

crp Conference speech – Dr. Zoltán Dubécsi

Horizons of European Research and Innovation: Experiences of Horizon 2020 and perspectives of Horizon Europe

(Introduction)

Dear Rectors, Professors, distinguished guests, dear ladies and gentlemen. As the Secretary General of the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, it is my great pleasure and honor to speak to you here in Budapest, between these halls, where Nobel prize winner Hungarian scientists and innovators learned the basics of science and nurtured their greatest ideas.

A few examples to mention: George Andrew Olah Chemist, Scientist; Leó Szilárd Physicist, Inventor, and Scientist; Theodore von Kármán Aerospace Engineer; George Szekeres Mathematician; Dennis Gabor Physicist, Inventor, Scientist; and professor Ernő Rubik the famous inventor of the Rubik's cube. These famous alumni made a significant contribution to the technological advancement of the European region in the past, and I hope the graduates of every Hungarian university will keep on doing so in the future as well.

I believe it is important to actively participate in international co-operations at a regional, European and global level, may they be a part of an initiative of the European Commission or any other global organization, since all of them are equally important. On the other hand, since institutions in the European region face similar challenges, looking solutions for solutions together could be beneficial. The Horizon 2020 framework program has provided excellent opportunities to do so, by making a significant improvement and launching projects that have a great impact on education policies in the long run.

(Innovation)

The H2020 program provides EU funding for spreading and promoting European excellence in the R&I sector, and is aiming to strengthen cooperation in all scientific fields. The majority of its funds are reserved for tackling social challenges, improving academic excellence, industrial development and improvement, which proves their importance. I would like to begin my speech with the related aspects of research, development and innovation, and Hungary's participation in the Horizon Europe 2020 program.

Although the H2020 program's main focus is the research and innovation sector, we all know that it comes hand-in-hand with tertiary education as well. Thus the main aims of the seven-year EU program are in line with Hungary's strategy for the future of its higher education sector, which is well represented in the figures and achievements of Hungarian participants in these Research and development projects.

Hungary is the 18th on the participation rank in its country group (out of 28 countries). More than 8000 organizations applied for H2020 grants, and received approximately 259 million EUR in funding for the projects. The top organizations are BME university with 17 million, ELTE with 7,04 million and the Central-European University with 22,9 million EUR net EU contribution since the launch of the H2020 program. Some concrete examples for the featured projects include successful projects in the agricultural sector, such as looking for innovative approaches to convert the growing amount of human-produced agricultural waste into eco-efficient, bio-based products. Or another example could be healthcare innovation, such as developing 'nano-vehicles' to deliver life-saving drugs, researching methods to aid in early diagnosis of diseases. The main themes of the projects where Hungary is involved include the various aspects of sustainability; looking for sustainable solutions for the future, whether it is related to medicines, energy, new technologies or digitalization.

Approaching the end of Horizon 2020 program, it's time to take stock of the lessons learnt and move forward: How could we exploit the opportunities even better in the next round of EU's research and innovation program, the Horizon Europe? The Hungarian Rectors' Conference had, and is going to have a strong role in spreading the information, and increasing the motivation of the Hungarian higher educational sector and the industry to innovate.

In the meanwhile, by establishing proper legal environment and by providing support, the Ministry for Innovation and Technology have an equally important role to catalyze researches in the innovative ecosystem.

Allow me to say a few words about the role of innovation in higher education globally, and the role of higher education in Hungary: From education's point of view innovation can be described better as the ability to react quickly to the emerging ideas and quickly adapting to the latest trends. For example via the introduction of multi-disciplinary courses as a part of a strategy for international cooperation with excellent partners. To be more precise, I would like to mention the recently launched European Universities initiative, created with the establishment of the first few European

universities in mind. The pilot project is backed with a project funding worth 85 million EUR. **Five Hungarian universities participated successfully in this project**, as members of winner consortia. Therefore, they became part of this groundbreaking initiative that will further unite European universities with each other, providing a chance at truly international education for the enrolling students. All five alliances came up with projects that combine the strongpoints of each member-university, thus creating unique and valuable curricula. The participating universities are:

- Eötvös Loránd University with the CHARM-EU (Reconciling Humanity with the Planet) project
- Central-European University with the CIVICA (European University of Social Sciences) project
- The University of Pécs as a part of the EDUC (European Digital UniverCity) project,
- also the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, leading the EU4Art (Alliance for Common Fine Arts Curriculum) alliance
- and last but not least, the University of Szeged as a part of the EUGLOH (European University Alliance for Global Health)

This pilot project will be an excellent chance for enrolling students to gain international experience, not to mention that learning experience from three or four European universities in itself provides an immense amount of competitive advantage. Apart from increasing student mobility and international recognition, the collaboration also provides an opportunity for the institutions to exchange information and cooperate on a deeper level. Sharing good practices and learning from each other in this manner could be beneficial for all parties involved in the European Universities projects. Keeping this in mind, quite a few universities will apply for support in the next round of the call, in which we hope that our region will attract the attention of the European Union to a greater extent.

