

Recent Developments in International Co-operation in Higher Education in Czechoslovakia

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The dramatic developments in Czechoslovakia since November 1989 have brought substantial changes to higher education. A new law on higher education valid from 1 July 1990 was approved by the federal parliament. In the paper the main features of this law are characterized. The recent developments in higher education in Czechoslovakia are further characterized by the new contact and co-operation with institutes of higher education in Western countries. Modalities of the co-operation are described, especially in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

CROSS-CULTURE dialog requires good mutual understanding and knowledge. In the first part of this paper there is only brief information on recent developments of higher education in Czechoslovakia, as publications on developments very quickly become obsolete. This information may be helpful in the preparation and development of co-operation between institutes of higher education in Czechoslovakia and Western countries.

RAPID CHANGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The development of higher education in Czechoslovakia has been influenced by the dramatic events in November 1989. It will be remembered that on 17 November 1989 students gathered in the streets of Prague for the 50th anniversary of Students' Day. On 17 November 1939 a number of Czech student leaders were executed, thousands of students and their teachers were sent to concentration camps and the Czech institutes of higher education were closed for 6 years. Cruel attacks by police in the evening on 17 November 1989 were followed by a students' strike to the end of 1989. The mass demonstrations in the week after 17 November 1989 led to the fall of the communist regime in the country.

Since then considerable changes have occurred at the institutes of higher education. Most leading personnel of the institutes of higher education, faculties and departments were replaced by elections with student participation. The curricula in social sciences were changed from the one-sided Marxist ideology. At the same time foreign language teaching was extended, especially English. The

first period of these changes culminated in the approval of the new law on higher education (Law No. 172 from 4 May 1990).

NEW LAW OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The new law may be characterized by the democratization and decentralization in institutes of higher education in Czechoslovakia. In the new law, academic rights and freedom of scientific research are defined, publication of results, of artistic creation, the right to teach and to learn, the right to elect self-governing bodies, the right of different philosophic opinions and religious expression and the right to develop them are all laid out. The use of these rights and freedom must be in accordance with the principles of democracy, humanity and legal order.

The decentralization introduced by the new law of higher education may be identified by comparing the new and the previous law on higher education:

- The institutes of higher education (e.g. universities, polytechnical institutes, schools of economics, schools of agriculture, schools of arts) are established by the Czech or by the Slovak National Council instead of the Federal Assembly.
- The faculties are established by the institutes of higher education instead of the Federal government.
- The associate professors (dozents) are appointed by the rector instead of by the minister (for education, youth and sports).
- The vice-rectors are appointed by the rector instead of by the minister.

- The deans of the faculties are elected by the academic senate of the faculty instead of being appointed by the minister.
- The vice-deans are appointed by the dean instead of by the rector.
- Curricula and length of studies are approved by the institutes of higher education instead of the Federal government.
- Study plans are approved by the institutes of higher education instead of by the minister for education, youth and sports.
- The regulations for the studies and for the final examinations are approved by the faculties instead of by the ministry for education, youth and sports.

According to the new law of higher education the rectors and deans are elected by an academic senate for a 3-year period (formerly it was for 5 years). The current period of function of these officials began on 1 February 1991.

Through the new law two new bodies were formed. The Councils of Institutes of Higher Education for the Czech and Slovak Republics are self-governing bodies and their members are representatives selected by the academic senates of the institutes of higher education. Duties of these councils are the co-ordination of activities of the institutes, appropriation of financial funds and the control of their use. Furthermore Accreditation Commissions are established, appointed by the governments of the Czech or the Slovak Republic as advisory bodies.

The new law of higher education has changed the system of degrees and titles. The institutes of higher education may initiate courses which award the title Bachelor (in Czech, *bakalář*, abbreviated to Bc.). These courses have not yet been introduced in Czechoslovakia at this time.

Graduates of the institutes of higher education are awarded the following titles:

1. For graduates of universities, theological faculties and faculties of arts the title Master (in Czech, *magistr*, abbreviated to Mgr.). This title has not yet been awarded.
2. Graduates of technical, economical and agricultural faculties receive the title Engineer (in Czech, *inženýr*, abbreviated to Ing.).
3. Graduates of medical faculties receive the title 'Doctor of General Medicine' (in Czech, *doktor všeobecné medicíny, MUDr.*) and at the schools of veterinary medicine the title 'Doctor of Veterinary Medicine' (in Czech, *doktor veterinární medicíny, MVDr.*).

