craft community but it also allowed to enter in negotiation not only with sister organisations but also with the political leaders of the city – some guild leaders often becoming town fathers of their own. You will have recognised in this description the government of peers that has defined until recently the universities set up on the European model that has dominated the world for the last two or three centuries.

Sociologists speak of habitus to name the attitudes considered normal in a given group, those elements of common culture everybody feels familiar with without experiencing the need to analyse why. Today’s problems, however, lie in the fact that the university is less and less of a self-centred group – anchored in a given territory; allegiance and common behaviour is as much to the community of scientific peers around the world as to the local institution that hosts the scientist. This aspect is linked to the fragmentation of the intellectual craft into a constantly growing number of disciplines or specialisations; thus, for many professors, their ‘communities of belonging’ are with experts of their own field who usually live far away. The 2005 UNESCO report on knowledge societies considers that this internationalisation is the key to tomorrow’s universities that will thrive on knowledge networks that are more rapid, efficient and flexible in the exploration and diffusion of information than traditional territorially grounded academic institutions. True, university people are prone to cultivate external links with professionals to whom they feel much closer than with the colleagues next door who happen to specialise in very different areas of knowledge. This weakens the social bonds among university members. Add to this that many professors are often busy in several institutions - be they other universities, firms or associations - that all have developed a corporate culture of their own. Today the sense of common belonging can also be reduced among the students who are frequently asked to do internships in firms and organisations where the academic habitus is rather foreign. Thus, the commonality of behaviour tends to be reduced to some basic rules, lots of actions depending more and more on individual conducts that are not necessarily dovetailed with those of colleagues. In other words, the collegial organisation of higher education is evolving fast and many, inside or outside the university, no longer recognise the institution they believed to know. That is why developing a sense of ‘common belonging’ beyond sharing the same employer is no easy task in our day and age.

Sharing a common purpose, however, by embracing a common mission may act as a strong ‘holding factor’: thus the institution may intend to make its mark in technical innovation, in committing to a more sustainable environment, in training dynamic citizens or in the search for new molecules; when such goals are considered to be a focus of common interest, members of the institution can certainly feel proud or ashamed of the success or failures of their academic community. To sum up, if a university is to play its part in the transformation of society, it must develop some sense of community belonging that goes beyond the simple awareness by its members of having a common paymaster. Conscious of common intellectual goals, common friends, common policies and a common knowledge
organisation, the academic institution can then become a responsible partner in the development of the region, country or planet.

2. **Allegiance, the need for consent, the call for dissent**

Asking another question like ‘Who speaks for the university?’ may add to the understanding of university identity. Is it the Rector or President - whose powers vary from executive to representative, depending on the country? Or is it the Faculties that propose teaching and research services? The Departments and Institutes that explore and disseminate knowledge? Could not one say that the doorkeeper refusing entry to an amphitheatre represents institutional identity as much as the Deans or the Vice-Chancellor claiming the institution is to be opened to all people and ideas? And what of the Professors draping themselves with scientific authority when speaking on television or radio programmes, or of the administrators justifying the weaknesses of the institution not to speak of the students who praise or criticise the quality of their training? Are they not all voices – often contradictory – of the institution they live in? Indeed they may be perceived by government, media or civil society as valid speakers for the university simply because they can claim they belong to it. Professors, students, however, often do not agree and the institution may look divided unto itself. But this is normal in an organisation dedicated to knowledge development, an institution where **doubt is the engine of progress**. In fact all, be they students or teachers, should rally around one central requirement, to doubt as the only way to take rational risks – in science, in technology, in the arts. This is the scientific method that makes the university mission-specific, i.e., able to explore and disseminate knowledge. In other words, in building a community of belonging, academics do consent to live in an institution that thrives on dissent. That is their fundamental common feature.

Doubt, as a method, goes back to the medieval university where the *disputatio* was at the heart of the learning process. Students were given proposals, which they had to dismantle, turn round, defend or kill in disputing their validity with their professors, usually in front of their colleagues since most of the teaching was oral. A remnant of that pedagogy exists in most universities when doctoral dissertations – or, sometimes, the final papers for a master’s degree – are to be defended, usually in public. The future graduate must prove the originality and solidity of his reasoning, often in a rather vivid way, members of the jury playing the devil’s advocate to check the seriousness of the proposed arguments. In Salamanca, the medieval student was brought to a chapel dedicated to Santa Barbara the evening before the doctoral defence; he was left there, alone in the dark, with the questions he would have to debate with the professors the next morning; people being what they are, the chapel was so arranged that two guards could make sure there was no cheating organised during the night! In England, this form of intense discussion has survived in the debating societies where students can test and train their capacity to convince - simply on the basis of logical reasoning. If you open a TV in Britain and look at parliamentary debates, you will often see quick dialogue, fast replies and humour in discussions opposing, on both sides of the same table in the Commons, the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition. That is how political decisions are being tested: Tony Blair was a master in the exercise.

