



**Visegrad Group Academies Forum
Warsaw, Staszic Palace
26-27 September 2017**

MINUTES

The meeting of the representatives of the Visegrad Group Academies was held in accordance with the adopted agenda (annex 1). The list of participants is attached (annex 2).

Participants of the Forum were welcomed by the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences, prof. Jerzy Duszyński. In his opening address, prof. J. Duszyński expressed his conviction that annual V4 meetings are important discussion platform for all four institutions and introduced prof. Anton Zeilinger – the President of the Austrian Academy of Sciences who was invited to attend the Forum.

Presentations on current activities of the V4 academies

After a *tour de table* respective presidents gave presentations on current activities in their Academies. Prof. J. Duszyński in his presentation focused on recent changes in the Polish Academy of Sciences and on its new initiatives. Last year the Excellence in Science Department was established to strengthen and support the Polish participation in the European Research Council. The Department provides help to researchers based in Poland or abroad, who want to apply for ERC grants with Polish host institutions.

In January 2017 the Polish Institute of Advanced Studies (PIAS_t) was founded within the structure of the Polish Academy of Sciences. It aims to support advances in knowledge and research innovation and to contribute to the promotion of scientific development in Poland. The Institute will focus on the wide diversity of the humanities and social sciences. In July 2017 it awarded in an open selection procedure 12 fellowships for 5 or 10 month stays in Poland.

The Authorities of the Polish Academy of Sciences have been working intensively on the concept of Research University of the Polish Academy of Sciences as a common initiative for all institutes. Currently there are about 1600 PhD students enrolled in

courses at PAN research units which are autonomous. The goal is to have 2500 PhD students in the Research University on research led courses with a strong international dimension (International Scientific Council, Selection Committees, Staff and Students).

The next speaker, prof. Pavel Šajgalík - the President of the Slovak Academy of Sciences gave a presentation on the results and conclusions from the evaluation of SAS Institutes by panels of international experts in 2016. The decision to carry out the assessment of SAS institutes was made as a result of vigorous discussions in Slovak science sector. The intention of SAS authorities, who invited to this evaluation famous foreign experts as the Panels members, was to compare the SAS institutes with similar ones in other European countries. The SAS expects to find extra financial means for the best research institutes as a consequence of the final report elaborated by the Panel of Experts and also to encourage the development of advanced research topics. As a result of this evaluation, which was completed in February 2017, 3,5% of SAS institutes were ranked as "A", 52,5% as "B", 35,1% as "C" and 5 % as "D". The recommendations of panel of experts are as follows: the number of institutes should be decreased, they should be internationalised and focus more on external relations, the engagement of young researchers should be much stronger, the SAS should create motivation mechanisms. The SAS Authorities accepted the conclusions of evaluation. As a result they decided to set up an International Advisory Board. The SAS institutes were instructed to elaborate their action plans for the next years. The above plans are intended to facilitate the decisions regarding distribution of funding to the institutes.

Prof. Eva Zažímalová – the President of the Czech Academy of Sciences reported on the recent developments at the CAS. The Academy consists of 54 public research institutions. It employs over 8,000 employees, more than a half of whom are researchers with university degrees. The supreme self-governing body of the Academy is the Academy Assembly two-thirds of which is composed of representatives of all Academy institutes, the remaining third being representatives of universities, state administration, business circles, and other notable personalities. The executive body of the Academy is the Academy Council headed by the President of the Academy of Sciences. The Council for Sciences is primarily engaged in setting science policy of the Academy. Members of each of these Academy bodies are elected for a four-year period. The present Authorities of the Academy begun their term of office in April 2017.

The Academy Council prepared the Programme Declaration in which the priorities of the Academy were defined. It can be summarised as follows:

- to increase the level of scientific performance of the CAS
- to utilize the whole potential of the CAS
- to increase and professionalize PR and popularization activities
- to further strengthen the role of the CAS in society.

