

LUMEN 2017

MEETING OF LEADERS IN UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Thursday, 16th November 2017



Photo: The winners of the Lumen 2017 competition were announced during the evening gala.

The turning point. Act 2.0

HIGHER EDUCATION. Poland needs universities that educate at a European-class level, and scientific research at a world-class level. In order to achieve that, outlays on education and science must be significantly increased. The academic circles claim that a reform is necessary, but it must be well thought-over and properly implemented.

The 3rd Lumen Conference, held in Warsaw on 13-14 November, drew together rectors of Polish and Ukrainian universities, representatives of the ministry of science and of institutions related to the academic circles.

The participants wondered, among others, how to take advantage of the opportunities provided to universities by Act 2.0. During the first day, discussions concentrated on university management in Poland and worldwide in the context of the act on higher education.

The second day of the conference was devoted primarily to discussing the solutions which will need to be introduced if the act comes into force.

Jarosław Gowin, the minister of science and higher education, emphasized that the planned reform will be successful if the academic circles prove cooperative.

“Today’s conference is extremely important. In a year’s time, we will either have a new higher education system, or the current one. We, the rectors, need to understand the content of Act 2.0 and to consider how to lead the academic community in order to implement the structural change stipulated by the act. We need to discuss it”, began professor Jan Szmidt, president of the CRASP, rector of the Warsaw University of Technology.

The rector as a leader

Professor Jerzy Woźnicki, president of the Polish Rectors Foundation, spoke to rectors of Polish and Ukrainian universities about the art of rectorship and of leadership at universities. “A university rector should be capable of bearing the burden of the role and the position of a leader of the academic community. He is under an obligation to exercise his power with due respect not only for the legal norms, but also for the requirements of the institutional culture of a given university, therefore his mission far exceeds the area of management. The rector is obliged to lead the university community. All these elements form the requirements of leadership and the art of rectorship,” said Professor Jerzy Woźnicki. According to Professor Szmidt, nowadays rectors find it very hard to master a large university with, for instance, 20 faculties. “That is why there is a need for deregulation, de-bureaucratization and streamlining a number of procedures. As rectors, we believe that the act will bring a change for the better if it is properly implemented and understood”, emphasized Professor Jan Szmidt.

Professor Wiesław Bielawski, vice-president of the CRASP, rector of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW, enumerated the qualities of an efficient rector: “A leader should have a vision, implement innovative solutions, boldly face the future, be creative. Leadership at a university is not the same as leadership in business. A rector must think primarily of finding a common ground with the academic community and be able to take advantage of its potential. A rector must be a good strategist, capable of choosing the right collaborators. I hope that the new act will enable rectors to do so. A rector should also be a scientific authority”, reminded Bielawski.

According to Professor Leonid Hubersky, President of the Ukrainian University Rectors Association, rector of the Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv, it is the rector who is responsible for the quality of education and they must follow the changes. “Those who can’t make it should make way for others”, claimed Professor Hubersky. According to Professor Ihor Kotsan, Rector of Lesya Ukrainka Eastern European National University, a rector should first and foremost consider the role of universities in the society. “The mission of a university is to educate. In Ukraine, we have one axis – the state, another one – business which requires good specialists and the third one – the students. The university should be in the middle and take into account the opinion of all three groups”, added Professor Kotsan.

Autonomy ensures freedom of creative work

The draft Act 2.0 ensures broad autonomy to universities, it will help reorganize them and provide them with tools to bring about a revolution in higher education – the discussion devoted to that subject was moderated by Professor Wiesław Banyś from the University of Silesia, Member of the Board of the EUA. The leadership in the conditions of new university autonomy will result in an increased centralisation of power in the hands of the rector, but also in greater accountability towards third parties, therefore it is necessary to elaborate new solutions.

“Autonomy is not a privilege, but a necessity, a precondition for freedom of creative work. The latter requires extensive academic freedom. Simple actions may be regulated strictly, but not creative work. Due to this fact, the expectations of the academic circles regarding increased autonomy are obvious. They result from concerns regarding quality. Employees at each level should be accountable for the quality of education and the effective use of funds. From that perspective, it may be claimed that autonomy is natural and that it may be favourable for work at universities. However, autonomy and freedom may not be subordinate to the comfort of the university employees and authorities”, noted Professor Andrzej Elias, president of the CRASP Committee for Communication and Social Responsibility, rector of the SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities from 1996 to 2016. Experts agreed that extension of university autonomy must be intertwined with integration of funding streams.

