

# **WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

## **Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century**

### **Vision and Action**

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#### **VOLUME V – PLENARY**

##### **Hungary**

Note1: To meet UNESCO publishing standards, some editing of papers has been required.

Note2: Authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in signed articles and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

Hungary

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**Speech of Mr József Pálinkás  
Secretary of State  
Minister of Education of Hungary**

Mr President,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I begin by sincerely greeting all the participants of the World Conference on Higher Education in the 21st Century on behalf of the Hungarian government and Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán.

**The Mission of Higher Education**

In Hungary, like in all other countries, the level of higher education and the intellectual and financial attention paid to higher education are a manifestation of the nation's self-respect, ambitions and belief in the future. Higher education is the concentration and simultaneously a generator of the well-trained labour force and intellectual elite of a nation. Higher education has its roots deep in the texture of a given society. Furthermore, being the institutional realization of free thinking, it even surpasses reality in terms of conceptualization and vision. The balance established between these two aspects is the main characteristic of the higher education policy of any government. Higher education as professional training must serve the demand for professionals in a given society, while as training for intellectuals and creators of new knowledge it must provide a basis for economic and social development. Higher education is capable of establishing a reliable vision of the future. Belief in higher education is no less than trust in our own future.

Today we hear a lot about globalization and the global economic and social phenomena. Beyond the problems emerging in extreme forms (such as financial crises, social explosions, etc.) one can detect, among other things, a loss of balance between globally moving capital and the intellectual-political establishment. Global higher education systems, which are linked and co-operate closely, have a historic role and responsibility in correctly identifying the problems of mankind, setting out global action plans and acting upon these.

The well-known saying of "think globally, act locally" has been partly overtaken by events. One must act on both global and local levels. The mission of higher education is simultaneously global and local. One level of local action is the national level. The national level is the most capable, best-structured and best-organized level of economic and social life. The future of our world, including the fate of nations, depends on the countries themselves. This approach gives each and every state the responsibility and opportunity to shape global processes. We believe that a nation that comprehends this and translates it to the level of professional action is indeed capable of shaping its own destiny - and that of the world - effectively. In this respect, small countries can also achieve great results.

**Hungarian Higher Education after 1990**

Eight years have passed since the change in the political system of Hungary. The Hungarian economy and society have undergone significant changes. The Hungarian nation had to recover faith in itself. It has had to compete in global economy relying mainly on its own resources, and making growth possible for the nation as a whole as well as for each of its members. We believe that innovation and ingenuity are essential traits for rising to this challenge.

The past eight years have simultaneously witnessed reforms in the content and the structure of Hungarian higher education and a general impoverishment owing to the economic changes. We are proud of our higher education system that doubled student enrolment while maintaining the high standards of education.

In 1993 the first independent Higher Education Act was passed in Hungary, granting comprehensive autonomy to universities and colleges, guaranteeing the operations of the democratic bodies of institution-management. The Hungarian Accreditation Committee, the national organization for quality control, and the Council on Higher Education and Academic Affairs, the national representative higher education body, were established and the National Conference of Rectors and General Directors started to work as well.

In the dual system of university and college training, a diversification of the training was initiated. Besides graduate training, higher education embraced short-term post secondary training; universities recaptured the task of educating Ph.D. students. Higher education institutions are becoming increasingly involved in the tasks of continuing training and retraining.

The organization of higher education training in Hungarian language for the Hungarian-speaking youth of neighbouring countries has become a special commitment of Hungarian higher education. Our institutions provide this training in view of and abiding by the laws of the given country.

While the higher education system has been opened up to an increasing number of young people wishing to pursue academic studies, the budgetary subsidy of higher education as a whole has dropped by some 25% in real value. The subsidy per student has decreased by 60%, and the real income of instructors has decreased by nearly 16%. Despite the rapidly growing number of students, the number of instructors has basically remained the same, and therefore the number of students per instructor has more than doubled.

### **Higher Education Strategy: Principles and Initiatives**

The new government set up after the 1998 elections paid particular attention to European and world tendencies as well as EU, OECD and UNESCO proposals in setting out its programme. The Delors Report of UNESCO was studied in great detail.