The CAS is financed primarily from the state budget. In addition to basic institutional financing of research objectives of Academy institutes, target-oriented financing is being more widely practised to carry out research projects and grants selected on the basis of public competitions. The CAS was the first institution in the Czech Republic to establish its own Grant Agency which financially supported research projects

selected through a peer-review procedure involving reviewers from abroad. However, based on the decision of the government, in 2015 its operation was terminated. Individual Academy institutes obtain additional financial resources by participating in national as well as international research programmes.

The funding for the Academy from the state budget has been decreasing in recent years. There has been a slight rise in 2016, but still this funding is very low and it constitutes only 34 % of the total Academy's budget. In this situation the Academy Council decided to stabilize the CAS institutes and reduce dependence on targeted funding (in favour of institutional funding from the Academy's own Budget Chapter) and to get more time for conceptual and research work. Therefore, the CAS initiated a series of negotiations that took place between public higher education institutions, the CAS, the Czech Conference of Rectors, and the government representatives responsible for science and education. As a result the Statement on the Stabilization of the System of R&D&I in the Czech Republic was signed. Its main assumption is to increase systematically the institutional support of the Institutes of the CAS and public HEIs in 2019–2023 annually by at least 5 %, so that in the longer time horizon institutional support could reach the level of 70 % of the expenditures of the Institutes of the CAS and public HEIs for R&D, with the effect that the amount of targeted funds in this area will not be adversely affected.

Concluding her presentation prof. E. Zažímalová emphasised that the Academy Council would like to support the predictable and stable system of science and research funding in compliance with the fulfilment of the Statement on the stabilization of the R&D system. It should be based on research evaluation corresponding to international standards, and ensuring the long-term financial stability of the scientific-research environment in the CAS and the Czech Republic.

In his presentation regarding the new developments in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the President of HAS prof. László Lovász mentioned the Content Pedagogy Research Programme of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. It is a 4-year programme with 19 research groups taking part in it with more than 150 researchers, and more than 200 persons attending school classes. The programme is carried out in Budapest, in the countryside and in neighbouring cities. Under this programme regular conferences are organised in four areas: humanities and social sciences; natural sciences, mathematics and informatics; art education and health & science.

Prof. L. Lovász gave also a brief information on the special HAS programme for young scientists called "Momentum". This programme is aimed, among others, at fighting brain-drain among young talented researchers, providing young talents with an opportunity to create their own research group and responsibility in realizing their own research goals, introducing new research topics to revitalize the thematic renewal of the research network, promoting the culture of excellent science - in the research network of the Academy and throughout the country and increasing the competitiveness of research institutes and research groups on the international level. Researchers can be funded under this programme both at research centres of the HAS and at the universities.

Prof. L. Lovász mentioned several new facilities that have been built recently in the HAS, including a new building for the Research Centre for Human Sciences and the Centre for Agricultural Research. Worth mentioning is also the renovation of the building of Alfréd Rényi Institute of Mathematics.

Concluding his presentation prof. L. Lovász raised a problem for a discussion: how a new topic, dealing for instance with artificial intelligence or public health, could be founded, to create a basis for a series of conferences, publications, etc. how the system of research institutes would react to it and how it would be possible to get funding for its implementation.

Last speaker in this session was the President of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW) Prof. Anton Zeilinger. OeAW is Austria's central non-university research and science institution. It is a learned society with over 770 members and 1,600 employees. The OeAW is also a research centre in which operate 28 research institutes in the field of innovative basic research in the arts and humanities and the social and natural sciences. Every 5 years OeAW research units are evaluated by external experts.

The Academy Council is responsible for monitoring the management of the Academy. It consists of 16 delegates who are elected by the General Assembly and of whom 4 are not members of the Academy. Additionally, within the Academy Council there is an audit committee whose tasks include monitoring the accounts and the efficacy of the internal control system.

The Academy maintains an active dialogue with politics and society. The Academy's recommendations and statements are centred on issues of great social relevance concerning the future, which the OeAW evaluates on a scientific basis and communicates to the public. The OeAW supports the Austrian parliament with their expertise, focusing on questions concerning the societal, economic and political impact of scientific and technological developments. Regular meetings between the representatives of OeAW and members of Austrian parliament are organised every year.

Closing his presentation prof. A. Zeilinger expressed the opinion that the main goal ahead of science sector is to make in 10 years the European science system equal everywhere in Europe which would lead to preventing young gifted people from leaving their countries in their scientific pursuits.

