

To the Signatories of the
Magna Charta Universitatum

Bologna, 23 October 2003

Dear Signatories, Dear Colleagues,

As the leader of a university, you are certainly very busy attending to the development and activities of your institution. So busy perhaps that, unfortunately, you have little time to take distance from daily urgencies and think of the sense and direction of European higher education.

Please find herewith a booklet that could support your reflection: it questions the role of the university and its links to society – as a partner in its development.

The Magna Charta Observatory, as a joint venture of the University of Bologna and the European University Association, decided to draw the attention of academic leaders on the case of a recent law passed in the German State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. It qualified academic freedom in such a way that a law suit was introduced asking for the annulment of an article linking university work to the academics' responsibility towards "man, nature and society". This text, here in an edited English version of Prof. Jürgen Kohler, former Rector of Greifswald University, is no easy reading because of its legal character. However, it is asking fundamental questions about why and how the university should act in society – questions that are also commented, in the second half of the booklet, by members of the Collegium of the Magna Charta, Prof. Michael Daxner and myself.

If you want to share your views on the matter, you are welcome to do so by using the dedicated Forum of the Magna Charta website at: www.magna-charta.org. The following three questions – referring to the case study – are used to structure the debate:

1. *Is the University - as a knowledge CREATOR, CURATOR and CRITIC- both a reproducer of past data and social structures and a questioner of given information and community organisation? If so, does it combine two contradictory functions, "consent" and "dissent" and how?*

2. *How can the legislators and governments specify what is “academic freedom” through basic legislation and thus set academic freedom in the frame of institutional autonomy? Is this a positive right given to universities with a specific purpose, exploring the unknown (“dissent”)?*
3. *Can “political correctness” and majority opinion on “truths” (the need for “consent”) be reconciled with the core institutional task of academic research and teaching to defend the quest for knowledge and truth (the obligation of “dissent”) as elements and conditions of freedom, peace and prosperity?*

Even if you do not find the time to contribute personally to this digital debate, we would be glad to receive ideas and suggestions from other members of your institution; anyway, we hope that this first case study can support you in precisizing the role of your university in its own context while abiding to the key principles of the Magna Charta Universitatum.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Fabio Roversi-Monaco
President of the Collegium