Varied funding

In the opinion of the academic circles, the reform must go hand in hand with an increase in funds awarded for education, and the expenses must be much higher than previously. Some people are of the opinion that the act marginalizes financial issues, among others: it fails to name the sources from which universities could obtain money and presents the distribution of public funds in too general a manner. “The act only increases flexibility in the allocation of budgetary funds by universities. A number of provisions were copied from the previous act, which affects its coherence,” emphasized Professor Tadeusz Pomianek, president of the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów. During the discussion, the experts analysed funding of universities with regard to education and scientific research during the last ten years. “It turns out that during the analysed period, the amounts granted per student to respective universities were equalised and the quality of education was not rewarded in any manner”, he added.

According to Professor Roman Cieślak, rector of the SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, openness to various means of obtaining funding, including extrabudgetary ones, is required.

The best ideas were rewarded

During the evening gala, the winners of the Lumen 2017 competition, initiated by PCG Polska, were announced. In 2017, the competition was organized by PCG Academia (Public Consulting Group capital group) and the Polish Rectors Foundation. For this year's edition, ideas were submitted by members of the academic circles in three categories: Development (in partnership with the “Rzeczpospolita” daily), Management (in partnership with Pearson Central Europe) and Cooperation (in partnership with Bank Zachodni WBK implementing the Santander Universidades program). The winner in the first category was the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, the Management category was won by Collegium Medicum of the Jagiellonian University and the Cooperation category – by Koźmiński University. The LUMEN 2017 Competition Board also presented three special awards, to the Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, the Wrocław University of Science and Technology and the University of Lodz.

For the last three years, Lumen has been supporting and integrating the community of professional university managers in Poland. In 2017, the organizers of the project, apart from the PCG company (Public Consulting Group and PCG Academia) included: Pearson Central Europe, Bank Zachodni WBK implementing the Santander Universidades program and the “Rzeczpospolita” daily. Honorary Patronage over the event was assumed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and by the President of the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (CRASP).

- Agnieszka Usiarczyk

LUMEN 2017 AWARD

LIST OF WINNERS AND NOMINEES

A more detailed description of the projects from the three main competition categories: Development, Cooperation and Management, as well as of the projects which received Special Awards, is available at www.lumen.edu.pl.

“DEVELOPMENT” CATEGORY

WINNER

Project title: Information Technology Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities

University: Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (UKSW)

Implemented by: Marcin Zarzecki PhD, Professor Stanisław Dziekoński PhD, Maciej Bała PhD, Professor Cezary Mik PhD, Anna Kołcz, Katarzyna Szumowska, Mariusz Wielec, Anna Mróz, Michał Sacharewicz, Przemysław Kojło, Paweł Waligóra, Dorota Stempień, Mateusz Tutak PhD, Aleksandra Syryt PhD, Associate Professor at UKSW Rafał Wiśniewski PhD, Aneta Jakubiak-Mirończuk PhD, Tomasz Rowiński PhD

NOMINEES

Project title: Creating a modern technical infrastructure for the implementation of the academic curriculum for the engineers of the future at the Gdańsk University of Technology

University: Gdańsk University of Technology

Implemented by: Professor Henryk Krawczyk Eng. PhD, Marek Tłok, Marlena Sawicka PhD

Project title: WELCOME “Organometallics in Nanophotonics”

University: Wrocław University of Science and Technology

Implemented by: Professor Marek Samoć Eng. PhD, Katarzyna Matczyszyn PhD, Marcin Nyk PhD, Leszek Mazur PhD, Dominika Wawrzyńczyk PhD

“COOPERATION” CATEGORY

WINNER

Project title: International Networking Staff Week

University: Koźminski University (ALK)

Implemented by: Valentyna Gumińska, Marzena Indra, Associate Professor at ALK Grzegorz Mazurek PhD

NOMINEES

Project title: Higher education supported by practical experiences – a programme of involving employers in the creation, implementation and mentorship of study curricula adapted to the needs of the job market

University: Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan (UAM)

Implemented by: Associate Professor at UAM Marek Nawrocki, Professor Jerzy Kaczorowski PhD, Associate Professor at UAM Jerzy Szymański PhD, Associate Professor at UAM Marek Wiśła PhD, Edyta Juskowiak PhD, Tomasz Piłka

Project title: Support from the start – an integrated system for the university’s cooperation with employers with a view to assisting the students in their education and professional development consistent with their field of study

University: University of Dąbrowa Górnicza

Implemented by: Magdalena Kot-Radojewska PhD, Paulina Głowacka PhD, Weronika Nowak, Rafał Rębilas PhD

