

DO NOT DESTROY THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY INSTITUTION.
REFORM AND STRENGTHEN IT.

This is a statement of opposition to the recent laws and government acts concerning the Universities, and an appeal to strengthen and reform public University in Italy. For many years the Italian system of University and Research has been in a strongly disadvantaged position with respect to that of other European countries: we have less professors, researchers and technical staff, both in relation to population and to the number of students; we spend less on teaching and research, thus having obsolete structures and resources; costs for students are high and the services offered inadequate. Many degree programs and research centers work as best as they can, with outstanding results, **however an entire generation of brilliant students and young researchers is forced to seek better study and working conditions abroad: an enormous damage for the Country.** All this clearly contradicts the recurrent slogans claiming that research and innovation must boost the future development and an economic upturn.

Funding cuts determined by the July 2008 DPEF [government economical and financial development plan] are destructive. They will lead to the progressive dismantling of the public University. Limiting the turnover to 20% when a huge number of retirements are expected, due to both demographic reasons and to the new rules, will rapidly reduce staff and prevent young people from being hired: **we will continue to have the oldest teaching staff in the world.** Despite this, withstanding the progressive reduction imposed by the law, the Fondo di Finanziamento Ordinario [the budget granted to Universities by the State] will not suffice to even pay wages. As a result, there will be a push towards privatizing the Universities, which is already happening in a concealed way, up to the final transformation of Universities into private foundations, a possibility that the law allows. Meanwhile, many self-appointed “centers of excellence“ have been founded, by exploiting the lack of a rigorous evaluation, but cannot offer high quality teaching if not to restricted elites of students.

We believe that Italy needs state run schools and Universities, which are able to guarantee the right to study and a high quality of teaching and research. A University is not a company: it must take into account a budget but most of its income has to be provided by the State, so as to enable it to plan and deliver the fundamental service of higher education free from private interests, and to guarantee freedom in research activity, as prescribed by our Constitution. In the interest of the Country, we believe that **teaching institutions, research centers and single persons who have been able to operate with high standards need to be strengthened and rewarded, while it is necessary to reform and innovate wherever results are not satisfactory or personal interests have prevailed.** A different strategy, such as destroying (to rebuild later?), cannot guarantee quality and represents an unacceptable waste of expertise, people and money.