

## **Czech Rectors Conference 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Speech, Prague, Feb 16, 2023**

*Prof. Michael Murphy*

*President of the European University Association*

Yours Excellencies – President of the Senate, Prime Minister, Ministers, President of Czech Rectors Conference, Rectors of the Universities of Czech Republic, Distinguished Colleagues.

It is an **honour** and a **pleasure** to share your celebration. I bring you hearty congratulations from EUA – and best wishes on behalf of our 800 universities and 34 National Rectors Conferences across the European Higher Education Area.

Czech Rectors Conference was a **founder member** of EUA in Salamanca 22 years ago. Over the past decades, CRC has been **pre-eminent in the work of EUA**, contributing to policy making and to our expert groups.

Today we have the wisdom of **Prof. Martin Bares, President of CRC**, on the EUA Council – following in the steps of distinguished predecessors, including, no less, your **Prime Minister Prof. Petr Fiala** who served for two years (2009-2011).

Your Secretary General, **Marie Fojtikova** has been an outstanding servant of CRC for all 30 years. She is also, unofficially, the chief photographer of EUA, the longest serving and the most popular member of EUA's Secretaries General group.

Given the current context, may I also share the admiration of EUA for the manner in which **Czech universities** have supported Ukrainian students, academic staff and other refugees during the past year. Your work has been an inspiration to colleagues everywhere – an exemplar to all of us, of true solidarity in these dreadful times.

Today, it is important to look back, to reflect on **accomplishments**, to celebrate achievement and to take pride in the contributions of Czech universities collectively in CRC – to your society, its democracy, its economy, its arts and sciences – during the past 30 years

But, it is equally important, on a “zero birthday” to reflect on **the future** – the “Knowledge Age”, when high performing universities will be **ever more crucial** to Czech, European and global success.

Our future will be quite unlike our past. Our societies' path is emerging – shaping and shaped by technology, “big data”, artificial intelligence – to be embraced and to be feared – and our overarching current challenge – to achieve the United Nations **Sustainable Development Goals**.

For us, in universities, **sustainable** development – in its many facets – must, in this decade, be the primary objective across all of our missions – education, research, innovation, culture and societal engagement.

**To be strong** in our service to society, we must embrace **diversity** – in university missions across Europe – and in the Czech Republic. Diversity is a Darwinian imperative – and a strength of European higher education.

Wherever institutions sit – on the spectrum of university missions, all must be valued equally. **Strong regional universities** – serving their regional societies – **collectively** are as important – as the globally famous, research intensive institutions.

**To be strong**, Europe and the Czech Republic must prioritise **distributed excellence** – **promoting solidarity** to minimise regional economic disparities.

**To be strong**, Czech and European institutions must embrace a – new university model, more open, more flexible, more innovative, networked institutions – and deeply connected to society, responsive to citizens needs.

**“Universities without walls”** – will demand blended campuses – combining on-site, online and societally embedded, experiential learning.

- **Students** learning “real world” problem solving – in the **workplace** – in civic, social and cultural spaces.
- **Staff moving** between campus and the workplace – updating curriculum and their own skills.
- Universities that are **deeply networked** – nationally, across borders in Europe and beyond – with students, staff and researchers **moving freely** between them.
- Fostering **transnational solidarity** and European identity.
- Students – no longer the objects of education – but partners in the **co-creation of understanding**, often designing their own learning portfolios – accumulating microcredentials at their own pace – and lifelong.

- **Researchers** embracing **Open Science** – sharing data (**no paywalls**) – publishing openly to help restore **trust** in evidence and in expertise.
- **Interdisciplinary research** – flourishing – as we break down internal walls between traditional disciplines – particularly the walls between humanities and STEM.
- Universities working more closely with leaders – political, business and civic – co-leading economic and social **innovation**.
- And finally, universities that will be **repositories of the cultural assets** of our societies, **guardians** of our ethnic stories and guarantors of sustained **cultural diversity** in the world. Our cultural spaces, must be ever welcoming to our local citizens.

**Universities Without Walls** is our shared vision for Europe’s universities. Implementation – across Europe and in the Czech Republic – will require **investment**, a supportive **regulatory framework**, sufficient university **autonomy**, **Academic Freedom**, **strong and competent university leadership** – **all coupled with robust accountability** to society.

Success – will require many committed actors. **National university associations** – such as Czech Rectors Conference – will play a particularly crucial role – advocating with government to ensure the right environmental conditions;

championing change in the sector;

constantly **horizon scanning**;

supporting member universities in **sharing good reform practices**.

Universities have served Czech society for almost 700 years. They have shown a remarkable capacity to adapt through the centuries. Evolving to be “Universities Without Walls”, **they will continue** – to serve Czechia and to shape your nation’s contribution to a strong Europe – in the years and decades ahead.

Happy Birthday to the Czech Rectors Conference!

May you lead Czech universities to an ever brighter and impactful future!

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