

Conclusions of the Common Meeting of the Czech Rectors Conference and the Slovak Rectors Conference held in Bratislava on 6–7 June 2019

Czech Rectors Conference (CRC) and Slovak Rectors Conference (SRC), which bring together the Rectors of Czech and Slovak higher education institutions, adopted at their common meeting in Bratislava the following conclusions:

1. CRC and SRC had the opportunity to inform each other about the current developments in the higher education sector in the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic since the last meeting, which took place in Prague on 8–9 June 2017. Regular meetings of Czech and Slovak rectors are beneficial for maintaining traditional relations between the partner institutions but can also initiate new and innovative forms of cooperation going beyond the borders of both countries. The mutual proximity and common history of the two nations should be reflected in cooperation that could be unique in our region. It is worth noticing that the Czech and Slovak higher education institutions and both Rectors Conferences as well have already been using the existing opportunities offered by, for example, the Visegrad Fund, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the Danube Rectors Conference, the European University Association, the European Cultural Route of Saints Cyril and Methodius, UNICA – the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe, the Compostela Group of Universities, etc., and have been striving to innovate the existing cooperation within these opportunities.
2. At the common meeting, CRC and SRC informed about developments in the field of quality assurance in higher education, evaluation of research and other creative activities, about higher education institutions funding, social mission accomplishing and international co-operation. Naturally, the issue of quality assurance and assessment of higher education and other creative activities is one of the most discussed topics of the common meetings in the long term. Our common ongoing concern is to promote the quality of higher education and research as well as to strengthen the autonomy of higher education institutions and their status. This requires not only financial security but also a manifestation of trust and recognition of the autonomy of higher education institutions as they can respond with their own responsibility for the quality of education and research or social mission. Competitiveness and attractiveness of higher education institutions depend not only on their management and their activities, but also on the conditions created by the state through national legislation and the degree of its flexibility in the rapidly changing digital era, the overall volume and structure of funds from the state budget (public resources) and the access to modern educational and research infrastructure. Other important conditions for the attractiveness of higher education institutions are also the challenges arising from the current dynamic development of society, which are not sufficiently reflected in discussions on this topic and whose effective solutions we need to suggest.
3. CRC and SRC have repeatedly stated that both countries common problems include long-term underfinancing of education, research and development, and infrastructure. Since the 1990s, higher education institutions have responded to the state demand and opened their gates to multiple times increased number of students and the state has also founded or approved the establishment of new higher education institutions. This massive increase was not supported by sufficient funding at that time, which the higher education institutions experience even today, although the situation has improved to some extent. This historic financial debt to the higher education institutions will only increase with the emergence of new forms of education (digitization), scientific research, publication in the framework of the "Open

Science / Science 2.0" and other tasks that the higher education institutions will undertake within their social mission. Our European partners have already employed, for example, publishing in an open access format, making their research results to be more visible in the academic environment, and thus enhancing the competitiveness of individuals and higher education institutions. However, in our conditions, full implementation of open access publishing depends not only on legislative changes but also on additional funding. The "Open Science / Science 2.0", based on technological progress, is the future of world science, an opportunity associated with the trend to publish research results in the digital environment. Therefore, the governments of both countries must actively support the implementation of these policies and their funding also on a national level.

4. CRC and SRC are founding members of the European University Association, which they reckon as a fundamental platform for international cooperation and exchange of experience, as their representative and advocate of academic freedoms. At the same time, both Rectors Conferences have joined the 'Universities for Enlightenment' platform and their representatives have signed the 'Universities for Enlightenment' Vienna Statement advocating freedom of research and academic autonomy and is a common voice of universities in our region.
5. This year, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, which started political, economic and social changes and began the process of democratization of Czechoslovakia and its successor states. Today as in previous years, the legacy of November 1989 is in our countries still up to date. CRC and SRC note that the mission of modern universities and colleges in today's Europe, which are top educational, scientific and artistic establishments, means a space for open and critical debate. Higher education institutions play a role not only in education for knowledge and skills but also in civic engagement. Higher education institutions, academic officials, educators, and students need to be more active against the escalating manifestations of populism, intolerance, radicalization, and pseudoscientific messages promotion that are a threat not only to democracy but also to academic culture. Academics can promote the development of democracy in our societies by active participation in civil life.
6. CRC and SRC agreed to make available the corpora of final and qualification works central databases of both countries for the purpose of the anti-plagiarism system.
7. CRC and SRC have agreed to maintain the tradition of common meetings and confirmed that the next meeting will take place on 3–4 June 2021, in the Czech Republic and will be organized by CRC together with Brno University of Technology.

Bratislava, 7 June 2019

On behalf of the Czech Rectors Conference

On behalf of the Slovak Rectors Conference

Prof. Tomáš Zima
President

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