Graduates of the institutes of higher education may continue in postgraduate studies and prove their ability to do independent scientific work. These studies are concluded by production of a dissertation and a so-called rigorous examination. Students who complete postgraduate studies (with the exception of graduates of medical faculties and schools of veterinary medicine) are awarded the

title Doctor (in Czech, *doktor, Dr.*). Higher degree titles transferred from the former USSR educational system are still in use, namely Candidate of Science (in Czech, *kandidát věd, CSc.*) and the higher degree Doctor of Science (in Czech, *doktor věd, DrSc.*) which is awarded not only by institutes of higher education but also by the institutes of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science. There are ongoing discussions on the new system of titles and degrees and there may be more changes in the future.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The international co-operation of the Czechoslovak institutes of higher education was oriented mostly towards the East European countries. Nevertheless there was also co-operation with universities in Western countries. The possibility of exchange of staff existed in the frame of the cultural agreement between governments. For example the DAAD (German), British Council (GB) and IREX (USA) worked to help establish the contacts of Czechoslovak institutes of higher education with universities abroad. It was therefore possible to get information on education and research in Western countries. Another form of international contact was through the participation in international organizations like UNESCO, engineering organizations and others. Most of these international contacts and co-operations had to be officially approved by the Ministry of Education.

Direct ways now exist for contact between universities and other institutes of higher education in Czechoslovakia and similar institutions in Western countries. We do not want to exaggerate our activities but it seems to be expressed in the conclusions of the international symposium 'Engineering education 2000' in July 1990 in Vienna: 'It is necessary to keep in mind, that not all in the East was bad and all in the West good. From the institutes of higher education in Central and East Europe we may learn about their experience in specialized courses, in the link of education with practical experience, and with further education of teachers.'

The areas of co-operation between universities in Eastern and Western Europe are in education and research, and exchange of information, staff and students. The content and forms of international co-operation in higher education are specified for example in the TEMPUS program (Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies) organized by the Commission of the European Communities' Task Force Human Resources, Education Training and Youth as financial support for co-operation and mobility in higher education between Central/Eastern Europe and the European Community. This program includes Joint European Projects (JEP) with co-operative education and training actions, structural

development of higher education, and development of education/training capacities. Further it includes mobility grants for staff and students and projects for complementary activities. TEMPUS is known at the institutes of higher education in Czechoslovakia and there a list of our proposals was prepared for 30 September 1990 for the TEMPUS office in Brussels. These proposals may be taken as a broad starting point for East-West co-operation in higher education.

The Czech Technical University in Prague proposed several TEMPUS projects for teaching of engineering courses. Two projects are in co-operation with the IGIP (International Society for Engineering Education) and other institutions in Western and Eastern Europe. The themes are:

- Communication training for engineering professions.
- Development of curricula models for engineering education based on progressive European standards.

Another possibility for co-operation with the Czech Technical University comes from the foundation of two new institutes namely UNESCO International Centre for Scientific Computing (ICSC) and Masaryk's Institute of Advanced Studies. These institutes are geared for international co-operation in computer techniques, postgraduate studies and further education. Co-operation with universities and educational institutes from abroad is planned for postgraduate studies in engineering informatics, top management and decision making and management of projects.

The former Research Institute for Engineering Education was concerned with production of educational videotapes, with the development of programs for computer-aided learning and authoring systems for engineering courses. There were produced about 200 videoprograms. Another activity of the Institute was further education for graduates of the Czech Technical University in pedagogy and psychology. This activity was transferred in the year 1991 to Masaryk's Institute of Advanced Studies. This education is used for engineers who work as teachers of technical courses at secondary schools or at institutes of higher education. This form of further education for engineers may be classified as staff development. These activities may also be used as a base for co-operation, namely exchange of educational programs.

When we discuss the international co-operation in higher education in Czechoslovakia we should not forget two difficulties: financing and the language barrier. In financing the main problem is the shortage of hard currency for accommodation abroad or for purchase of modern equipment. On the other hand there is the possibility to arrange and pay accommodation in Czechoslovakia for the co-operating persons from abroad. This problem might be overcome by exchanges on a non-convertible currency basis or by funding from international or national projects.

The language barrier is an important problem, especially for students. Therefore, we organize extended courses in foreign languages and any help with materials and teachers would be welcome for extension of East-West co-operation.