HARMONISATION OF THE DANUBE HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

DANUBE RECTORS’ CONFERENCE ANNUAL MEETING

Maribor, November 4 – 6, 2015

On 4-6 November, the DRC annual meeting took place in Maribor. More than 40 participants from the Danube countries discussed how to harmonise the Danube higher education area. It started with video message of Commissioner Navracsics  about the role of university networks in supporting cooperation and making Europe stronger. He also emphasised the       importance  that students leave universities with right knowledge and skills, to lead fulfilling lives and help our societies and economies grow.  It was pointed out that  there are new challenges (like digital technologies) facing higher education  and modernisation of higher education should stimulate: quality, relevance, regional innovations and internationalisation.  Part of the changes in higher education can be supported by  EFSI as additional opportunity to    fund projects in education, research and innovation.

Minister of Education, Science and Sport of Slovenia Maja Makovec Brenčič presented Internationalisation Strategy of Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia. She pointed out that the international openness, mobility, cross-border cooperation in scientific research and higher education, and joint projects and programmes foster the achievement and improvement of quality in higher education and promote competitiveness and excellence. This, in turn, contributes to higher employability and higher employment for people and the advancement of the intercultural and communication competencies of all the stakeholders. So the internationalisation of higher education is much more than just academic mobility: it is a driver of development which we need to take advantage of in our global world. Slovenian national education strategies promote the circulation of knowledge not only in individual regions, but also at a global level.

Other topics included were:

* **Dual education system**-Wolfgang Schuster, director of European Foundation for Education who urges EU institutions and governments, businesses and social partners at all levels to address the youth unemployment challenge through dual education. In his analysis of booming regions important drivers are: - social market economy system and:  companies engaged in vocational education and training, living partnership of shared responsibility,  - differentiated educational offers linked systematically with real life: working world, - harmonized labour demand and training structures
* **How to implement research in Master studies** - Harald Kainz, rector of TU Graz.  His recommendations how to implement master students in scientific work are :

  -Participate in basic research programms  of the institute

             -Create essentials and  conduct subprojects for PhD thesis

-Implement the master thesis in development orders of industry

             -Lead master students to handle interdisciplinarity

             -Call attention to diversity solutions depending on the country and

              culture of implementation

* **Trends in Innovative Doctoral Training in Europe and particularities of Danube region** – Melita Kovačević, president of Steering Committee for Doctoral Education at EUA. The roles of research and cooperation with companies have been strongly emphasised. It has been recommended that regional efforts should go in the direction of: establishment of joint and collaborative doctoral programmes; shared infrastructure; research cooperation; collaborative research programmes; mobility of researchers; establishment of regional centres of excellence with mutual funding.
* Annette C. Hurst from Steinbeis-Europa-Zentrum (SEZ), presented their activities as part of KIC InnoEnergy.

One of the sessions was devoted to cooperation between DRC and  ALPS-ADRIATIC RECTORS’ CONFERENCE-opportunities and mutual benefits. It was also an occasion to elaborate how similar and how different universities  are in the Danube region.   The Memorandum of Understanding between the two rectors’ conferences has been signed which will be an opportunity to share the experience and the role of DRC in EUSDR to other macroregional strategies (EUSAIR and EUSALP).

In the annual report and action plan for the 2016 it has been proposed to enlarge the DRC collaborations potential with existing networks  and institutions (**JRC,** ARCS, DAC, CASEE, EUA).