

Dear Ambassadors, Rectors, Professors, dear guests!

It's a great pleasure and honour to welcome you here in Budapest, in the framework of the Hungarian Presidency of the V4 countries, at the V4 Rector Conference today and at the 30th anniversary of the Hungarian Rectors' Conference tomorrow.

I know that in the past, there have been initiatives to bring together the representatives of the Central European rectors and Rectors' Conferences, in order to exchange ideas and share experiences in developing higher education systems. However, in this form, as V4 Rectors' Conferences, we haven't met yet.

The apropos of the establishment of the Visegrád Convention was given by a medieval agreement. In November 1335, at the Royal Palace of Visegrád, a reunion was initiated by Charles Robert, King of Hungary, with the participation of John of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia and Casimir the Third of Poland. The purpose of the three countries' meeting was to overcome their controversy and to agree on economic and political cooperation against the staple right imposed in Vienna.

This cooperation was renewed on 15 February 1991, when Václav Havel, President of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, Lech Wałęsa, President of the Republic of Poland and József Antall, Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary, signed the Visegrad Declaration. In 1993, with the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia became independent members of the group, thus increasing the number of members to four.

Although the V4 co-operation was initially of a political nature, now, it covers many other areas, including the field of education and culture, as well.

Please let me note here that it was a pleasure for me to attend the 25th anniversary of the Czech Rectors Conference in February this year, and I am pleased to inform you that we are planning to hold a meeting in Slovakia with the Slovak Rector's Conference during the next academic year.

Of course, not only regional cooperation is important for us, for the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, but also the ones at the European and the global stage.

We are all members of the European Higher Education Area, the European University Association and the HRC is also a member of the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education and the International University Association. The European and global activity of the HRC is also indicated by the conferences and co-operations that we have implemented over the past few years. Here, I would like to take the opportunity to invite all of you to our next global

conference. In the last week of September, the HRC organizes “*The Universities of the 21st Century*” conference co-organized with the Coimbra Group of the Brazilian Universities, which will host approximately 100 Brazilian and 200 international rectors at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics.

It is important to actively participate in international co-operations at a regional, European and global level, as none of these co-operation forms can be exclusive, all of them are equally important.

However, it seems, as if regional and Central European cooperation has been neglected a bit in the recent decades. It seems natural looking back to the history of the past 30 years, since our university associations formed during and after the fall of communism looked more to the west – to where they couldn’t look or look less before – than to the nearby neighbours.

Taking into consideration that our higher education systems in the V4 countries, face similar challenges, I believe that we should try to find solutions to these together.

Cooperation is only possible between independent and autonomous rectors' conferences and universities, which has appropriate professional background, as well. Therefore, we must take care of these values. I have mentioned the appropriate professional background: maybe we, the Central European Rectors' Conferences, should consider what our German and English colleagues have already done: instead of small secretariats providing administrative background, we should set up professional back-end organizations with greater capacities.

Dear Colleagues!

I hope that the two days that we’ll spend together will not only bring meaningful discussions, high-quality presentations, exciting conversations and new initiatives, but also new collaborations, acquaintances and friendships between our universities, our rectors' conferences and, last but not least, personal relationships.

Therefore, I wish a lot of success and pleasant meeting for all of us.