This ability to take a step back, to doubt and review has been revived in Renaissance universities with the development of the humanities, those fields of knowledge that criticised traditional, accepted learning by referring to the older masters, the Greek, Roman, Jewish, Arab philosophers, historians or writers of the past. Again, in the 18th century, much of the Enlightenment consisted in reviewing and casting aside ideas that were considered accepted truth. The same happened with the Humbolditian type of university in which students – and professors – were constantly questioning the validity of their thoughts and reasoning to strengthen their ability to think anew and develop original ideas as part of the quest for truth.
In fact, in the 19th century German university, formal learning was not a must as long as students could pass the final exam – after discovering the strength of good thinking. Like in Montaigne’s Renaissance, it was more important to have a tête bien faite than a tête bien pleine. This meant critical abilities. Today, the fight for dissent goes on through refusing didactics requiring to cram students’ minds with all kinds of facts and ideas, a refusal that sometimes distresses professors who feel threatened if they cannot cover the many aspects of their discipline: as a result, lots of students are still being asked to take 30 contact hours a week; in the knowledge society, however, we are told that it would be better to learn how to learn rather than to know a vast amount of information that tend very quickly to become obsolete in our day and age. A pedagogy of dissent means to be free to contest in order to test and, thus, move to another level of understanding.

This also means a smaller load of face-to-face courses, free space for the students to learn by themselves or with colleagues, more practical exercises to test skills and train competence. This is certainly a central item for your discussions in this meeting since credits should measure the tête bien faite much more than the tête bien pleine considering that society needs citizens able to judge and value knowledge and its use rather than people trained to repeat acquired gestures and attitudes that fit the mould of tradition. What is measured – as much as how it is measured – is at the heart of the difference between the US and European systems of credits: indeed, by assessing the workload required from the student to achieve a specific outcome, ECTS points to a student-centred university education, an education based on various forms of knowledge, explanatory, descriptive, procedural, behavioural. Facts are important still but the capacity to describe them, to use them in a growing process of personal development is the frame of reference ECTS wants to stick to. In many ways, this is so far from the usual understanding of what graduates should be trained for that, in Europe, ECTS was not understood for quite a while – and sometimes assessors still fall into bureaucratic temptations by tending to quantify rather than qualify. The US system, going back to the beginning of the 20th century, is more interested in time spent with the teacher, hours that can be easily verified, considering that the non factual training is a spin off of the normal teaching: in other words, it is much more professor-centred than the European approach, more quantitative than qualitative.

My point, however, is not so much ECTS than the academic community’s consent to dissent. This requires – or translates into – academic freedom. In Europe, where such freedom is linked originally to the process of thinking itself, academic freedom has usually focused on the possibility for teachers and students to progress in their discipline through doubt and risk-taking. That is why, at that level of reflection, political or any other pressure from people outside the ‘community of academic belonging’ - who would try to force on original ideas a foreign logic that is everything but scientific -, can only undermine the whole purpose of the exercise and distort the mission of the university. Academic freedom is of course close to freedom of expression, one of the key human rights but, in Europe, they are not considered the same: in the US, however, after a famous position taken in 1940 by the American Association of University Professors, a strong group stressing loud and clear the norms and values of the academic profession, academic freedom has been considered one aspect of the freedom of expression; thus, taking account of the First Amendment, it covers not only scientific development but also the opinions expressed by professors or students on subjects other than their disciplinary interest – social, cultural of political. The university becomes a crucible for debating all opinions, theoretically in a rational way. This leads to the ‘engaged’ university – or at least to committed academics when university members feel that an intellectual contribution is needed to help re-shape the environment, local or regional. In Europe, the intellectual quest is balanced by a sense of responsibility for its consequences. In a way, freedom is not absolute but relative to the duties springing from it. That is why, in
continental Europe, academic freedom is no contradiction with civil servant status as long as
the State recognises that intellectual progress – that is of interest for society as a whole –
needs the capacity for dissent in order to advance. It is as if the State was the supporter of a
thought process that could question its own wisdom – especially in social sciences. Indeed.
such a partnership has often existed, a link that is reinforced by the fact that the public purse
is the main source of funding for universities. The Bologna Declaration may illustrate this
connection: in 1999, the Ministers challenged the universities to put their act together so that
public authorities could better understand the conditions of academic success that, in their
political role as governments, they were supposed to sustain. There was a kind of underlying
blackmail: if you, academic institutions, may not explain and justify your needs, then public
authorities will have to decide in your stead what is good for you and for society. Universities
understood the message and, since 1999, the Bologna process has strengthened the dialogue
with the universities, now seen as partners rather than servants of public interest. Indirectly,
this has expanded academic freedom in Europe and brought it closer to the US situation.

