

SOME REMARKS AND REFLECTIONS

ON THE ROLE OF THE POLICY OF ACADEMIC EDUCATION

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*Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day.
Teach a man how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.*
(Proverb)

It is a great honour and pleasure to be invited on this memorable occasion to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Miskolc in Hungary. With our Matej Bel Uviniversity in Banska Bystrica itself celebrating last year its 10th anniversary it seems that a path of common development and co-operation is evolving between our faculties.

Matej Bel University and the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Affairs

Matej Bel University was established on July 1, 1992 by merging of the Pedagogic Faculty and the School of Economics into one institution. Now the University comprises eight faculties; the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Natural Sciences, the Faculty of Philology, the Faculty of Pedagogy, The Faculty of Law, The Faculty of Finance and The Faculty of Political Sciences and International Affairs. Having more than 11 000 students, the University of Matej Bel is the fourth largest university in Slovakia. It ranks among the dignified successors and representatives of an exceptional tradition of education in the city of Banska Bystrica and at the same time it plays an important role which goes beyond the reach of the area of the central Slovak Region.

Besides the faculties mentioned the University also houses the Institute of Applied Communication, European Information Centre, European Documentation Centre, Methodical Centre for Slovaks Living Abroad, University of the Third Age, University Library, International Centre of Canadian Studies, European Studies, Institute of Max van der

Stoel and other centres and establishments of research and studies; e.g. British studies, American studies, Hungarian studies, etc.

Our Faculty, the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Affairs is one of the youngest ones. It was founded in 1995 after the dramatic period of transition in 1989 to a newly created democratic political system. The faculty offers two study specializations, namely political sciences and international affairs and diplomacy. For both specializations the faculty provides Bachelor's degrees and Master's degrees. The highest form of university education reached at our faculty is the level of PhD study. The faculty prepares experts who are suitably qualified to work in various governmental and self-governmental institutions and diplomacy.

The prime minister of the Slovak Republic, Mikuláš Dzurinda during his last visit to the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations stated that our Republic will need approximately 600 highly qualified experts to work in EU institutions in the near future. So far the faculty has trained only about 80 graduates each year, so in the future we would like to prepare even more experts in this field. Our faculty has to cope with this challenging task and at the same time, similar to other Slovak universities and faculties, has to adapt to new educational legislation which requires greater centralization and unification at university level. This means centralization and professionalization of university management units, especially within the area of international relations. According to this we will do our best to improve relationships with similar universities and faculties and try to develop international contacts within educational and research activities. To achieve this goal we would like to become an open university institution which will attempt to create conditions for the development of fields of studies needed on the labour market as well as taking into consideration individual student's needs and individual skills. Our faculty will support all the projects that will help quicken the process.

Priorities of the Policy of Academic Education

What are the challenges facing at present our Faculty and academic education in general? How best can we demonstrate its relevance to forthcoming changes of our contemporary society?

These are the questions we have to find out the answers to and cope with in our everyday work.

In accordance with policy principles and rules of University education, our faculty follows the main priorities and imperatives of the European Policy Statement. This Document was widely discussed at the Rector's office level and is being gradually introduced into daily practice in the areas of study, research, development and international relations.

At the same time, present university educational policy underlines the need to pay more attention to interdisciplinary studies, integration of teaching and research, and the effective use of a transparent and transferable academic credit system, as well as student and mentor mobility, application of models of international education and an increased access to higher quality education. This is necessary in order to find more efficient ways of cultivating the spirit of academic critical thinking and to promote the values of a modern European community and civic maturity in the awareness of our teachers and students.

According to this the key aims and priorities are as follows:

- 1) To improve the faculty position by providing higher academic education based on local, regional and country needs and necessities.
- 2) The academic educational policy statement of our faculty, which following the concept of Matej Bel University, centers around a close relationship between education and research, is based on openness, creativity and an interdisciplinarity approach. Furthermore, it has to be integrated into larger ethical, cultural and social education.
- 3) Improvement of the ECTS academic credit system which was introduced at the faculty in 2001/2002, and thus creates one of the fundamental preconditions for approaching European and world academic educational institutions.
- 4) To increase the number of student and teacher exchange programmes based on existing international programmes, e.g. Socrates, Erasmus, Phare; as well as creating new ones based on bilateral contacts with foreign universities and faculties.
- 5) Supporting active and mature citizenship and civic maturity, to increase the adaptability, employability, knowledge and skills exchanged among individuals at local, regional, country and EU-level.
- 6) Internationalization of all fields of study in the academic educational structure and the improvement of curricula.

- 7) Improvement of the use of new information and communication technologies in educational, research and management processes.
- 8) Strengthening teaching programmes by means of staff development and quality ensuring projects, in order to carry out human resources policy which focuses on motivating our staff towards participating in international projects, publishing abroad and achieving European standards according to the content and quality of study schemes and regulations.
- 9) Offering courses of International Relations in English for foreign students.
- 10) Concluding new partnership contracts and continuity in existing cooperation with partners.
- 11) To increase the number of foreign mentors at our Faculty.
- 12) To provide individual study programmes for outgoing and incoming students, to ensure their selection based on fair and transparent criteria.
- 13) To enable handicapped students to participate in student life and exchange study programmes as much as possible.
- 14) Following The Decree of Matej Bel University, the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Affairs expresses its commitment to the fair and equal treatment of all individuals regardless of gender, age colour, race, ethnic or national origin, socio-economic group, social orientation, marital status, religion or political beliefs.

Conclusion

The transformation of societies in Central and Eastern Europe over the last decade has been rapid, dramatic and difficult. It has changed the circumstances of our lives, hopes, values and ideals while leading to communities being more free and dynamic.

In this situation, the proper role of education has changed in both of our countries from political and ideological control into a process of raising self-assured and freedom-loving individuals with constructive orientation, individuals who will be able to cope with the challenges of a rapidly developing and changing environment of the new millenium.

While anniversaries in both of our institutions urge some reflections, they also call for a glance into the future. With both of our countries rapidly

preparing for EU entry next year, being similarly on the road to academic education reform, we are developing together not only in terms of modernization and educational improvements, but also in terms of bridging previous gaps caused by prejudices and misunderstandings, and thereby developing closer relationships between our faculties. I hope that in the future such contacts and co-operation fostering the dialogue between us will become more commonplace.

I am therefore very pleased to be given the opportunity to address you all and I would like to express the wish that our teachers, lecturers and students find a beneficial and creative environment for the development of academic education, research, culture and international co-operation on the grounds of our educational institutions that would reflect the rich European tradition in a new Europe. I wish you a pleasant anniversary meeting and celebrations.