

EUA STATEMENT ON THE DISMISSAL BY THE SERBIAN MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF THE RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KOSOVSKA MITROVICA

The European University Association (EUA) notes with grave concern recent higher education developments in Serbia, and in particular the decision of the Ministry of Education in Belgrade to dismiss Gojko Savic from the position of Rector of the University of Kosovska Mitrovica and to appoint Radivoj Papovic in his place. These developments are clearly against the spirit of the Bologna Process and are harmful to higher education in Serbia. Through this statement, EUA lends its support to the voices within the Serbian academic community, and notably the Serbian Association of Universities, which have publically protested against this government action violating the fundamental principle of university autonomy.

One of the central tenets of EUA's mission is to promote the respect and protection of the fundamental university values and rights laid down in the Magna Charta Universitatum. The first fundamental principle of this document enshrines the respect for the university as an autonomous institution which is morally and intellectually independent of political authority.

EUA acknowledges that the legal situation of the University of Kosovska Mitrovica has many ambiguities, and that it is desirable for the university to have a firm legal basis in Kosovo - whether or not funding continues to be received from the Serbian government. The United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has an important responsibility to ensure that these legal issues are resolved, especially as it has played such a strong and supportive role in developing the university as a vital higher education provider in the region. There is also a need to pursue positive reforms within the university in the best interests of its students and the local and regional communities to ensure that the institution operates effectively, transparently and democratically. The recent action of the Serbian Ministry of Education has unfortunately served to make such positive developments more difficult to achieve.

In the country's recent past under the Milosevic regime, the 1998 higher education law, which violated fundamental principles of university autonomy and academic freedom, led to Serbian universities being further ostracised from European higher education developments. It is to be hoped that this period will remain firmly buried, and that the ongoing process of higher education reform and development will be pursued with commitment and solidarity from all actors.

In the name of its 700 member universities and rectors conferences, EUA therefore supports the demand of the Serbian Association of Universities for the annulment of the appointment of a new Rector at the University of Kosovska Mitrovica, and for the university to be enabled to pursue its internal organisation and development through a democratic process of internal elections, unhindered by external political interference.

EUA, Brussels, 2 June 2004