Thus, last week in London, where Education Ministers met, like every two years, to
review progress in the Bologna process, they said: ‘We reaffirm our commitment to increasing
the compatibility and comparability of our higher education systems, whilst at the same time
respecting their diversity. We recognise the important influence higher education institutions
exert on developing our societies, based on their traditions as centres of learning, research,
creativity and knowledge transfer as well as their key role in defining and transmitting the
values on which our societies are built. Our aim is to ensure that they have the necessary
resources to continue to fulfil their full range of purposes. Those purposes include: preparing
students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future
careers and enabling their personal development; creating and maintaining a broad,
advanced knowledge base; and stimulating research and innovation’. My introductory
question was: what the university is all about? Here is a clear answer, at least in terms of
expected results, and it shows the respect and understanding universities and governments
may have of each other: as partners in the globalisation of knowledge, they help each other on
the way to the presently emerging knowledge society.

3. The Magna Charta synthesis

This bet on dialogue is no won case. Let us remember that, in continental Europe, the
universities have long been considered a public service, very much like health or
transportation. It is only recently that the grip of the State on the daily organisation of the
institutions has loosened– some time in the 1990’s when, with mass education, it was proving
more and more difficult to steer from a governmental office the complexity of universities
that often represented a key industry if not the main employer in their region, institutions with
large budgets as compared with other institutions in the area –private firms included. Indeed,
the university had evolved since mass higher education had become the norm in the sixties
and after the old institution had exploded during the 1968 student revolt. As a matter of fact,
1968 helped recognise a more fundamental metamorphosis of the academic institution that
had developed – in Europe – during the reconstruction period following World War II.

Universities, rather than training a small elite of intellectuals and society leaders – not
more than 4 to 8 % of an age cohort in most countries before the war – had been encouraged
to open their gates to wider numbers of students. For instance, in 1963, the Robbins report in
Britain considered that higher participation rates were needed to help develop society in a
world characterised by economic growth: this supposed the creation of new institutions of
higher learning as well as the expansion of existing universities. And this was true all over
Europe. The old models of academic organisation were questioned everywhere: in Germany,
for instance, the Humboldtian model was criticised as too focused to allow groups of students coming from low middle class or a workers’ milieu to benefit from higher education; next to university enlargement, this led to the setting up of Gesamthochschulen, the so-called comprehensive universities asked to combine academic education and professional training; simultaneously, Fachhochschulen, centred on professional and technical competences mainly, were organised everywhere in the Federal Republic to cater for large groups of learners interested in general higher education rather than in re-engineering knowledge in academic centres. With 20 to 30% of an age cohort aiming at higher education, universities could no longer provide for the social elite only; they had to open training paths allowing also for socially useful employment – in trade, industry or in civil service. Universities were thus forced to adapt to new economic and social circumstances characterised by greater individual autonomy which, combined with higher equality in learning opportunities, could result in extended social mobility. This meant opening new areas of training to meet specific needs; this also implied paying attention to the students now asked to express their concerns and requirements – immediate, in the department they were attending, or long-term, for their future activities in society.

In terms of organisation, the traditional collegial university composed of intellectual peers answering the call of science, usually for its own sake or its pedagogical value, could no longer face these transformed social obligations: laws, as a result, changed the academic systems of Europe, the French reorganising teaching around specialised departments combining training and research, the Dutch introducing a democratic governance system where students – the social demand – could have majority influence on their education path as was the case in France also. In the late 60’s, indeed, everywhere in Europe students were given advisory powers, if not an executive capacity in institutional decision-making processes. Moreover, the fragmentation of disciplinary interests - encouraged by the expansion of higher education and by internal democracy – called for the professional efficiency in university management in order to keep the institution as a single whole. Rectors were now chosen as much for their operational competences as for their intellectual prestige based on proven scientific ability. Leadership meant management.

