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STANDING CONFERENCE ON UNIVERSITY PROBLEMS
CC-PU

**Consultation with countries of Central and Eastern Europe
on activities in higher education**

Strasbourg, 19 - 20 September 1991

**Proposed action plan
in higher education**

**Memorandum prepared by the Chairman of the CC-PU,
incorporating proposals to the CC-PU
by the consultation meeting**

**Distribution:
Consultation
CC-PU
Education Committee**

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Foreword

The Standing Conference on University Problems (CC-PU), which under the Council for Cultural Cooperation (CDCC) is responsible for the Council of Europe's activities in higher education, held a high-level consultation on 19-20 September with delegations from Central and Eastern Europe. Delegations from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, the USSR and Yugoslavia attended; and from Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain. The Education Committee was represented by its Chairman, Mr Pierre LUISONI (Switzerland). The NEICs network was represented by its Chairman, Mr Maurits DELOZ, who attended the meeting as an observer. The meeting was chaired by Dr Roberto DE ANTONIIS (Italy), Chairman of the CC-PU; Professor Roger ELLUL-MICALLEF (Malta), Vice-Chairman of the CC-PU, acted as rapporteur.

A consensus was reached on a number of guidelines for the Council's future work to give practical help to the urgent problems in Central and Eastern Europe in this field.

A number of specific recommendations were adopted at the close of the meeting, and the Chairman was asked to incorporate these conclusions in a document to be submitted to the CC-PU, and circulated rapidly to delegations.

Part I - INTRODUCTION

I. General considerations:

1. The consultation took careful note of the proposals made to the Education Committee in the areas of school, language and adult education, arising from that Committee's consultation held on 19-20 June 1991 (see doc CDCC-ED (91) 26 Addendum). The CC-PU's consultation extended this process to the higher education sector, and these conclusions are also intended to be complementary..

2. The general considerations raised in section 1 of the Education Committee's document are also valid for higher education, and need not be repeated in detail. This applied in particular to the remarks on:

- the seriousness of the problems facing education in Central and Eastern Europe;

- the prime responsibility of the countries themselves for reform, with the assistance of Western European countries in making available their own experience;
- the need for partnership rather than one-way aid, and the desirability of action at the regional or sub-regional level on problems shared by several countries;
- the specific role of the Council of Europe in disseminating good practice in areas where it has experience, possibly also in contributing to the coordination of complementary bilateral projects;
- the heavy demands on currently available resources, and the need for reinforcement of staff if the full potential is to be realised.

3. Higher education presents a number of special features in this context. Reform in this sector has been given an especially high priority in many countries for a number of reasons:

i. Higher education, and particularly the universities, have been in the past the objects of systematic interference with principles of academic freedom, which is a part of human rights. The restoration of academic freedom and institutional autonomy has therefore been an essential component of the restoration of democracy.

ii. Some highly inappropriate policies have also been followed: the separation of teaching from research; the multiplication of institutions without a clear differentiation of their missions; the failure to establish strong links between higher education and industry; and over-specialisation, particularly in technical fields, leading to inflexibility in the labour markets.

iii. An overhaul of many branches of study, including most obviously economics and management, but also languages, social science, law and history, are essential if the transition to a fully functioning market economy and democratic society are to succeed.

iv. Reform of higher education is closely linked to reforms of other parts of the educational system, for example, through teacher training, and in the matter of widening access to educational opportunity.

4. To offset these particularly severe problems, many institutions, particularly universities, succeeded in maintaining living links to the true traditions of higher education. Academic standards in some areas such as pure mathematics reached full international level. There is a dense network of personal and institutional contacts, in which very many higher education institutions in Western Europe have been active since long before the democratic revolution. The capacity for self-renewal of higher education in

Central and Eastern Europe is therefore potentially high, once their host societies can guarantee an appropriate institutional framework and resources. International cooperation is generally seen in Central and Eastern European higher education as a vital part and contributor to this self-renewal, and it is here that the help of the wider European higher education community is called for.

5. The consultation listed a number of these problems, and related them to the possible contribution of outside assistance.

At the first level are problems where outside assistance can play hardly any role. These include basic policy options such as the retention or not of numerous clauses in access to higher education, and the maintenance of the academies of science. Similarly, the institutions of higher education have to take steps themselves to ensure that periods of study abroad by their own students are fully recognised on their return. The academic audit of staff, a difficult and sensitive problem inherited from the ideological interference of the past, was also an internal matter for the national systems and their institutions.

Second are problems where outside expertise can be of great help in clarifying the options for action within the national higher education system. These include:

- the legislative and regulatory framework,
- accreditation systems,
- the management and administration of universities and institutions of higher education,
- the establishment of distance learning programmes in institutions,
- the setting up of information points on the Council of Europe.

