Universities and higher education in the European knowledge area

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Cristina GUTIÉRREZ CORTINES (EPP-ED, E) on universities and higher education in the European learning area. While affirming that the freedom and autonomy of universities must remain cornerstones of European society and its institutional framework, the committee nevertheless felt that the foundations should be laid for an active, dynamic European higher education area to boost renewal and ongoing development. In order to bring this about, the EU should increase its support for universities. MEPs pointed out that such aid would be perfectly compatible with respect for the subsidiarity principle. The report also said that greater mobility was needed in order to create a common European area, which would be impossible without genuine recognition of qualifications and diplomas. The Member States and universities were therefore urged to take steps to overcome the legal and administrative obstacles in the way of mobility and to adopt rapid, flexible systems for recognising qualifications. The committee also recommended that official status or teaching and research staff complements be made more flexible to encourage the recruitment of professionals and experts. Fostering a culture of quality and common European criteria would also contribute to greater mobility, as would the proposals being put forward by the Commission to establish common studies and qualifications or European master's degrees in collaboration with all the universities of the EU Member States. MEPs also reiterated the importance of learning modern foreign languages at university level. In conclusion, the committee called on the Commission to draw up a Green Paper on a future European higher education sector which should seek, inter alia, to: - assess the state of play regarding European universities, their roles and the types of education they provide; - examine the various regulations and working conditions for teachers, research workers, administrative staff and students; - identify the common programmes and public services that universities require as centres of education and research and which, if they were brought into being, would enable them to perform their tasks more easily.