

Conclusions of the 4th Meeting of the Presidents of National Rectors' Conferences of Central Europe

Date: September 13-14, 2002

Venue: Rector's Office, University of Rijeka, Trg braće Mažuranića 10, Rijeka

Participants:

AUSTRIA:

Prof. Dr. Georg Winckler, President of the Austrian Rectors' Conference

Mag. Heribert Wulz, Acting Secretary General of the Austrian Rectors' Conference

CROATIA:

Prof. Daniel Rukavina, M.D., D.Sc., President of the Croatian Rectors' Conference

Darko Štefan, International Relations Secretary of the Croatian Rectors' Conference

CZECH REPUBLIC:

Prof. Dr. Ivan Wilhelm, President of the Czech Rectors' Conference

HUNGARY:

Dr. István Bilik, Secretary General of the Confederation of the Hungarian Conferences on Higher Education

SLOVAKIA:

Prof. Dr. Juraj Sinay, President of the Slovak Rectors' Conference

SLOVENIA:

Prof. Dr. Željko Knez, Representative of the Association of Rectors of Slovenia

Guest:

Prof. Gvozden Flego, Ph.D., Minister of Science and Technology of the Republic of Croatia

Invited speaker:

Prof. Manfred Horvat, Director of the Bureau for International Research and Technology Cooperation (BIT), Austria

Agenda:

- 1) Sixth Framework Program and an Overview of the Current European Research Policy
- 2) Quality Assurance
- 3) Miscellaneous

Conclusions of the meeting

The Presidents and representatives of the National Rectors' Conferences of Austria, Croatia, The Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia met at the University of Rijeka, on September 14, 2002.

In the continuation to the 3rd Meeting of the Presidents of the National Rectors' Conferences held in Rajecké Teplice on April 26, 2002, the presidents agreed on the following conclusions and statements:

Ad 1)

The main focus of Framework Programme 6 is the creation of a European Research Area as a vision for the future of research in Europe. It aims at scientific excellence, improved competitiveness and innovation through the promotion of increased co-operation and improved co-ordination between relevant actors at all levels.

The European Research Area (ERA) should be an area where

- best use can be made of the scientific capacity and material resources,
- national and European policies can be implemented more coherently and
- people and knowledge can circulate more freely.

The European Research Area should be an area attractive both to European researchers and to the best researchers from third countries, and an area built on respect for the common social and ethical values of Europeans and their diversity.

The Presidents of the National Rectors' Conferences appreciated the initiatives in Europe to raise the level of investment in research and development to 3% of the GDP by 2010. The Presidents stressed that the increase in financial resources has to go along with a sufficient increase in the number of researchers, scientists and engineers with appropriate qualifications.

It will be a special role of the universities to offer education and training opportunities to raise this level of qualification. This should also imply encouraging further women to enter the field of science, technology and engineering, and to increase the opportunities of lifelong learning and private public partnership with respect to knowledge transfer to society. The Presidents further agreed that synergies between education and research should be reached, by especially setting up appropriate Ph.D. programmes at universities.

The Presidents supported the creation of a Central European Research Area (CERA). They emphasised the crucial role of the universities to form regional research networks and to educate researchers who will participate actively in the European Research Area. The Presidents obliged to inform the Ministers of Science in their home countries about this conclusion and ask for their support regarding the process of development of the Central European Research Area (CERA).

The Presidents pointed out the need for university autonomy and institutional strategic management. In order to strengthen the strategic positioning of the universities, the co-operation between universities and National Rectors' Conferences shall be enhanced.

Universities must be more open to collaboration with other partners, regarding the financing of research activities. To be able to participate in the EU integrated research programmes, the universities need sufficient funding.

Ad 2)

With respect to quality assurance, the Presidents agreed that institutions independent of governments, individual universities and professional associations should evaluate and accredit institutions of higher education. They stressed the need that these institutions use international expertise, use peer reviews and report publicly on the results.

The emergence of high quality culture within an institution is needed instead of bureaucratic quality rules determined by government officials.

The implementation of quality culture requires the reinforcing of the role of institutions, especially the role of the university management.

The Presidents discussed the fear that no joint quality standards will emerge in Europe. The co-operation among Central European Rectors' Conferences could help to define such joint standards.

Ad 3)

The Presidents accepted the statement from the Regional Rectors' Conference in Dubrovnik (Meeting of University Rectors of Southeast European Countries) held in Dubrovnik on August 22-23, 2002 that was presented by Rector Daniel Rukavina. Rectors of Southeast European Countries sent an appeal to the European institutions to be fully included in European mobility programmes, particularly SOCRATES-ERASMUS. The Presidents of the Central European National Rectors' Conferences supported this appeal.

Mobility of students and professors sponsored by the SOCRATES programme will create a strong pressure for harmonisation of these universities with European criteria particularly in the development of curricula. This may be a strong support for a further democratisation of these countries.

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Rijeka, September 14, 2002