A third level of problems requires the setting up of task forces or other groups working over a longer period. These include the reform of the content of teaching. Priority areas here are:

- the retraining of university teaching staff in:
 - . economics and management studies,
 - . international law and human rights,
 - . political science and European studies,
 - . environmental sciences;
- improving the teaching in universities of modern languages, especially to future teachers.

Finally, re-establishing academic freedom requires in part a clarification of this difficult concept, in all European countries.

6. The consultation recommended that the Council of Europe concentrate its action on two lines. The first is the **development and refocusing of the existing CC-PU programme**. This is to a large extent an appropriate vehicle for contributing to the solution of some of the problems outlined in the consultation. The postgraduate training programme and the new project on the European dimension of higher education lend themselves to work on the reform of teaching programmes, while mobility and equivalence activities support efforts being made by institutions and national agencies in this area. The forum role lends itself to the common exploration of policy issues of particular concern. The results of past work should be made available efficiently to the debates in the new partner countries.

7. A number of other issues revolve around the concept of **legislative reform**, a topic on which the Council of Europe is particularly well placed to contribute expertise. Accordingly it is recommended below that a specific cooperation project be drawn up in this area. Its implementation will call for a significant commitment of additional resources, both financial and human.

8. The consultation noted with pleasure that its work formed part of a wider development of the Council of Europe as a whole. East-West cooperation had been established by the Committee of Ministers as a central mission of the Organisation, and significant work was under way in many fields, supported by the new DEMOSTHENES programme. The CC-PU had already taken several practical initiatives in the same direction. The consultation was glad to see its work as a further step on a path both long and broad.

Part II - RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Development and refocusing of the CC-PU programme

9. The new CC-PU project on the **European dimension in higher education** should be a vehicle for cooperation in key areas of higher education:

- human rights, democratic institutions and law;
- economics, management and business studies;
- languages, including university-level education of language teachers;
- European studies;
- environmental sciences.

True two-way cooperation should be aimed at; it should not be forgotten that Central and Eastern European universities have been able to maintain high standards in a number of areas.

Financial implications: none in 1992 (funds already included for the preparatory year)

10. The **postgraduate training programme** should be concentrated on the concerns of Central and Eastern European higher education, taking further the reforms already undertaken by the CC-PU. The Evaluation Group of the programme should be asked to make specific proposals to the next CC-PU.

Financial implications: none in 1992, but possible implications for subsequent years.

11. Under the forum role, the planned conferences on Universities and Democratisation (Warsaw, January 1992) and on Access to Higher Education (Parma, Autumn 1992; joint with the Education Committee) were strongly welcomed as corresponding to the priorities of Central and Eastern European higher education. The intention to contribute to the conference on University Autonomy and Academic Freedom, planned by Unesco and the Romanian Rectors' conference in Bucharest in May 1992, was also appreciated.

12. A **regional seminar** on the problems of financing the reform of higher education should be added to the 1992 programme. It should draw on the colloquy on financing of higher education, held in Barcelona in September 1989 in cooperation with the OECD, but extended to cover the question of aid to students. The provisional invitation by Bulgaria to host and organise this seminar, with the support of the Council of Europe and the CC-PU, was welcomed. This meeting could be followed up by other similar seminars on other policy problems, subject to availability of resources.

Financial Implications for the 1992 programme: addition of 80-100,000 FF

13. The existing work on mobility and recognition was seen as appropriate. On training needs for international cooperation within higher education institutions and agencies, the NEIC network of information centres and the ad hoc Tatra forum on 1-3 October were invited to make recommendations. The NEICS were also asked to examine ways of improving the recognition of periods of study abroad, including the better application of the existing Council of Europe instruments. The evaluation now underway of the higher education scholarship scheme was welcomed, with a view to making the scheme a more effective vehicle for East/West exchanges at postgraduate level.

Financial implications: none at present envisaged but possible at a later stage

B. Legislative reform in higher education

14. The initiative already underway to offer technical assistance to Bulgaria in the preparation of its new law on higher education was strongly welcomed, and should be pursued within the Vote IX/Demosthenes framework.

Financial implications: continuation of support from Vote IX

15. As legislative reform in higher education is a common concern of Central and Eastern European countries, a project on a larger scale was recommended. A detailed proposal for such a project should be prepared urgently. It should take into account both the contribution of legislative reform to the democratisation of society, and to the quality of education. This project would need resources going beyond those available to the CC-PU and co-financing by a number of Member States would be required.

16. The consultation set up an ad hoc group to draw up a proposal, for submission to the CC-PU Bureau on 27-28 November. Its members were experts from the delegations to the meeting of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Hungary and the Netherlands.

Financial implications: to be defined by the ad hoc group, but significant and including staff.