

**DRAFT**  
**(As of 1 March 2005)**

**Joint Statement**  
**by the Presidents of Central European Rectors' Conferences**  
**(Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic)**  
**Prague, 4 March 2005**

The Presidents of Central European Rectors' Conferences (Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic) met at Charles University in Prague on 3rd and 4th March 2005. They discussed current developments in higher education and research in Europe with regard to regional aspects of participating countries. The particular attention was paid to the effort of academic community to follow the main strategy of the European University Association (EUA), namely

- the enlargement of the educational offer through „structured“ studies with a quantitative stress on Bachelor study programmes,
- the preservation of qualitative standards of Master study programmes,
- the support of the idea of Doctoral study programmes as a basis for building up the European Research Area.

Participants of the meeting adopted at the end of the joint meeting the following statement:

**On the Role of Higher Education Structured Studies**

The participants of the joint meeting agreed on the fact that in order to enlarge substantially the offer of the educational capacities in higher education the structured study is essential, mainly on the Bachelor level, in correspondence with the Bologna Declaration. The goal of this effort is the substantial enlargement of number of higher education institutions graduates as necessary condition for the further development not only from the economical point of view, but also from the point of view of the social cohesion on the level of individual countries as well as on the European level. It is therefore necessary to enlarge the offer of study programmes mainly on the Bachelor level and also to modify the content of current study programmes so that the probability of their successful completion would increase.

An intensive reform of study programmes which satisfy all conditions of higher education qualification of graduates is the main task of higher education institutions that cannot be replaced by any other institution without interference in the academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institution.

No matter how important the role of further opening of higher education systems is, all participants of the joint meeting consider the participation of Central European universities in the European student and teacher mobility programmes as the principal moment significantly helping to build partner higher education networks with mutually acceptable educational standards.

## **On the Doctorate as a Hallmark of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area**

The Berlin Communiqué of Ministers of September 2003 emphasised the intrinsic relationship between doctoral education and research as well as the importance of the third cycle for the realisation of the “Europe of Knowledge”. The Bologna follow-up seminar on *Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society*, which was jointly organised by the German and Austrian governments and EUA in Salzburg in February 2005, dealt with the issues raised by the Berlin Communiqué. Several initiatives by various Rectors' Conferences as well as various activities by the European University Association such as the project on doctoral programmes have further underlined the significance European universities attribute to the doctorate.

The Presidents of Central European Rectors' Conferences hereby state their support for these endeavours at European, international and bilateral level. They concur that the right to award doctorates is a defining feature and core mission of the university. The universities are solely responsible for the organisation of doctoral programmes and research training as part of their institutional autonomy.

In order to confirm their commitment to assuring the quality and attractiveness of doctoral programmes, the Presidents of Central European Rectors' Conferences have agreed that the purpose of doctoral programmes is the advancement of knowledge through original research. They should train graduates to contribute to the knowledge society inside and outside academia. To achieve this goal, doctoral programmes should

- be incorporated in institutional policies and strategies;
- be attributed an appropriate time frame (3-4 years as a rule);
- be organised in a structured manner that allows for the development of transferable skills;
- provide doctoral candidates with team supervision by scholars that may come from different disciplines and universities;
- embody the recommendations regarding early stage researchers that have been developed within the initiative to draft a European Charter for Researchers;
- promote interdisciplinary training;
- promote mobility of doctoral candidates and academic staff;
- provide for gender equity in the recruitment of and conduct towards students and academic staff and
- be sufficiently funded to ensure the quality of programmes as well as appropriate and timely completion rates by doctoral candidates.

## **On the Future Cooperation of Central European Rectors' Conferences**

Central European Rectors' Conferences state that so far the Bologna Process has mainly been government-driven. This was necessary since as a first step the national legal frameworks for higher education had to be adapted to the Bologna Reforms. However, we have entered now the second phase of the Bologna Process in which the focus has shifted away from legal reforms to the implementation of the Bologna goals at institutional level. This development is also reflected in the fact that universities and students are the new central actors in the Bologna process.

The Presidents of Central European Rectors' Conferences consider joint meetings of this kind beneficial and intend to deepen the cooperation not only between universities of respective countries, but also between the Conferences of Rectors.

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Prof. Dr. Gordana KRALIK, President of the Croatian Rectors' Conference

Prof. Dr. Lajos BESENYE, President of the Hungarian Rectors' Conference

Prof. Dr. Franciszek ZIEJKA, President of the Polish Rectors' Conference

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

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