

DISCUSSING THE ROLE AND FUTURE OF THE HUMANITIES EDUCATION WORLDWIDE

Anatoliy Kruglashov

(Ukraina, Lietuva / Ukraina, Litwa)

The situation with higher education all over the world needs comprehensive critical reconsideration and systematic reforms. Due to the increasing misbalance of changing market demands and universities' proposals, the lack of resources, the growing competition amongst leading models of education, and the conservative tendencies in educational management, universities have grown vulnerable and too inflexible vis-à-vis these and many other challenges. Special attention should be paid towards the humanities, as their popularity is repeatedly questioned by both academics and the general public, provoking ongoing debates on the future of institutions related to this branch of knowledge and education and even the discipline itself.

In an attempt to face the scope of the problems in humanities universities, the European Humanities University convoked an international conference under the title "The Mission of Humanities Universities in Eastern and Central Europe: Between Training and Bildung," which took place in Vilnius on 6–7 June 2012. The conference seemed to be very representative and gathered together participants from many countries, e.g., Albania, Belarus, Great Britain, Ireland, Lithuania, Moldavia, New Zealand, France, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine, the USA and the Czech Republic. Researchers, professors and administrative

staff from these countries presented different points of view and put forward new ideas and proposals concerning the agenda of the conference. Cross-cultural and interdisciplinary dialogue contributed towards a better understanding of university education in the humanities, not only in the region of Central and Eastern Europe but from the standpoint of the global perspective as well.

Participants and guests of the conference listened to the greeting addresses of Anatoli Mikhailov (Rector of the European Humanities University, Vilnius, Lithuania), Dan Davidson (Acting Chair of the Governing Board of the European Humanities University) and Pavel Tereshkovich (Director of the Center for Advanced Studies and Education, European Humanities University). The presentations made later by the participants reflected a wide variety of topics. Some of them were discussed in panels, e.g., "The University in the Region—Is It an Autonomous Corporation?", "Models of Universities in Central and Eastern Europe" and "Types of Transmitted Knowledge, or Entrepreneurial Universities and University Management," etc. Others were concentrated into roundtables, for instance, "The Important Role of Values in European Humanities Education." One very positive outcome of the conference was the active participation of EHU students and graduates in some activities there.

The topics regarded by the speakers and disputants of the conference as being of the utmost importance were the following: university autonomy—its status, problems and prospects; academic freedom—its friends and enemies; values and the humanitarian education; the latest know-how and methods of education; and the quality and discrepancies of university management. The discussion on the Bologna process revealed many questions, doubts and expectations about the pros and cons of its implementation. These wide ranges of issues provoked vivid debates, grounded on fears about the consequences of the implementation of this process in the participating countries, such as accelerating centralization and resource consumption (including cost-burdening).

Another special event of the conference agenda worthy of mention here reflected

the presentation of the newest publication of the academic writings of professor Vladimir Furs. He worked at EHU for years and passed away in 2009. His colleagues and students warmly commemorated the scholarship and achievements of this distinguished philosopher.

Finally, the conference adopted the document, “The EHU 2012 Declaration Supporting the Mission of Liberal Arts Universities in Eastern Europe.” The conference was dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the founding of EHU in Minsk (although, since 2005, the university has opened its doors to Belarusian and international students in Vilnius). The organizers of the conference will be publishing the proceedings as a special volume. More information on the conference agenda and participants may easily be found at <http://conferences.ehu.lt/index.php/humanities/2012>.