Hungary wishes to achieve success in the European and world economy through its excellently trained labour force rather than by low-wage employees. We fully understand that the competitiveness of the Hungary of the future depends on the higher education of today. The main strategic principles of the government are equal opportunity, flexibility and quality. The government is determined to establish the efficient and concentrated higher education institutional structure that has been planned for so long. Both our inner drive and the expanding international cooperation require a more strongly concentrated higher education network of institutions offering a wide variety of academic and education options. Therefore, we consider the enforcement of efficiency, quality and integration as a central task of modernization. These institutional conditions provide a basis for wider and more flexible training options. By uniting the intellectual force, we establish a system of terms and conditions for globally competitive training and research that may be realized in international cooperation. Improvements in our system of higher education are implemented to serve the training of the professionals and intellectuals of the third millennium. While higher education is becoming readily available to almost everyone able to and wishing to pursue academic studies, we lay particular emphasis on quality and education. The admission of students into higher education is based on their individual merits and performance.

At the same time, we must not lose sight of the fact that the higher education policy of this government launched in the 20<sup>th</sup> century leads us into the third millennium and gives us the task of establishing the initial conditions for access to European norms in the field of higher education. Hungary wishes to join Europe with its higher education values of nearly seven centuries and thus hopes to contribute to enriching the European Union.

We believe that the openness and international relations of Hungarian higher education and research are values to be further developed. In the field of international relations, we intend to place special emphasis on regional thinking and bilateral relations as well as on multilateral education and cooperation projects and on the mobility of students and teachers.

The diversification of training is considered an ongoing process making it possible for the training system to react quickly and flexibly to social and economic challenges. Especially in the case of colleges, a principal aspect is regional embodiment, i.e. meeting the demands for local labour force, in close cooperation with local governments and the organizations employing the labour force.

Lifelong learning is a must in today's Hungary as well. Making use of institutional autonomy, Hungarian universities and colleges launch a large number of continuing training programmes for adults in forms adjusted to their needs. The significant enlargement of this sector indicates the demand for this new form of training.

Student mobility has little tradition in Hungarian higher education. Introducing an internationally compatible credit system is an essential strategic goal of the government. In order to ensure the smooth implementation of this system, Hungary has joined the ERASMUS programme of the European Union and wishes to receive students from developing countries in this spirit, in the framework of bilateral educational agreements. Expanding agreements on the mutual academic recognition of diplomas is considered a major task.

We have placed the responsible and active citizen in the centre of our social development programmes. In higher education policy, this translates into paying special attention to the training of intellectuals: developing skills, transmitting and generating knowledge shaping views and at the same time passing on and preserving values. This endeavour on our part falls in line with the increasing support of science and research within higher education. Higher education in our understanding is more than merely a school or training of new generation in academic research, yet we intend to support our universities as centres for research and development.

We believe that the development of a country largely depends on the extent to which its education system ensures quality, democracy and equal opportunity for all. We are about to implement a system of financing in which those with adequate abilities and commitment can earn their first degree regardless of their financial means. To make continuing training more accessible, both the state budget and local communities must take a greater share in financing higher education.

The official position of the Hungarian Delegation on the documents of the conference:

The Hungarian Delegation approves the Declaration of the World Conference and wishes to emphasize the following points:

- ◆ Aware of its special responsibility for the stability of the East and Central European region, it declares that it considers its educational establishment to be a link in the process of regional integration based on national stability and cohesion (Article 1. d).
- ◆ In its education system, it aims to select the students from the widest possible social spectrum and with attention given solely to abilities and performance (Article 3. c).
- ◆ It intends to pay special attention to working out training methods and legal conditions easing the advancement of social groups from challenged backgrounds, granting top priority to the Romany of Hungary among them (Article 4).
- ◆ It attempts to make academic careers in Hungary more appealing to the best students and tries to retain the best professors of outstanding performance in international research and technical development. It will continue the great traditions of Hungarian science by granting social recognition to instructors, improving the conditions for research in the institutions and benefiting from the opportunities of international co-operation (Article 10, 16).