By 1985, the changes born out of the 1968 student revolt had been accepted; in fact, they had induced new balances of power – inside and outside the institution; European universities had adapted to a new institutional culture, sometimes unwillingly if not unconsciously. In such a transformed situation, were the traditional tenets of academia still of any significance? Could the transformed ‘community of belonging’ that social change ushered be the heir of the sense of purpose and cultural behaviour of a prestigious past? In other words, were the old values that gave meaning to the academic profession still of relevance in the mass university?

The Magna Charta tried to give an answer to this doubt and self-doubt on university identity. At a time when economy and trade were developing fast, at a time when universities had regained a position in European society as accepted engines of its development, the question of university fundaments could be asked again in a rather secure context. The 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna in 1988 offered the opportunity to do so. Thus, in 1987, at the invitation of the University of Barcelona, a small group of academic leaders from ancient and prestigious universities in Europe met to draft a document that would take stock of the role and function of today’s universities from the perspective of their permanent and changing autonomy, a charter that academic leaders from the world could sign as a solemn reference on what constitutes their institutions, on what universities are and should be.

The university, over the centuries, has both evolved and remained loyal to features of a core identity. To take a zoological metaphor, the snake has shed its skin many times, grown
and transformed over the years in different ways in different places, but it is still a snake – and recognisably so. What was the skin - or the body - and what are still the essential features that make the university what it is?

The drafting committee considered that, over the centuries, universities had best prospered when they acted as engines of social development and intellectual transformation and when, to do so, they were free to explore or spread knowledge and free to organise, thus making the best of their staff and students’ competences in order to contribute to society’s needs and ambitions. In other terms, academic freedom and institutional autonomy are the pivots of higher education and research that allow for the provision of social change.

That is why the rectors who signed the document considered that ‘at the approaching end of the millennium, the future of mankind depends largely on cultural, scientific and technical development ... built up in centres of culture, knowledge and research as represented by true universities’. Thus, ‘to spread knowledge among the younger generation, universities, in today’s world, must also serve society as a whole ... whose future not only requires ... a considerable investment in continuing education but also the respect of the great harmonies natural environment and of life itself.’

Moving on from these considerations, the Magna Charta looked into the best conditions for their realisation by asserting the principles around which universities should structure: ‘to meet the needs of the world around it, university teaching and research must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power’. In other words, institutional autonomy guarantees the critical mind that makes possible the changes still to be explored and explained by intelligence and reason, should society progress. Autonomy, therefore, points to the requirements of an open future. This implies that ‘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’. Thus ‘freedom in training and research is the fundamental principle of university life’. Such an academic freedom is no support of personal dogmas, however, since it ‘rejects intolerance and is always open to dialogue as the university is an ideal meeting-ground for teachers capable of imparting their knowledge... and for students entitled, able and willing to enrich their minds with that knowledge’. Therefore the ‘university is a trustee of the European humanist tradition, its constant care being to attain universal knowledge ... by transcending geographical and political frontiers, thus affirming the vital need for different cultures to know and influence each other’. As a matter of fact, the Magna Charta was endorsed from the first not only by European universities but also by other academic institutions that recognised in their organisation the cultural heritage represented by these ideas and developments – whole or partial.

Such is the core of the document signed by some 400 university rectors and presidents on 18 September 1988 on the Piazza Maggiore of Bologna, in the presence of social partners who were represented by the President of the Italian Republic, members of the national government, church prelates, city leaders or ambassadors from foreign nations. The Magna Charta was a solemn reaffirmation that, even as a mass university, the institution needed self-steering capacity if it were to meet its social obligations as a motor of change ‘at the heart of societies differently organised because of geography and historical heritage’.

4. Magna Charta validity and understanding

This long presentation was perhaps unnecessary here since several universities of Kazakhstan have subscribed to the principles of the Magna Charta, their leaders having come to sign the original document in Bologna where it was first proposed some twenty years ago. Moreover, this afternoon, the rectors of Kazakh universities will sign a Memorandum that,
very much like the Magna Charta, offers common references to all the universities of this country about who they are and what they do. In a way, like in 1988, rectors are claiming an identity and specificity of their institutions that make them full partners in the development of the country. Interestingly enough, in Bologna, the representatives of civil society did not speak or contribute anything other than their presence; even the President of the Republic – who arrived late - agreed simply to attend a two hour ceremony celebrating a recovered sense of academic pride after many years of doubt and questioning on the reality of universities. Affirmation of identity was the first step indeed before reasserting the need for collaboration with public authorities – as well as with industrial and social stakeholders; this cooperation was given a frame eleven years later by the Declaration of the Ministers of Education signed also in Bologna – in fact in the Aula Santa Lucia of the University.

