

ANA BOTÍN
Closing address of the IV Rectors' Meeting in Salamanca
Palacio de Congresos y Exposiciones
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Your Excellency, Prime Minister of Spain
President of Castile and León
Iberoamerican General Secretary
Mayor of Salamanca
Chancellor of the University of Salamanca
University Chancellors
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are reaching the end of the Universia International Vice Chancellors' Meeting.

Thank you very much, President Rajoy, for being with us today.

I thank all of you for being here and for your work, and I am also thankful for having had the opportunity to speak with so many of you over the past two days. This is a remarkable and unique gathering: with over 600 chancellors from 26 countries, representing some 10 million students from Latinoamerica, US, UK and the rest of Europe, Africa and China.

I would also like to thank the International Committee and the Academic Committee, and their respective chairmen, for their leadership and their effort to make this meeting possible.

Since the first International Chancellors' Meeting in Seville, we have charted a path that now has four major milestones and which I hope will have many more.

Our purpose continues to be to strengthen our bonds to continue working toward a better university in a better world.

[Salamanca Declaration]

From its very founding, the University of Salamanca has been a pioneer and an innovator.

It was here that Luisa de Medrano, for whom this Hall is named, became the first female professor in the western world, 400 years before Marie Curie was appointed at The Sorbonne in Paris.

Today, in another example of its forward-looking vision, this great institution will lend its name to what I am pleased to present now, the Salamanca Declaration:

- an example of the global university community's capacity to mobilise;
- a reflection of our ambition and commitment to change and to get ahead of the needs of the new digital world;

- and an excellent example of how cooperation is essential for addressing the great challenges faced by society today.

Together we can have a strong impact and serve as the catalysts of change.

The time to act is now. To accelerate university transformation and modernisation, to agree on measures and to execute them.

The Salamanca Declaration contains three main lines of action for Universia and Banco Santander's cooperation with universities for the coming years:

- Strengthening universities' human capital, to ensure greater equity in terms of access to opportunities and development in technical and transversal skills [critical thinking and ethics, entrepreneurship, intercultural and digital mobility.]
- Fostering alliances and networking among universities and with other stakeholders.
- Contributing to a smooth digital transformation and to managing the social impact of that transformation, with the goal to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth.

[The global challenge of digital transformation]

The global digital transformation is being led by new companies, whose size and impact are increasing exponentially. At times their young founders are more focused on the transformative power of technology than on their overall impact on society, and operate largely unimpeded by the regulation and supervision that usually and rightly come with the power they wield.

Their impact is not only economic; it also reaches the broadest social spheres, affecting and even changing our personal and group relationships, as some recent events have made clear.

This should give pause to everyone, especially to those of us who are committed to seeing higher education reach socially important spheres, where our collective future is being defined.

I am a firm advocate of innovation and technological progress, which in general has positive effects for most of humanity. But I am an equally firm advocate of sustainable and inclusive growth, of the need to offset the externalities that inevitably arise and of establishing remedial mechanisms in favour of those who are most negatively affected.

I have no doubt that regulators will deal with these issues. But the ideal would be for these new entrepreneurs, with all their transformative capacity, as well as those who advise and finance them, to internalise the social setting in which their activities are carried out as well as their scope and potential impact.

Nothing will better meet this need than their having a solid humanistic and multidisciplinary education, such as the education our universities have offered for more than 800 years.

[Close: Key role played by education: the response to important challenges]

For this reason, here at the University of Salamanca, with the same resolve as its founders once had, we are committing ourselves to a vision of the future in which inclusion, equal opportunity and sustainability, against a backdrop of the pursuit of excellence, will be the priorities guiding all our decisions.

Our purpose at Santander is to help people and businesses prosper, which also includes social progress and our commitment to education.

Our alliance with universities is proof of this commitment. Our partnership is stronger today than ever, demonstrated by the fact that in the next three years more than 200,000 students will receive a Santander scholarship to obtain experience in an SME or participate in entrepreneurship programs led by your universities and supported by Santander. We will continue promoting the projects with the most impact in your communities, as we have in the past.

Education is the primary and best tool for facing these great challenges and dealing with the problems of today and of the future.

All of the great achievements and aspirations of humankind have had education as their point of departure. Equality and liberty, free and critical thinking were all born of education.

Education buries prejudices and opens minds.

Education unites us and brings us together.

The various forms of extremism and populism are fought with more and better education, not with less.

Post-truths and attempts to manipulate public opinion are more effectively neutralised with more and better education, not with less.

Climate change and the challenges of immigration are addressed with more and better education, not with less.

The leaders of new technological enterprises will better manage and offset the effects of their disruptive innovations with more and better education, not with less.

Given this, education must recover its broader scope and leading role, and it must have more resources, both public and private, and be considered an investment in the future and not an “item of expenditure”.

Something as essential as education cannot be an object of political confrontation. Political parties – regardless of the moment, regardless of the country – should prioritise education as a space for understanding, for seeking agreement, in favour of the common interest and the interest of society at large.

As I noted yesterday, we – you – have done many things, and done them well, over the last few decades: first, broadening the access to and availability of higher education to include broader sectors of our societies; and, later, managing the most recent crisis intelligently and effectively.

Today we face new challenges that require resolute actions with an eye to the future, to coming decades, and, as always, with a focus on the common good.

In my opening remarks, I spoke of the pioneering values of the University of Salamanca: innovative, global, interdisciplinary, diverse, humanistic values.

Today's universities are the heirs to those values which, with the Salamanca Declaration, we are renewing and projecting into the future, for the benefit of further generations.

I will end by once again evoking Miguel de Unamuno, who three times served as chancellor of the University of Salamanca: "Let us seek more to be parents of our future than children of our past".

Today we reiterate the commitment of universities to reinvent and to transform themselves so they may continue to spearhead progress and prosperity in our countries.

Universities will continue to have the backing of Banco Santander in this pursuit.

I thank all of you for your presence and your dedication. See you in Buenos Aires in 2023.

I wish you safe travels back home to your universities.