Besides, the European Universities is an excellent chance to cooperate with foreign partners. However, Hungarian universities also collaborate with a number of other partners. From innovative international cooperation projects, this leads us to the connection between innovation and national cooperation. **When I think about innovation in education locally, the emerging dual education system comes to mind, where the industrial sector meets higher education.** Since technologies advance these days faster than ever, educating the future generations with up-to-date knowledge is becoming a challenge. Taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the automotive

industry's areal expansion in Hungary, local universities adapted to the changing labor market needs by close collaboration with these companies. Therefore, we can see dual degree programs becoming more popular among Hungarian students, because they provide new alternative with a more stable career path in sight. By completing their internship, the students not only get invaluable experience from working on-site, but they also have a higher chance at finding a long-term position with the gathered knowledge.

This dual learning model format is compelling for corporations and companies, because it allows them to establish a bond with the students from an early stage of their studies. Since companies have the right to choose the students they want to hire as a part of the dual education program, companies can use this opportunity to handpick and train the next generation of experts for their workforce, who are more likely to stay loyal to them.

Just like the dual education system is lucrative for both parties, I believe the Hungarian Rectors' Conference has a successful relationship with its partners and members. Hence, I would like to say a few words about the role of the Hungarian Rectors' Conference on a national level. More than 30 years after the foundation of the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, our organization's main responsibilities remain the same; as we aim to stay true to the five guidelines laid down by the founding rectors' of our organization in 1988. They were the following:

- 1) holding important meetings with the leading figures of the universities about issues related to these institutions.
- 2) support universities' cooperation with external partner institutions.
- 3) provide information about the universities' situation and public interest.
- 4) preparing statements and proposals towards the universities, or the government.
- 5) arranging and coordinating the responsibilities related to the representation of the universities' best interest.

Apart from HRC's responsibilities towards its' member institutions in the home front, we also have an important role in internationalization. Just like every rectors' conference or similar organization, HRC serves as a bridge to connect Hungary, and especially its member institutions to the international scene of higher education and research. It also represents their best interests in a number of organizations, such as the European University Association (EUA), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and in International Association of Universities (IAU). Through such memberships, we have the chance to provide up-to-date information and intel on the latest international trend on good practices, management and academic matters, to list a few.

Our responsibilities are involvement in international cooperation projects, organizing conferences and being active in the international education scene in general, through visiting education fairs and conferences all over the world. Apart from the worldwide conferences, active involvement in international associations dedicated to HE, HRC is deeply committed to a number of EU projects as well; for example the successfully completed EFFECT and PROCSEE projects (which will be followed by its successor initiative also with the participation of HRC).

Furthermore, we try to provide opportunities to establish new connections for Hungarian HEIs through our annual collaboration events with like-minded European and global partners. One of the most recent examples of our cooperation with key European partners was this year's 29th Annual Conference of the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The conference, titled *'Future Students. Future Universities. Future Jobs. Professional Higher Education in the changing world.'* was a great success for all parties involved. Apart from regional European partners, such as the V4 countries or EURASHE, we maintain other great working relationships. For example in the beginning of the previous academic year, on the last week of September, the Hungarian Rectors' Conference and the Coimbra Group of Brazilian Universities co-hosted a international conference titled „Universities of the 21st century,” at this very same venue, where we had the opportunity to exchange great ideas and valuable information in similar topics that will be mentioned today and tomorrow.

Before my closing remarks, in the name of the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, it was my great honor to greet all of our distinguished guests here at the 38th Conference of Rectors and Presidents of European Universities of Technology. **As a final line of thought, let me revoke the spirit of these great innovators and award winning engineers, —who passed these halls—may they serve as an inspiration during the upcoming events.** I hope that these two days will not only bring forth meaningful discussions, high-quality presentations, exciting conversations and new initiatives, but also new collaborations, acquaintances, friendships between institutions and, last but not least, long-lasting personal relationships. Therefore, I wish you a successful and pleasant time in Budapest!