“MANAGEMENT” CATEGORY

WINNER

Project title: Assistance for the processes of scientific research and development works management as a strategic element of a modern organization at the Collegium Medicum of the Jagiellonian University

University: Jagiellonian University – Collegium Medicum

Implemented by: Professor Tomasz Grodzicki MD PhD, Joanna Nikodemowicz, Ewelina Bętkowska, Kinga Dąbrowa-Depta, Piotr Jarocki, Małgorzata Kasperek, Wioleta Kirker, Agnieszka Klich, Małgorzata Kołodziej, Justyna Kukła, Magdalena Lisowska, Joanna Machejek, Anna Maniszewska, Jowita Pilch, Ewa Rzepka, Ewa Stępień

NOMINEES

Project title: How to speak to treat well? Communication workshops and internships for future doctors

University: Medical University of Silesia in Katowice

Implemented by: Małgorzata Perlak and her team

Project title: Rector's team for innovative forms of education – INFOX PW

University: Warsaw University of Technology

Implemented by: Kinga Kurowska-Wilczyńska Eng. PhD, Professor Krzysztof Lewenstein Eng. PhD, Katarzyna Bargieł, Grzegorz Dobrzyński Eng. PhD, Mariusz Kaleta Eng. PhD, Mariusz Kostrzewski Eng. PhD, Marcin Luckner Eng. PhD, Robert Olszewski Eng. PhD, Piotr Pałka Eng. PhD, Dominik Sierociuk Eng. PhD, Michał Syfert Eng. PhD, Artur Wilkowski Eng. PhD

SPECIAL AWARDS

The LUMEN 2017 Competition Board decided to present three special awards.

Project title: Nationwide Research of Professional Careers of Graduates of Artistic Universities – the Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow

University: Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow

Implemented by: Associate Professor at UJ Ewa Bogacz—Wojtanowska PhD, Marek Szladowski PhD, Sylwia Wrona, Małgorzata Lendzion, Paulina Hojda, Magdalena Dudkiewicz PhD, Associate Professor at UJ Roman Batko PhD, Associate Professor at ASP Jan Tutaj PhD Barbara Siorek, Joanna Groszek, Elżbieta Adamczyk, Jolanta Bartczak, Joanna Daszkiewicz, Justyna Embinger, Magdalena Gomuła, Małgorzata Kempieńska, Cecylia Kominiarczyk, Weronika Kosno, Agnieszka Nalewajka, Katarzyna Nieużyła, Aleksandra Paciorkiewicz, Joanna Polak, Agnieszka Radwan-Stefańska, Agnieszka Skupińska, Joanna Szewczyk, Joanna Wesolek, Sylwia Wrona, Aneta Wysoczańska, Agnieszka Zajk-Tworkowska, Magdalena Zalewska, Anna Zielińska

Project title: Elaboration of principles of cooperation with economic entities with regard to implementation of scientific studies, development work and services ordered at the Wrocław University of Science and Technology

University: Wrocław University of Science and Technology

Implemented by: Katarzyna Kozłowska Eng. PhD, Katarzyna Bucka, Agnieszka Rudnicka-Hamera, Angelika Wiatrowska, Agata Zastawska, Waldemar GrzebykD, Professor Andrzej Kucharski

Project title: To hear a painting. Audio description for works of art at museums in Lodz as a factor creating and shaping relationships between the scientific and educational activity of the University of Lodz and third party stakeholders (cultural institutions, non-government organizations, local community, business representatives)

University: University of Lodz

Implemented by: Associate Professor at UL Aneta Pawłowska PhD, Julia Sowińska-Heim PhD, Anna Wendorff PhD, Kinga Klimczak-Sygizman PhD, students and doctoral students of Department of Art History of the University of Lodz, Paulina Dzwonkowska, Katarzyna Mądrzycka-Adamczyk, Foundation for Culture Without Barriers, Audio Description Foundation, A Chance for the Sightless Foundation, the Polish Association for the Blind – Lodz Area

There is no point in waiting for the perfect draft amendments

PROFESSOR MAREK KWIEK, PhD, *director, Centre for Public Policy Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan*

I am very favourably disposed towards the suggested direction of changes within the framework of the Act 2.0: emphasis on international institutional scientific excellence, strict promotion procedures, increased university autonomy, stronger rectors' colleges and weaker collegial bodies, lack of compulsory habilitation degree and finally a competition to select research universities.

