

21st February 2022

To whom it may concern

I have become aware of the proposal in Bulgaria to merge a number of Higher Education Institutions into 'national polytechnics'. As the President of EURASHE, which represents over 600 professional HEIs, including the University of Telecommunication and Posts in Sofia, I would like to underline several negative consequences that may result in such a merger; consequences that we have observed in other European countries.

Firstly, large structures risk suffocating the agency and motivation of the different merged institutions, undermining the important academic principle of autonomy. The larger institutions within the new polytechnics may dominate and crowd out the smaller institutions. This loss of identity, tradition and independence may result in much weaker institutions, providing general and less specialised education.

Secondly, smaller institutions are often more agile and flexible, being able to make decisions more quickly than large HEIs. For professional higher education, such agility is important to respond to changes in the labour market and specialise in emerging technological domains. There is a risk that mergers will remove the competitive advantage of the existing specialised individual institutions.

Thirdly, larger national institutions can weaken the territorial impact of HEIs, and thus the benefits to cities and regions. Smaller institutions that are governed locally are better placed to respond to local and regional needs, which is a hallmark of professional higher education. Such a contribution has been strongly promoted in recent years by the European institutions and international association such as the OECD.

Finally, I would like to finish by urging those responsible to closely consult and involve the management, academic staff and students in decisions on merging and restructuring of the higher education system. We have witnessed very negative consequences in other European countries when restructuring has taken place 'top down' without the support of those who deliver higher education on the ground.

EURASHE would be pleased to provide further advice and information and is ready to support Bulgarian institutions to develop quality professional higher education, together with partners from across Europe.

Yours sincerely,



Armando Pires

President