Here, if I am not wrong, the two stages of the process – the recognition of each other’s common interests and the need to address shared problems of social commitment - are addressed concurrently rather than consecutively. At first, I did not understand why I was being asked to deal with both Bologna papers, the Charter and the Declaration. My disarray grew when I saw that you are here first to discuss how to introduce a credit system in Kazakh higher education institutions. However, when I read the Memorandum to be signed later today, the structure of this meeting became evident: the partners in the intellectual venture of Kazakhstan on the way to modernisation in a world of global knowledge are taking stock of their institutional specificity, role and functions at ministerial and at university level to affirm that they can work together as partners of transformation - in a trustful and open manner.

As representative of the Magna Charta, I can only welcome this will both to assert values and principles in the Memorandum and to create a Kazakh area of higher education. Indeed, one leads to the other as the European example illustrates. The Observatory is honoured to have the Magna Charta taken as a source of inspiration in the organisation of tomorrow’s system of knowledge in Kazakhstan. This means that you recognise yourselves in the 1988 text, that the points made there are of relevance to you. Indeed, if the Magna Charta refers to the constitutive elements shared by all universities, your interest in its articles proves that it can be a valid document the world over – even if its summary wording can call for further comments – like any basic text motivating the identity of a given institution.

That is why I would like now to analyse a little more closely the ways and works of the university – and point to the values and principles we might all share - before I turn to the convergence process started in Europe around these norms and the universities’ potential for change, the Bologna process.

5. **Knowledge: dissent as a need, consent as an ambition**

In practice, academic institutions act as

- think-tanks for the future,
- knowledge organisers,
- centres of qualification, or/and
- laboratories for innovative products and services.

These are the main roles universities are asked to play in today’s world. Many contend that these four functions are being met - as well or even better - by other providers such as those institutions that focus on one of those roles only, be they public or private. Often, industrial labs, for instance, have proven more apt than universities for innovative design in applying research to development; or corporate schools more agile to train professionals with relevant expertise for the jobs required by the labour market. There is also increased competition between universities and those firms that take over growing shares of the
research and education market in a society where knowledge is distributed far and wide – through the media, through the internet, through consumer created data bases - Wikipedia, for instance: universities have lost the monopoly of knowledge creation and dissemination.

Why then should universities still exist – what specificity can they invoke as a competitive advantage vis-à-vis other providers of knowledge and innovation on the market of intelligence? Their uniqueness lies in the fact that they, and they alone, bring together these various activities as *integral parts of a single body*, a set up built on the tensions and the cross-fertilisation of the varied functions of knowledge. This bridging role is essential as it puts man’s various ways to appropriate information at the centre of social transformation. In other words, there is an added value to put under the same roof varied social roles – and that added value justifies the unique identity of universities. This does not mean that universities are all the same. On the contrary, they may differ when exploring the variety of knowledge and social attitudes – some are more research oriented, others more service centred; some are more skill providers while others focus on sorting out and validating the information relevant for society’s development. These various interests can be combined in different ways: in other words, each university is able to develop a *unique profile* when matching resources to ambitions. However, and this is essential, the four functions of knowledge that such a reunion of opposites demand must be present in a way or another, thus making what the Magna Charta calls a ‘true’ university. That is how, each university, in its own way, can *dissent in order to consent*. In terms of processes, it also means that the institution cultivates the four types of knowledge that combine with different emphases in order to fulfil the various roles of the institution: the explanatory, the descriptive, the procedural and the behavioural.

When universities are supposed to roll back the frontiers of knowledge, to explore the unknown and enlarge the scope of science and the arts – i.e., act as think tanks -, they need to step back from acquired data and information in order to explain and renew understanding of the world and of man’s place in the universe. In older days, this *urge to explain* was called the *search for truth* and was very much at the heart of the Humboldtian model of higher education in which research was at the heart of teaching. Universities are still asked to foster critical thought and independent minds, to stimulate creativity for man’s conquest of the intangible, i.e., for his or her opening to the unexpected. No easy task but institutional autonomy – that embodies the consent to dissent - represents the best device to protect the questioning culture needed to free the new, which, if really new, can only be unauthorised by the powers that be, political, economic or – some times - academic.

