



Higher Education Reform in the Slovak Republic

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Slovak Higher Education Today

- 33 higher education institutions
 - 20 public HEIs
 - 3 state HEIs (military, police, health)
 - 10 private HEIs
- 2008/2009 enrolment (except state HEIs)
 - total 226 000 (full-time 143 000)
 - public 195 000 (full-time 138 000)
 - private 31 000 (full-time 5 000)
 - entry rate 71,7% (full time 45,9%)
(Source: MoE Annual Report on HE 2008)
- The largest university: Comenius University in Bratislava, 27 000 students in 2008/2009



HE Reform Milestones

- **1998/10:** new Government comes into power – preparation of HE reform initiated
- **2000/08:** new Strategy for HE adopted by the Government
- **2002/02:** new HE Act approved by the Parliament
- **2002/10:** next new Government declares full continuity of HE reform
- **2002/10-2006/06:** implementation of HE reform – several amendments of HE Act approved
- **2005-2007:** evaluation of the Slovak HEIs by EUA
- **2006/07:** next new Government (after preterm elections) declares a need of a new HE strategy and further changes in HE
- **2008/02:** EUA presents a report on the Slovak HE
- **2006/07 – up until now:** no new strategy elaborated so far – new government have not changed basic principles of the HE reform of the previous 2 governments but has made more changes in the HE Act. The form of changes and in some cases also their content are not compatible with the former approaches



Weaknesses of the HE System at the Beginning of Reform

- lack of vision
- incomplete legislation
- weak diversification
- long-lasting bad financing
- internal disintegration of universities
- "wild" fee collection for some kind of studies
- weak mechanism of accountability



Strengths of the HE System at the Beginning of Reform

- big interest of young people to access higher education (217 % increase in total number of students during the period 1990 – 2001)
- many enthusiastic people working in higher education



Main Goals of the HE Reform

The reform runs along two lines with 4 main goals:

- **broadening access** to HE while retaining its **quality**
- increasing **autonomy** of HEIs and strengthening their **accountability**



Further Characteristics

Following the approved Strategy the new Law introduces:

- the **competitive environment**
- the **multisource financing** with **performance-based** allocation of finances from the State budget

Key idea: orientation on student



Broader Access

- institutional diversification
 - university (23) and non-university (10) HEIs – process of re-classification of HEIs into universities and non-universities is currently running
 - public (20), state (3) and private (10) HEIs – the ratio of student numbers between public and private HEIs is 86,4 % / 13,6 % in 2008/2009
- program diversification
 - Bologna scheme: 3 levels of study programs (students: Bc-71,3% / Ms-24,2% / PhD-4.5% in 2008/2009)
 - full-time study, part-time study (63,5% / 36,5% in 2008/2009)
(Source of 2008/2009 data: MoE Annual Report on HE 2008, calculations: author)
- Strengthening the student social support:



Quality

- the reform of the fields of study and study programs
- the reform of teaching staff positions
 - competition-based 5-years appointment of professors and associated professors with tenure after 3 re-appointments
- improvement of the accreditation and evaluation system
 - accreditation of study programs – HEIs are not allowed to enroll students to non-accredited study programs
 - complex accreditation of HEIs including comprehensive research assessment resulting in possible re-classification of the accredited HEI
- use of specific funding tools for quality support
 - subsidy depending on qualification structure of teachers
 - motivation scholarships
 - support of HE research and development
 - support of qualification growth of young teachers
 - support for using IT, support for advanced laboratories
- introduction of tuition fees in case the study lasts more than the standard length and in case of the second and further study at the same level (3 unsuccessful attempts to introduce tuition fees for all students)



Autonomy

- transformation of HEIs from the state budgetary organizations to public non-profit organizations sui generis
- HEIs own property formerly owned by the State,
- being still mostly financed from the State budget, HEIs are obliged to use also other resources obtained by their own activities for full coverage of their expenses
- HEIs have the right to use their property to carry out also entrepreneurial activities
- organization under faculty level and internal administration almost fully left to HEIs



Accountability

To strengthen accountability, the HEIs are obliged to elaborate and make publicly available

- long-term strategy
- annual reports on activities and finances

New element in the Slovak HE: board of trustees as the link between the public HEIs and society



New System of Funding

Two categories of changes

- overall change of financial management of HEIs
- change of the allocation of funds from the state budget to HEIs