In his comments during the discussion prof. P. Šajgalík stressed that the Slovak Academy of Sciences is not planning to establish its university. He said the SAS is focusing on developing "science advice for policy" activities. For this purpose it established the Institute of Strategic Analysis which cooperates closely with the government trying to solve difficult problems. Thus it also has an additional source of income.

Prof. E. Zažímalová said that as far the concept of establishing CAS public university is concerned the situation is similar to SAS. The discussions on this subject were unsuccessful. As regards the advisory activities, the Czech Academy would like to

adopt a British system where in the parliament there is a special office for science and technology. The consultations between the CAS and Czech Senate on the implementation of the same pattern are underway.

Prof. L. Lovász informed that the HAS authorities have never considered a possibility of establishing its own university. HAS research units cooperate very closely with the universities and they have numerous joint research teams.

Prof. J. Duszyński asked the presidents of the Academies for their help in a controversial problem that PAS has to cope with currently, namely the matter of Białowieża forest. There is a strong conflict in Poland over this issue between ecologists and the Ministry of the Environment. The PAS is going to prepare a position statement on Białowieża forest and to do it the Academy has convened an international conference devoted to this topic which will be held in Warsaw at the end of the year. Prof. P. Šajgalík and Prof. E. Zažímalová offered their help in indicating best specialists who could serve as experts or speakers during this conference.

Last problem tackled at the end of this session was the evaluation of research teams in selected institutes and the matter of financial consequences, conflicts of interest and the interference from outside that are usually connected with such procedures. Prof. Zažímalová presented the experience of CAS in this matter. Such evaluation was carried out in 2015-2016. The directors of the institutes were informed about the results of assessment of their research teams with a request to indicate the preferences of each institute regarding the allocation of funds for its teams and to describe the vision of the institutes as regards its research priorities. Based on the level and content of responses that were sent by the institutes, and on discussion with representatives of each institute, the Academy Council provided for them additional funding from 2,5% (in case of low evaluation) up to 30% (in case of high evaluation).

Discussion on the forms and instruments of cooperation between the universities and academies of sciences in the Central European countries

Prof. P. Šajgalík repeated that although SAS does not intend to create a university of its own, it is very much interested in developing close collaboration with the universities. First of all the Academy wants to attract students and secondly it would like to make the best use of laboratory bases of the universities and benefit from structural funds which could be earmarked for joint facilities shared with the universities.

Dr Zdeněk Havlas from the Czech Academy of Sciences expressed the opinion that close cooperation with the universities can also be problematic, since the publications that result from such a cooperation are usually attributed to the employees of the universities rather to those from academies.

Prof. J. Duszyński informed that PAS research units run schools for PhD students and if they liaise with the universities they would be too dispersed and would have no significance. Therefore the idea emerged to create a university of the Academy which would be based on an enormous potential of the research PAS scientific units and

would be able to compete with top European universities. Only two Polish universities are noted in international rankings: the University of Warsaw and the Jagiellonian University, but their places in all available rankings are very low.

In his comment prof. L. Lovász referred to the matter of rankings. He said that their goals are usually set by politicians and the bigger a university is the more impact it has. Instead of establishing five, one should aim at founding only one, but bigger. Prof. L. Lovász mentioned also the so called „excellence cooperation centres” which more easily get financial means for research on a specific topic.

In the opinion of prof. J. Duszyński it would be hardly possible for him to move with his research group for a year to a university to conduct his research there, since there would be a great problem with equipment. It is obvious that in such disciplines like mathematics, the „exchanges” (e. g. sabbaticals) with the universities are quite frequent, but in case of experimental biology, medicine or chemistry it is rather difficult.