A strong *capacity to question* is also required in order to re-arrange the ‘known’, to update and upgrade past understandings: the *urge to describe* may sustain the revision, sorting out of any received idea or acquired concept to set it in a different context. Such a reorganisation of knowledge to make contemporary sense of ideas past is often summed up under the term of ‘scholarship’. That is the *search for meaning* of people like Diderot and d’Alembert in 18th century France when they launched the project of an *Encyclopaedia* to filter and re-visit the accepted truths of their day. They did not propose anything really new but their changed arrangement of knowledge was innovative enough to transform the understanding of man and society, so much so that the Enlightenment ushered formidable revolutions in Europe, political in France, industrial in Britain. Thus, the university should not only be the archives of given knowledge but also its memory: archives collect everything while memory filters and chooses among existing notions so that acquired wisdom – once trimmed and re-organised - makes new sense of culture, of man’s imprint on the world, that is. Critical description is indeed part of the dissent culture that structures universities: *'no, this world picture does no longer make sense and needs to be revisited!'* That is why, as we saw, academic freedom is an essential feature of academic organisation.
Behavioural knowledge founds the urge to fit by taking pit corresponds to man’s search for order. Every time a degree is awarded, the university places a former student on the mobility ladder, thus giving him or her specific social prospects that may vary according to the value given to the ‘paper’. This sesame to social success is what parents are looking for - much more than a thorough training in the sciences or the arts that they often do not understand. Universities are thus machines of conformity – conformity to expected norms and results: they are places of social reproduction. In that function, they have little reason to dispute the ranks and values they are training for – even if they do not simply mimic the past but also use doubt and questioning to educate ‘modernisers’, a reference to society’s aims for a future that should bring about prosperity, peace and solidarity. Therefore it is important for universities to know the political authorities’ priorities if they are to meet the challenges of training. In this role, universities consent – even if, in their training, they play on dissent to form able citizens.

Procedural knowledge (exploring the ‘how’) characterises the innovation processes that condition the search for wellbeing, the fourth social function of universities. Even if change is at the heart of research and development (i.e., R&D) or of professional efficiency – thus proposing new products and new services with strong academic content – the end of the process is improvement rather than revolution. This function is now considered to be central to academic growth – an investment in social transformation in order to cope best with new technologies, new materials, with health and energy challenges, or with environmental changes – that is social sustainability. As such, procedures can propose efficiency by reviewing, revising and revisiting processes of innovation; they do not, by definition, question the why of what is being done. They react and foster reform rather than revolution. They refer to the world that exists - although to improve it – and sustain a culture of consent.

For the daily experience of university people, this multi-faceted combination of consent and dissent has consequences on personal and institutional values and comportment. When universities search for the intangible and for meaning – areas of dissent -, they are called to be responsible; this implies that they can be made accountable for their choices – and possible errors – since freedom never ensures expected results. In their search for order or wellbeing, on the contrary, universities are invited to be responsive; they are made accountable for their failures, for their inefficiencies much more than for their priorities since the latter are in fact chosen by the society outside. In a situation of dissent, universities are social partners taking enough distance from the problems of the day to offer alternatives to existing strategies. In a context of consent, universities are social agents meeting the urgent needs and present hopes of the society they live in. This corresponds to a narrow understanding of the university as a public service; that is why society should also be persuaded that, in the long term, critical thinking is a real service to the public that is worth investing since free academics in free institutions can best test and imagine the social environments of tomorrow. To sum up consent to dissent and dissent to consent are the two poles of the university as an institution, the explosive combination that makes them the motor of social evolution: the university’s specificity is to feed on them both while fulfilling four very different functions.

In 1996, at a meeting organised in the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, then President of the country, told some 150 rectors from universities from all over Europe that their institutions are based on the call for the unity of knowledge as knowledge, in its various forms, is man’s main tool to discover and develop his fundamental unity as a person in society. He added that the name of the organisation says it all, even if it applied originally to several types of ‘communities of belonging’: is not the term universitas coming from the Latin unum (one) and vertere (turn to), which could mean turn to the one? This could be made into a beautiful motto for all academic institutions: Ad unum vertere! Such is the raison d’être
of the university – to link together\(^1\) the various strands of knowledge – and its motivation for bringing under the same roof the tensions inherent to the four functions the institution does exert for society in general. Therefore universities are normal platforms of discussions, of possible oppositions considered to be ways forward to new syntheses and continuously reformed perspectives. Tensions are the dynamics of a university life on the move.

