

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 the 3rd and 4th March 2005. They discussed current developments in higher education and research in Europe with special regard to regional aspects. Particular attention was paid to the efforts of the academic community to follow the main strategy of the European University Association (EUA), namely

- increasing the capacity and maintaining the quality of the education on offer, particularly Bachelor study programmes,
- preservation of the qualitative standards of Master's study programmes,
- support for the idea of Doctoral study programmes as a basis for building up the European Research Area.

At the end of the meeting participants adopted the following statement:

On the Role of Structured Studies in Higher Education

The participants of the joint meeting agreed that in order to achieve a substantial increase in the number of places available in higher education, structured study is essential, mainly on the Bachelor level in line with the Bologna Declaration. The goal is a major increase in the number of graduates from institutions of higher education as a necessary condition for further economic development and also social cohesion at the national and European level. In addition to extending the range of Bachelor's study programmes, we also need to modify the content of current study programmes to increase the probability of successful completion.

An intensive reform of study programmes, satisfying all the conditions of higher educational qualification, is the main task facing higher education and no other institution can undertake it without interference in the academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions.

Aside from the general issue of further opening up higher education systems, all those who attended the joint meeting considered the participation of Central European universities in the European student and teacher mobility programmes to be of key importance in helping to build partner 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,
- 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. Governments should refrain from administratively hindering joint programmes and joint degrees.

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

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

Prof. Dr. Joze MENCINGER, President of the Slovenian Rectors' Conference

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