

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

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Slovakia

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

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Slovakia

**Speech of Mr Miroslav Zima
Rector, Slovak Agricultural University in Nitra
Slovak Republic**

Honourable President of the World Conference,
Honourable Director-General,
Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to make some remarks to this conference from the viewpoint of the Slovak Republic.

Through the peaceful separation of the former Czechoslovakia into the Czech and the Slovak Republics on 1st January 1993, the Slovak Republic became an independent state. Although the Slovak Republic is a young state, its higher education follows a rather old tradition - the oldest university Academia Istropolitana in Bratislava was established in 1465, the Jesuit University of Trnava functioned from 1635 to 1777, and the oldest technical university in Central Europe - the Mining Academy in Banská Štiavnica - functioned from 1762 to 1919.

Institutions of higher education in Slovakia - presently there are 18 universities - have the basic mission to promote education on the basis of scientific concepts and through creative scientific and artistic activities. According to humanitarian and democratic traditions, the institutions of higher education in Slovakia bear a special responsibility for the advancement of education as a part of the culture of our entire society and simultaneously contribute to upgrading its scientific, technological, cultural and economic standards.

In these activities and especially given the size of Slovakia and its location in the heart of Europe, international contacts with the world-wide scientific and cultural development are particularly needed.

Education in the Slovak Republic upholds the civil right to education and reflects the basic human values included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right to education is stated in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic.

Since the „velvet revolution“ in 1989 and during the period of independence of the Slovak Republic, significant changes have occurred in the higher educational system. These changes are structural and conceptual. A three level system, e.g. bachelor, master and PhD., was adopted. Education in the humanities has been increased and more stress is laid on ethics, ecological education and foreign language teaching.

Institutions of higher education in Slovakia are self-governing bodies. The academic officials (rectors and deans) are elected by representative academic senates and members of these bodies are elected by the whole academic community.

The legislative framework of higher education in Slovakia is well established. The Higher Education Act of 1990, its Amendment of 1996, as well as Decrees of the Ministry of Education on PhD Study (1997) and the Act on Further Education, provide for the different forms of education, equal access to education and life-long education.

Study programmes, curricula and subject innovations are the main concerns of the academic senates and scientific boards of the universities, faculties and departments.

Modern and economically more advantageous study forms are offered by distance education. A flexible educational system and intra-university as well as inter-university credit transfers help meet the student needs because they are the centre of attention for each university and I hope this will continue in the 21st century.

All of the above-mentioned changes are happening during the so-called transition period from a centrally planned to a market economy which means that this period has been characterized, not only by changes in the social and economic life of the country and in the people who are subjected to these, but also by even more rapid changes in the educational system. The most difficult problems are financial, but they also concern everyday thinking and action so that people get accustomed to the new environment and accepts the new rules of a democratic society. The young generation is pioneering these changes more rapidly and efficiently.

Students via their influence on socio-economic changes and their ability to adapt to new information technologies, can easily deal with the impact of globalization and its promise for the future and sustainable development.

During the transition period and for the next millennium, and not only for university graduates, further education will be a vital part of the educational system of the Slovak Republic. This education can be realized in accordance with the interests and activities of participants regardless of their age and it can be provided by educational institutions as a part of life-long education.

According to the Further Education Act, all individuals can supplement, widen and deepen their education, retrain or simply satisfy their interests. Further education is provided by means of short-term and long-term educational programmes e.g. seminars and training courses. These may be in various organizational forms, for example: part-time study, supplementary education, additional education, special study, retraining, where the newest educational methods are used, including multimedia approaches, correspondence education, distance learning, videoconferences, computer network aided education etc.

Further education prepares the participants for the acquisition of a certain educational level or for professional education and training which enables them to replenish their knowledge and proficiency or to attain a qualification in a certain field. It also facilitates civil and other education which enables the participants to satisfy their interests and get fully involved in the life of society.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me one final remark.

The Slovak delegation is supporting the proposed documents. *The World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action* fully corresponds to the intentions and perspectives of higher education policy in the Slovak Republic.

Thank you for your attention.