6. **Knowledge, a shared venture**

Universities tolerant of different opinions, open to the unexpected - thus able to commit to change because they are free to decide about their strategies of development and social integration - are the institutions described by the Magna Charta. However, the variety of their engagements, of their organisation asks for a shared purpose, not only at institutional level but also collectively – on the national, continental or world stage. Tomorrow’s knowledge society calls for networks of knowledge providers – as no institution, academic or otherwise, will ever be able to meet successfully and completely the four challenges outlined earlier, man’s unquenchable quest for the intangible, for meaning, for order and for wellbeing. This implies giving substance – as a group - to the call for university social accountability that is so central to the 1988 Magna Charta. Thus, in 1999, following a first meeting of 4 countries in Paris a year earlier at the occasion of the 800\(^{th}\) anniversary of the Sorbonne, 29 European Ministers of Education quoted the Magna Charta as an essential step on the way to university self-awareness, a quality very much needed to create a European Higher Education Area by year 2010. For the Ministers, when envisaging greater compatibility and increased mobility between national systems of education, universities are normal *partners in the shaping of the new society of knowledge*; this means for governments that they recognise institutional autonomy as the condition for an efficient and effective contribution of academia to the transformation of the community. But introspection, self-doubt and institutional awareness are no reason for feet dragging; on the contrary, such qualities call for active responsibility for the future of society. This means that each institution, while facing its own constraints, should reflect on the need to

- re-organise its curricula (in order to combine professions and science),
- re-define its quality (by adapting Humboldt’s heritage to purpose-oriented activities),
- re-shape its balance between education and research (by cross-fertilising personal and social responsibility for the management of a changing knowledge basis that is supposed to offer *meaning* rather than tools to development).

At present, the Bologna process of exchange and compatibility in higher education involves some 43 countries, from Lisbon to Vladivostok, from Reykjavik to Malta. However, at the inner core of that larger group, the Ministers of those countries that are members of the European Union go one step further by proposing universities to mobilise for long-term social objectives by betting on academic initiatives and the mobility of their graduates in order to contribute to the *setting up of the world’s most vibrant knowledge society*, if possible also by 2010. In Europe, this is known as the *Lisbon agenda*, an ambitious target for development that was adopted by the heads of government of a EU summit organised in Portugal in year 2000. Since then, in recommendations passed by the Commission in Brussels, the universities were called twice to pick up the challenge and to enter a knowledge economy of which, by nature of their intellectual drive, they should become the axis. Interestingly enough, over the years, the concept has moved from a society of knowledge to a knowledge economy – not exactly the same thing – as if the Commission was shifting attention from the ends to the means. Anyway, the EU agenda tends to colour also the more general search for a shared purpose that

\(^1\) Interestingly enough, ‘link together’, in Latin, is *inter-ligere* – which is one of the etymologies for *intelligence*, after all an essential basis for good academic work.
motivates the wider group of countries that are members of the Bologna process: indeed, everybody accepts that the knowledge society is on its way and that universities are key to the success of the reorganisations that will bring forth a world where information is shared rather than fought over, a world where competition is but the efficiency aspect of a deeper concern for cooperation among the people of this earth – whose fundamental challenges are planetary even if expressed at local or regional level. Cooperative networks, open and flexible, changing and focused, are then the best way to commit universities to social development as nodes of transformation in the re-engineering of our societies.

That is what the Bologna Declaration invites institutions to aim for when the Ministers call the universities to build up a common higher education area – with their active support. Therefore, although the Bologna process is intergovernmental, the universities, the students, the unions and the employers must be permanent partners of the public authorities in defining the convergent changes now being turned into law in nearly all countries of Europe. In 1999, only the association of European universities was the recognised partner of the Ministers and I remember organising in Bologna the meeting of rectors preceding the conference of Ministers to discuss the governmental agenda and the draft of the Declaration. The President of the association was given a seat in the discussion of the Ministers and could intervene to represent the academic viewpoint. Today, next to EUA, this active dialogue between the Ministers and civil society is pursued with other representatives of those groups that are interested in the success of higher education, the students – through ESIB, the student unions in Europe -, academic staff – through Educational International (EI), the teachers’ unions in the world -, the employers – though UNICE, the confederation of industrial organisations in Europe not to speak of the international organisations that have a stake in university development, the Council of Europe, UNESCO-CEPES or the European Union. All these people, with delegates for all ministries, compose the Bologna follow up group that unwinds the Bologna process, from one ministerial conference to the next, every two years.

