

Dear Rector,
ladies and gentlemen members of the University of Siena,
I would like to send a special and warm greeting to all of you.
I send my warm regards to students as well
And warmly welcome to all our international guests.

2010. The University of Siena is one of the most renowned academic places of Italy to study and conduct research. The high reputation, the rich educational assortment on offer, the vivid social and cultural context brought me, like other young students, to opt for it/decide on it for further studies/to pursue our university education.

Very soon, however, beyond what seemed like a wonderful dream, reality turned out to be much more complex. The accountancy scandals of the University and of the Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena, the political crisis of the local administration together with one of the most significant reforms of the higher education system, undermined not only the economic and administrative foundations but also social cohesion and confidence within academic circles and civil society. It has been hard to restore the almost entirely collapsed system. Similarly, it has been the adaptation to the new set of rules.

2015. To date, after years of difficulties faced by professors, university researchers, administrative and technical personals, by students in the same way, despite the progressive reduction of the primary State funding the economic balance-sheet is also broadly positive for the second year running. The multi-annual programming and the scientific publications continue to gain national and international recognition. The University is ready to welcome new full and associated professors.

Besides the undeniable achievements in terms of financial recovery, administrative restructuring and promoting a new image of the Athenaeum, as a representative of the student body I can't refrain from further debate on outstanding issues that must be taken into consideration.

First, I must make it clear that we need to think more deeply about the nature of the relationship between students and teachers, too often corresponding to logics of power and blackmail. Innovative teaching methods are essential to avoid discouraging and getting students used to passive subordination in a vertical society. In other words, the University must make it possible for students to break free and to show greater responsibility. Receiving appropriate training is a fundamental prerequisite for developing a critical and proactive awareness. I hope there will be improvements in the evaluation methods of the teaching system so that students' opinion is properly taken into account.

I feel it is my duty to relate, in this regard, the aversion to any kind of admission tests and their background. As students, we think those are not only means of arid and standardised verification but also means of disseminating unfairness, nepotism and clientelism. In a broader sense, we object to an evaluation system that cause competition and exclusion among students, professors and universities too, which regrettably appears to be because of ministerial decisions.

Secondly, I think about the need to correct the inefficiency of both certain bureaucratic procedures in which students are directly involved in and the relationship between offices that necessarily affect the coherence and timing of services provided. I take this opportunity to ask to review the coordination with the Language Centre of the University, since we know it is a crucial participant in the definition of any academic curriculum, in addition to incite some adjustments to the internationalization efforts.

Of course increasing the number of Erasmus agreements, adding curricula entirely in English to those in Italian, participating in projects on an international scale are credits and laudable proofs of openness and modernity. However, further than the excellent national and international ranking, students' satisfaction levels must raise even in this field. That's what I mean about simplifying procedures, of outgoing Erasmus for example or for the enrolment of foreign students and so on.

The optimization of existing services also implies redefine the logistical planning. On more than one occasion, students have mobilised against the quantitative and qualitative shortage of places in which they could study and socialize such as classrooms, study rooms, laboratories and others locales essential for students' well-being. The University necessarily must put a stop to the reduction of available places and speed up the implementation of maintenance and improvement works at once.

Naturally, any kind of intervention requires an economic and financial framework such that I cannot fail to offer a brief consideration about the monetary contribution made by students, since it is one of the main funding channels for the University.

While recognising the importance of a healthy, strong and stable economic situation, the gradual erosion of the public funding cannot be replaced by a steady increase in taxes. Not even by resorting to stratagems in order to rationalise expenditure or tighten the rules, as these measures would lead to only one paradoxical situation: changing the public educational system in a private and discriminatory one. I am also referring to all the local and national institutions that have a dogmatic responsibility to design adequate measures of support and improvement of students' living conditions. For this reason, the Siena city authorities, together with the University and other entities will not get over the dramatic dichotomous choice between the priorities in maintaining a certain level of expenditure and the provision of essential and accessory services. These can include urban transport systems, housing and sports facilities, social and cultural activities that profoundly determine the quality of life. The shortage of funds cannot force further sacrifices on students and their families, who put their trust in the University to achieve better future.

The Italian Constitution ratifies the mission of the State is "to remove economic and social obstacles that, limiting de facto citizens' freedom and equality, prevent them from developing their personality and effectively being involved into the political, economic and social organization of the country".

On a day like this, while other students from the main universities of the region are in Florence to fight against the economic measures that at every levels seem to move in an opposite direction to the previous one, we claim the guarantee of the right to education. A public university must be truly accessible and cannot allow itself to become a luxury item/good.

Even if my remarks are nothing more than an elaboration of generalized feelings among students, their active participation and emotional involvement in events like this are rather low. This leads me to the conclusive point.

If authorities recognized students' contribution as a core prerequisite for a better life in the academic and local community, formal and informal debates would be several more. Furthermore, it would mean first: to make sure the University does not appear self-referential. Second: to educate young people on critical and constructive collaboration with academic and local authorities. Third: to motivate students to show solidarity each other. Fourth: to eradicate disinformation, individualism and distrust for democratic institutions. Only in this way, it will be possible to feed mechanisms of integration, cohesion and social sustainability.

I'm absolutely convinced that we should keep on working on that path so that the University of Siena will lead by example by behaving in accordance with that values preached during lectures or read about in books.