

Sends: Trade Union of Employees in Higher Education (FDSZ)
Budapest
Hungary

Receives: European Trade Union Committee for Education
Higher Education and Research Standing Committee (HERSC)
Brussels
Belgium

OPINION
ON THE COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

European higher education in the world
[COM(2013) 499 final]

General comments

Trade Union of Employees in Higher Education welcomes the efforts of European Commission connected to its steps towards the goal that European higher education - which holds serious value and tradition - should be more open in general view. During forming our opinion we took into consideration the general European interests and also the Hungarian interests - which are specific, but could be represented by other member states of the European Union, too.

The communication of the European Commission recognising global race for talents tries to forward the European higher education by drafting exemplary strategy (increasing of mobility, cooperation between institutions, comparability of university curricula and degrees, the use of digital education and information and communication technology) and the methods of the contribution of European Union for implementation and realization.

The rapid grow of technics caused higher education to follow this development, moreover, to assure further appropriate steps in the near future. For assuring these steps, member states should participate in it with strong financial and moral assistance and support. Within this the right social appreciation of teachers, researchers and administrative staff of higher education is essential.

As the communication says, over the next twenty years the demand for higher education is expected to grow exponentially, from the current 99 million students worldwide to 414 million by 2030 - this growth, in our opinion will be realized variously in the countries, but this fact warns Hungary not to decrease the number of students in higher education.

According to the communication it is important to make higher educational systems more international on European level. It means the growth of demand on mobility of students and teachers and also, where the essential condition is the encouragement of foreign language skills.

We think, that teaching German, French and Italian language should be stressed besides English as a foreign language. At the same time the reputation of our institutions will increase if students and teachers speak the language of the sending country. The multilingual Europe could be reached only by high quality foreign language teaching.

Comments in detail:

1. The 2nd chapter of the communication stresses the problem that international academic cooperation is often still fragmented, based on the initiative of individual academics or research teams, and not necessarily linked to an institutional or national strategy and effective strategies should also include the development of international curricula, strategic partnerships, finding new ways of delivering content, and ensuring complementarity with broader national policies for external cooperation. At the same time, comprehensive internationalisation strategy should be implemented in:

- international student and staff mobility; the internationalisation
- improvement of curricula and digital learning;
- and strategic cooperation, partnerships and capacity building.

We agree, the the above defined categories should be handled as very important parts of the comprehensive development.

2. In Hungary, the number of students arriving from abroad should be increased. Three member states of the European Union (United Kingdom, France, Germany) receive 63% of students coming from states that are out of the European higher education area right now. In Hungary, the reception of students from abroad could mean important source of income, but adequate investments are essential and students should be placed culturally. To achieve this, there can be found possibilities in some of our potential regional institutions.

3. We agree with the statement of the communication that university curricula should be harmonized with the purpose of facilitation of mobility.

4. According to the communication the widening of teachers' and researchers' international experience is essential. For this purpose there should be created financial conditions. We urge, this endeavour to be reached for all employees in the higher education, including the administrative staff such as IT technicians or university librarians and also, the adequate appreciation of these employees. Because high quality of higher education can not be without high quality IT support and high level of printed and/or electronic sources and services and the staff behind them.

Our proposal to the 3rd point of "The key priorities on mobility for higher education institutions and Member States are to" is:

"- Support fair and formal recognition for competences gained abroad for internationally mobile students, researchers and administrative staff in higher education, including a better use of transparency and comparability tools and an increased focus on learning outcomes." Furthermore, in questions concerned to teachers and researchers we suggest to handle higher education administrative staff equally and recognize the importance and value of their activity.

5. The 3rd chapter of the communication summarizes the tasks that European Union puts into consideration, thus the internationalization of higher education. Ingrains unequivocally - with which we totally agree - that member states should support the strategies that aim at reforming higher education system. We feel necessary to remark, that for institutions of states there should be significant ambition to shape strong university curricula that is rooted on national value when it appears on international platform. We think, that from the objectives of the European Union the most relevant are the followings: international mobility, joint and double degrees, postgraduate courses for teachers and administrative staff. Furthermore, we urge the mutual recognition of degrees across Europe.

6. In Hungary the development of regions is essential governmental task. In order to have excellent professionals who take part in realization of these developments, there should be universities with wide range of structures which should be determined according to the pretension of development.

7. Trade Union of Employees in Higher Education agrees with the objectives that
- on one hand tend to improvement of quality and transparency
- on other hand tend to innovation and the high level of cooperation.

8. Ranking universities is getting more attention in nowadays, the communication says, and the Trade Union of Employees in Higher Education experiences the same in the number of national and international academic publication. The Trade Union of Employees in Higher Education agrees with the principles stated in the communication thus the resolution of discrepancy caused by the ranking problems.

9. The soft diplomacy program that falls back on old students is very useful activity. In Hungary, it is necessary to shape principles for this kind of support that operates successfully in several European country such as Germany and France.

10. Trade Union of Employees in Higher Education agrees with and supports a more reliable acquisition system to be used in international academic collaboration and international mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff.

11. The 4th chapter of the communication under title “Next steps” summarizes the most important aim of the document: “to contribute to the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy, by helping Member States and higher education institutions (HEIs) develop strategies and partnerships that will allow Europe to tackle global challenges more effectively.”

For Trade Union of Employees in Higher Education an objective of the communication has special importance, thus the ongoing monitoring of implementation of Bologna process.

Possible threats:

1. Quality: by appearing the massive open online courses, Trade Union of Employees in Higher Education stresses the quality assurance, the protection of values and quality. Europe must not let its high level education and research.

2. Some students coming from particular countries apply for international mobility programs because of getting visas, and after arriving to the European Union, they disappear.

3. According to the communication, that higher education institutions should shape more effective services in reception and sending of international students and researchers - including carrier plans, individual supporting consultancy for better integration into particular city/region/country - our opinion is that special attention must be paid on intercultural preparation of incoming students because for these students and also for receiving institutions can be cultural “shock” students arriving from other culture. Pursuant to this we urge the social responsibility on regional level.