Basic Characteristics of the New Financial Management of HEIs

- multisource financing introduced – finances mostly but not completely from the State budget
- the transfer of unspent subsidies from the State budget to next year allowed
- subsidies from the State budget in the form of block grant
- HEIs own property
- visualization of the true economic state of HEIs by introduction of write-offs and fully accrual accounting
- allocation of investment funds on central level just for development purposes or bigger reconstructions



New System of Allocation of Funds from the State Budget to HEIs

Four kinds of subsidies for each HEI from the State budget:

- subsidy for realization of accredited study programs depending on the number of students, the costingness of the respective study program, qualification structure of teachers and partly on the research performance
- subsidy for research depending on the research performance of the HEI
- subsidy for further development of the HEI provided for accepted development projects
- subsidy for social support of students – grants, accommodation, meals

Further funding for research: grant agency, State research programs



Main Changes since 2006

- In the period 2007 – 2009, several amendments of the HE Act were approved
- Main changes:
 - introduction of foreign HEIs
 - change of HEIs typology
 - introduction of specialized units of HEIs as incubators and research centers
 - more detailed regulations of internal structure of private HEIs
 - introduction of joint study programs
 - regulations concerning academic mobility
 - introduction of tuition fees for part-time students



Assessments of the HE Reform

- No comprehensive analysis of the HE reform results has been done so far
- Partial assessments:
 - Report on HE reform (MoE report for the Slovak Parliament, April 2004)
 - Country study on HE funding system in Slovakia within the OECD-IMHE project Funding Systems and Their Effects on Higher Education Systems (author's report, August 2006)
 - The Slovak HE system and its research capacity, EUA sectoral report (February 2008)



EUA Evaluation

- The European University Association (EUA) has been commissioned by the MoE, jointly with the Slovak Rectors' Conference, to evaluate the Slovak HEIs during 2005-2007 and based on the HEIs' evaluations to elaborate also a sectoral report on the Slovak HE system
- EUA evaluation concentrated on
 - organization and structures for carrying out the main missions of higher education institutions
 - effectiveness of internal quality processes and their relevance in decision-making and strategic planning
- Though the EUA evaluation was not aimed at comprehensive analysis of the HE system, it provided very important observations and assessments



EUA Evaluation – Strengths of the HE System

- Strengths of the HE system
 - considerable widening of access
 - adoption of Bologna reforms
 - introduction of real institutional identity of HEIs by abolishing the legal independence of the faculties and by introducing lump sum budgets controlled by the individual HEIs
 - greatly extended autonomy of HEIs compared to the previous decades
 - performance-based allocation of finances to HEIs as well as within HEIs
 - competition-based system of hiring of professors and associated professors
 - complex accreditation process that may lead to a more multi-faceted comparative data on institutions and to some institutional self-enhancement
 - highly motivated individuals with a will and capacity to induce and sustain change.
 - many cooperation projects and common initiatives between HEIs and their regional partners



EUA Evaluation – Weaknesses of the HE System

- The EUA evaluation presented several weaknesses, so systemic as well as of more technical or implementation nature
- A selection of identified weaknesses:
 - quality of educational and research activities suffering from the pace and insufficient funding of expansion
 - shifting attention to the diverse needs of the learners has not yet been addressed, not even in the context of the changes based on the Bologna process which was approached as a more formal structural change
 - the history of strong faculty independence can still be felt in most HEIs, preventing cross-arching initiatives and economies of scale
 - the HE law goes into too much detail with respect to decision-making processes and internal bodies, preventing HEIs from developing structures that fit their purposes
 - very “diversified” HEIs’ management with a whole range of different bodies involved; especially there is a division between actual power and responsibility (e.g. the Senate vs. Rector)
 - ex-ante input oriented external accreditation procedures for study programs; the idea of universities themselves having a vested interest in watching over the quality of their programs has not been debated yet
 - high level of mistrust and controlling attitudes within the system
 - the frequent legislative changes and lack of sustainability of government decisions.
 - strategic planning of poor quality – strategic plans are rather wish lists



Final Remark

- Out of 4 main goals set at the beginning of the Slovak HE reform, the broadening access can be considered almost fulfilled
- Autonomy and accountability are means; they are quite well advanced but further development would be necessary
- Now it is high time to concentrate the maximal effort on the remaining main goal - quality