Prof. Zdeněk Havlas, Vice-President of the CAS gave a presentation on the cooperation of the CAS with higher education institutions in the Czech Republic. The educational activities of the CAS are intensive. It is very important for the CAS to collaborate with universities, since the Academy may not confer scientific degrees. Joint educational activities are supervised from the CAS side by the advisory body of the Academy Council called the Council for Cooperation with HEIs and Graduate Study Programmes of the CAS. Currently 22 framework agreements on cooperation in implementing Doctoral Study Programmes are carried out, and there is also 55 joint research laboratories. The cooperation between CAS and higher education institutions takes place at all levels i.e.: bachelor’s programmes: teaching, supervision of bachelor theses; master’s programmes: teaching, supervision of diploma theses, membership in committees for state final exams and doctoral programmes: supervision of doctoral theses, co-accreditation of doctoral study programs, etc. The number of the CAS employees as lecturers at higher education institutions last year amounted to 1.790. CAS participates in the higher education process in a quantitative extent corresponding at least to the capacities of a medium-sized university. Unfortunately it was not possible for its authorities to push through the organisation of PhD studies at the Academy in the amendment to the Higher Education Act.

Prof. L. Lovász raised the matter of the multiple employment of lecturers which is a common practice in Hungary. Prof. Zdeněk Havlas informed that there is no law regulating this problem in the Czech Republic. In Slovakia, as dr. D. Galik said, there is a requirement to have only one full-time employment.

Discussion on the participation of Central European countries in EU framework programmes

The introductory presentation on this subject was given by prof. Ladislav Kavan, member of the Academy Council responsible for the CAS participation in ERA. The following points for discussion have been proposed:

- transfer of know-how from experienced coordinators to potential applicants;
- need for more applications or focus on increased quality of proposals;

- role of national schemes: national ERC support and Visiting Fellowship Programmes;
- the need to strengthen the cooperation with TOP 20 institutions;
- HR Award: better visibility and credibility for research institutions

Prof. J. Duszyński referred to the matter of HR Excellence in Science Awards. The PAS has indeed a wide experience and knowledge how to apply for this award (in Poland 64 institutions obtained it) and it will willingly share it with the remaining V4 Academies.

Prof. L. Kavan said that the Czech Republic has just introduced a system supporting junior scientists applying for ERC grants. The Czech National Science Foundation provides ERC fellowship grants enabling young scientists to visit the researchers who have already received ERC grants to gain experience.

Prof. E. Zažímalová stressed that the success rate of new EU countries in obtaining ERC grants is so low because the applicants have difficulties in formulating their proposals properly (using specific language), whereas in “old” EU states they have a wide experience how to do it. More and more often the scientists applying for ERC grants ask specialised companies to elaborate their proposals for them and such practices should be eliminated.

Another issue discussed was the need to take part in creating European policy regarding FP9. The Czech Academy of Sciences summarised its comments relating to FP9 in a the official position statement which was distributed to various organisations. Prof. E. Zažímalová proposed that V4 Academies should consider the possibility to issue a kind of a joint statement in which their negative opinions regarding FP9 would be enlisted. It was agreed that the Polish Academy of Sciences would coordinate this process. It will also gather all position statements on FP9 issued by the Academies or at the national level and will distribute them further.

Visit to the Copernicus Science Centre

On 27 September 2017 in the morning the participants of the Forum attended a guided tour of the Copernicus Science Centre.

Visegrad Group Academies Young Researcher Award 2017 BIOMEDICINE

Four national laureates of the annual competition organised by the V4 Academies briefly presented their work, scientific interests and future plans.

Dr Jiří Schimer, Czech Academy of Sciences

Photolabile inhibitors of HIV protease as a tool for studying viral maturation

Dr Éva Borbély, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Discovery of novel common mechanisms in pain and stress

Dr Tomáš Smolek, Slovak Academy of Sciences
Propagation of tau pathology in neurodegenerative disorders

Ms Alicja Kościelny, MSc, Polish Academy of Sciences
The nervous system development in health and disease

The Presidents of the four Academies awarded the laureates with diplomas.

Following a brief discussion the participants agreed that the mediaeval history will be the field of the 2018 Visegrad Group Academies Young Researcher Award.

Prof. J. Duszyński, concluding the Forum, thanked all participants for their presence and stressed the importance of personal meetings enabling the exchange of ideas and tightening of the links between the V4 Academies. Prof. E. Zažímalová extended her invitation to attend the next year's Forum which will be organised in Liblice castle near Prague.