

Communiqué
**3rd Meeting of the Presidents of the National Rectors' Conferences
of Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia**

On 26 April 2002 the Presidents of the National Rectors' Conferences, **Prof. Ivan Wilhelm** (President of the Czech Rectors' Conference), **Prof. Georg Winckler** (President of the Austrian Rectors' Conference), **Prof. Daniel Rukavina** (President of the Croatian Rectors' Conference) and **Prof. Milan Dado** (President of the Slovak Rectors' Conference), met in Rajec/Teplice/Slovakia. The President of the Confederation of Hungarian Conferences on Higher Education was represented by **Dr. István Bilik** (Secretary General of the Confederation of Hungarian Conferences on Higher Education). **Mag. Elisabeth Sorantin** (Secretary General of the CEEPUS programme), **Dr. Andrea Henzl** (Secretary General of the Austrian Rectors' Conference) and **Mgr. Mária Kozuchová** (Secretary General of the Slovak Rectors' Conference) were additional participants. No representative of the Association of Rectors of Slovenia was present.

Dr. Martin Fronc, State Secretary of the Ministry of Education of Slovakia attended the meeting as guest.

The representatives of the National Rectors' Conferences were concerned with the internationalisation of higher education and the needs of higher education institutions of the participating countries. In particular, items as joint degrees, ECTS, CEEPUS programme, student and staff mobility, cross border co-operation, 6th EU Framework Programme and European Research Area were discussed.

The representatives of the National Rectors' Conferences expressed their full support of activities leading to joint degree programmes based on co-operation of higher education institutions from two or more countries, which is considered an important tool in European higher education. There is a need to develop projects aiming towards joint degrees also in the region of Central Europe on the basis of mutual agreements.

The representatives of the National Rectors' Conferences stressed the importance of establishing the common credit system ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) facilitating academic recognition both at the international and the national levels. It was decided to advocate the idea of implementing ECTS in national higher education systems.

The representatives of the National Rectors' Conferences have been informed about the aims and the progress of the CEEPUS Programme (Central European Exchange Program for University Studies), which enhances academic mobility in the countries of Central Europe. Thus it was requested from national governments to support programmes of academic mobility financially with a sufficient budget. The representatives of the National Rectors' Conferences appreciate the new activity of CEEPUS allowing the incorporation of joint degree programmes in the Annex of the Agreement signed by the Ministers of Education, at the 8th Meeting of the Joint Committee of Ministers on March 1, 2002. The representatives of the National Rectors' Conferences recommend that these joint degree programmes are based on partnership agreements between universities and that the issue of accreditation as well as quality assurance are taken into account.

In order to stimulate the academic mobility, legal obstacles should be abolished and no visa fees should be charged.

Academic mobility has gained in importance, especially in connection with the establishment of the European Higher Education Area. The representatives of the National Rectors' Conferences of Central European countries support all activities relevant for the development

of this area. Academic mobility is most beneficial to students and higher education institutions and at the same time it adds to the quality of academic co-operations.

A study analysing the degree of academic mobility among the six participating countries, initiated by the Austrian Rectors' Conference and backed by the other Conferences, will be made. This study will be discussed in one of the next meetings of the Presidents of the National Rectors' Conferences.

Any academic co-operation across borders be it among universities, with industry and among local governments is likely to bring about economic prosperity and social development. According to the opinion of the representatives of the National Rectors' Conferences it is necessary to increase the scientific know-how in the society. It should also include information on the possibilities that higher education institutions have in developing new technologies and services.

Science and technology in most of the countries of Central Europe do not reach the same level of funding as in the countries of the EU. With respect to the upcoming European Research Area it is important to strengthen the role of universities in the 6th Framework Programme by appropriate funding of their research activities and by better developing their managerial abilities.

The third meeting of the representatives of the National Rectors' Conferences contributed to a better understanding of the themes presented and thus enhanced the co-operation within the framework of the European Higher Education and Research Areas.

The participants were grateful to Prof. Milan Dado and the Slovak Rectors' Conference for the kind hospitality in Rajecké Teplice and the preparation of the agenda.

The representatives of National Rectors' Conferences thanked Prof. Daniel Rukavina, President of Croatian Rectors' Conference, for inviting them to Rijeka, Croatia, for the next meeting in September 2002.

For the

Austrian Rectors' Conference:

Prof. Dr. Georg Winckler

Croatian Rectors' Conference:

Prof. DDr. Daniel Rukavina

Czech Rectors' Conference:

Prof. Dr. Ivan Wilhelm

Confederation of the Hungarian Conferences on Higher Education:

Dr. István Bilik

Slovak Rectors' Conference:

Prof. Dr. Milan Dado