

Madam Minister,  
Mr. Rector,  
Mr Director,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I would first like to warmly thank you Madam Minister for being among us today. Your presence bears testimony to the importance that you attach to the cooperation between our 2 countries, as was already demonstrated when you and your French counterpart signed an agreement for cooperation regarding scientific research, technology and innovation in July last year.

I would also like to thank very much the University of Oslo, which hosts the event, and especially you Mr Rector.

Our gratitude also goes to SIU and Campus France, the agencies for Higher education in Norway and France, which have made this event possible.

2. It is a great pleasure for me to participate in the opening of this seminar, which is the Norwegian leg of the Campus France Nordic Tour, organised for the first time.

Twenty five higher education institutions, coming from all regions of France and from very different academic fields, are this week visiting successively Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm and Helsinki.

I am very happy to see that 16 Norwegian universities from all over the country, as well as Norwegian companies, research institutes and organizations, are also participating today. This is a clear sign that the Campus France Nordic Tour responds to a real and mutual interest.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. European countries are operating in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. Higher education, Research and Innovation are indeed of the utmost importance for us and this is the reason why this area is an essential part of the excellent relation between Norway and France. One of its best instruments is the French-Norwegian Foundation for scientific research, innovation and industrial development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. We have decided to focus this seminar on the exchanges between French and Norwegian institutions, with a view to consolidating existing cooperation and developing new partnerships, exchange programs and joint programs. We aim to promote the mobility of students between our 2 countries and also to boost the recruitment of our graduates and interns in companies.

Mobility of students is indeed a priority for us. Last April in Louvain, 46 European ministers in charge of Higher education adopted a declaration entitled "The Bologna process 2020". It included one major idea promoted by France, namely that in 2020, at least 20% of the graduates in the European Higher Education Area should have done part of their studies or training programme abroad.

To achieve this objective, we cannot leave it only to the individual initiative of students: we have to establish the frameworks which will facilitate those exchanges.

5. Now, what is the situation of exchanges between France and Norway ? We already have a longstanding cooperation in Education and Higher Education.

It all started in 1918, when the first group of daring young Norwegian sailed to Rouen, at a time when the 1<sup>st</sup> WW was still ravaging Europe. The experience was a success and there are now Norwegian sections in 3 different high schools: Rouen, Bayeux and Lyon. Many have followed on and enrolled in a university degree in France.

After high school comes higher education. Norwegian universities have indeed very strong and active relations with French universities and research institutes. There are even programs which are specifically designed for Norwegian students at several of France's most renowned universities and "grandes écoles" : They will be presented to you later on.

The hundreds of French researchers who work in laboratories in Norway, contribute greatly to the development of our relations, as they also bring with them a wealth of contacts in France.

So our record is quite honourable and we are proud that many Norwegians, including some members or former members of the government, have studied in our country. Norwegian students contribute to the very positive image of Norway that exists in France.

6. But while the number of French students coming to Norway increases each year and has now reached about 500, the mobility of Norwegian students tends to slacken, particularly towards non-English speaking countries, including France.

One of the main limitations to our attractiveness in the eyes of Norwegian students is their fear that their French language skills will not be good enough to study in optimal conditions. As teaching of French has been declining in schools since the 2<sup>nd</sup> foreign language became optional, this has become a more widespread concern.

It is because we are very much aware of this phenomenon that the number of programmes taught in English in French universities has significantly increased. Another important and recent evolution should also contribute to the attractiveness of the French system: a major reform aiming to strengthen the autonomy of universities is underway. The creation of Research and Higher Education Clusters should also bring significant changes.

To relay those developments in France, the Embassy in Oslo has been quite active: it participates in education fairs, intervenes in Universities, welcomes and gives advice to students at the French Cultural Centre. And thanks to CampusFrance, we have launched a dedicated website (“Norge.campusfrance.org”) to promote French higher education and better inform the Norwegian students.

7. But we would like to do more. What we propose now is to intensify exchanges. One possible avenue would be to promote joint programs with financial support from our governments. France has launched such programs with a number of European countries (such as Spain, Greece, Austria and soon Sweden) and would be more than happy to investigate this possibility also with Norway.

I am convinced this seminar offers a unique opportunity to develop new partnerships and promote new forms of mobility in addition to the Erasmus student mobility: mobility of academic staff, joint programs or joint diplomas, Leonardo mobility and Erasmus Mundus projects.

I do hope that the French Nordic Tour will be a success and I look forward to its outcome !

I will be happy to welcome you all later on today for a closing reception.

Thank you !