The Declaration has started an open process by fixing a deadline, 2010, and a goal, a European Higher Education Area. To achieve this shared purpose, a series of tools for cooperation were outlined, like a common study architecture; the use of easily ‘readable’ degrees thanks to diploma supplements that could demonstrate what the graduate had learned; the adoption of the European Credit Transfer System, ECTS, that had been pioneered in the Erasmus programme; enlarged support of student and staff mobility; cooperation in quality assurance; and reforming curricula so that they show a European dimension fostering a common understanding of European identity. To these first six areas of collaborative concern for all European systems of higher education were later added other aspects of common interest: in Prague (2001), the social dimension of higher education – in fact the question of access to and support of learning to allow for the universal higher education required by a society of knowledge – a key concern for students; in Berlin (2003), the incidence of research on training – in particular at doctoral level; in Bergen (2005), lifelong learning as the framework Europeans should aim for in a student-centred system of higher education. Thus, in 1999, an open process began in order to position European higher education in the world - a process whose members and topics could evolve in time with the declared needs of the participants, universities and governments alike. As the Declaration came at a time when those actors knew that things had to change if the challenges of the future were to be met, the process proved a great success, all the more so as it was NOT a treaty, with compulsory clauses – just a declaration of intent.

As a result, it unleashed many initiatives at European, national and local level. The Bologna follow-up group approved activities and conferences clearly centred on key aspects of the process, as defined in the Declaration. In these ‘official’ meetings all partners - ministries, universities, stakeholders - were always convened; such encounters followed each
other nearly on a monthly basis, everywhere in Europe, thus bringing into the discussions a growing number of actors who, step by step, learned about systems of higher education other than their own and about common problems which they could help solve by inventing joint solutions. At the same time, at national level, similar exercises went on, always with the idea to develop compatibility among the systems on the other side of the border. Indirectly, Europe was becoming a normal reference if not the axis for desired transformations. Today, the process may have lost some of its impulse because change has reached the classroom level: professors, indeed, are now asked to revise and change their courses, to make them shorter, more focused on essential learning and thus more student-friendly. This is no obvious task for teachers who have been proceeding satisfactorily in the traditional teacher-focused approach! The challenge of the knowledge society, where information grows obsolete at high speed, is however to redesign curricula while making them readable and compatible with what others are developing in distant corners of the continent. If politicians are quicker to understand such requirements for modernisation, the actual transformation done at departmental level is a bit more of a headache and one can understand that resistance has appeared – for instance among engineers who contend it is impossible to train students in two stages of 3 plus 2 years rather than one stage of five years, the usual way. The proof of the matter will come from the employers when they hire the new ‘Bologna’ graduates: they, too, have to set aside fears of the unknown; that is why it was important to have them represented in the follow up group.

In London, last week, the Ministers did not add new strands to the concerns of the Bologna process, since 2010 is only three years away, but underlined the areas where real progress was still expected to move the European Higher Education Area from a mosaic of unsolved problems to a network of competences. Thus mobility is still too low if Europeans are to experience Europe in other parts of the continent, thus building a new culture of trust between people with different histories, languages and economic development. Employability also needs to be developed as it encapsulates the potential of the three-cycle degree system, the quality question and the communication concerns higher education and Ministries have vis-à-vis the firms and agencies, public or private, which could use graduates able to transform Europe into a knowledge society. There is also need to institutionalise the process, collecting similar data, training common agents of European change – perhaps at the risk of fixing the unexpected that makes Bologna so fascinating - especially outside of a Europe whose transformations are the envy of many reformers. Hence, the interest and validity of the process in other parts of the world is also an on-going priority. Until 2010, London proposes to consolidate the process so that it enters university culture as a norm of academic behaviour. For the next and last meeting of the Ministers on 28/29 April 2009, however, a more general reflection should develop on what the European Higher Education Area should become as a space where people, finances, projects and ideas circulate as freely as goods and capital in the EU. There is still a lot to be done in order to federate universities around common projects that express their renewed understanding of a shared identity accounting for the changes of academic organisation the knowledge society is calling for – in Europe and the world.

7. To conclude

The Bologna process is voluntary: everybody can apply its rules and join its reflections. I am sure that your desire to develop a credit system in the Kazakh area of higher education is a first step to open to the unexpected and, as Ministry and universities, to join the international movement of global transformation which we are all responsible for.