The changing social and economic environment of the European higher education institutions forces them to operate in a state of permanent adaptation. Examples show that reforming universities leads to subsequent reforms, not to a final result. It is much the same in Poland.

For the last two or three years, there has been growing conviction regarding the inefficiency of the Polish academic science system. The decision-makers are increasingly motivated to implement reforms, particularly given the fact that widely analysed comparative data reveal that the distance is growing between the Polish academic world and the world of Western universities in a number of significant categories: prestigious publications and prestigious international grants as well as average international scientific output.

At the same time, something else is changing in Europe: the traditional social contract between the state and the academia. In simple terms, it used to entail significant academic freedom, significant freedom of scientists to dispose of their time, high professional stability and middle-class material status, at least for university professors. The new social contract entails reduced academic freedom (understood as growing emphasis on applied, instead of basic, nature of research), reduced professional stability, ever less power to dispose of their own time and relatively lower (as compared to so-called professionals) material status of scientists. Not only the Polish, but the entire European academic profession is struggling to adapt to the new conditions.

Polish science needs to become less air-tight

The clash between the local and the global in scientific research and academic career is one of the most significant dimensions of the disputes surrounding Act 2.0. The tension between the local and the global refers to the perception of science and of research activity. It pertains to the natural reference groups and to the preferred global or local publication channels, but also to such mundane dimension as the language of pursuing science. For the local science, the sole language is Polish – which effectively cuts it off from the world. The prevailing locality of our science is becoming increasingly cumbersome in terms of prestige and finance: we are losing reputation and at the same time – financing the Western scientists (as we are failing to recover our contributions to the EU budget for science).

In such circumstances, university recruitment and promotion policy becomes ever more significant for the future of the Polish scientific system. The answer to the question who will be employed at the best

universities, who will remain there and who will need to leave will determine the quality of science in Poland. Should the new generations of Polish scientists – in the upper strata of the varied system – be deeply rooted in the international research networks? Should they publish primarily in the prestigious international circuit and should they be extensively involved in the global struggle for academic prestige and for competitive funding of their research? In my opinion, the answer is definitely yes.

The sum of small decisions regarding employment and promotion made at the faculty level results in an inevitable avalanche of consequences at the systemic level. These consequences include wasted opportunities and unexploited potential. The Polish system is still tolerating the intolerable and accepting the unacceptable – from the stage of assessment of doctor's thesis, through the autonomous award of the habilitation degree by faculty boards, to the local – instead of international – scientific requirements regarding the habilitation and professorial degrees. Employing or failing to dismiss one scientifically unproductive researcher is irrelevant at a good university, but the sum of hundreds of such decisions made each year on a systemic scale for the last 20 years is fundamentally relevant. The increased university autonomy is to change that. Systematically making Polish science less air-tight, i.e. more systematically open towards the world in terms of university operation with regard to promotions, finance, grants and publications – violates the stability of the previous, primarily local, academic hierarchies.

Distinction between researchers and teachers

From the practical perspective, we know one thing: competitive science cannot be pursued at Polish universities if our academic staff continues to devote as much time as it currently does to teaching students. The systemic solutions include a strong variation of universities in terms of functionality, distinguishing between the best institutions or their units oriented more towards research than education on the one hand and the remaining, more teaching-oriented, institutions or entities (the vast majority) on the other. Over time, the former would employ staff devoting less time to teaching (and more to research) and the distribution of working time in the latter would be exactly the opposite.

Such functional variation of the system would make it possible to eliminate the illusion that science is pursued at universities where it cannot be pursued in an efficient and competitive manner (due to the level of human and financial resources). The system would also need to be open towards staff mobility, in both directions. Over time, the former type of institutions or units would employ almost exclusively the staff focused on scientific research, not forced to conduct such research by the system of subsequent scientific degrees. Such segmentation of the system and of the units is already occurring step by step – it suffices to follow the results of the latest parametrization of scientific entities for the years 2013-2016 and the distribution of funds allocated for research from the National Science Centre by institution and by entity from the last five years.

It is the best that set the tone for science

During debates concerning reforms, it is extremely important to bear in mind that science cannot exist without merciless competition – for research results and funds allocated therefor, prestige and recognition, priority of discovery and the most quoted publications, but also for places in the global rankings. The idea of competition in science was almost non-existent in Poland during the last decades. The academic world is fighting for global prestige: it is sought by people and institutions and supported by the national science funding systems. Competition is growing on all levels, from global, through institutional to faculty; failing to take this fact into account guarantees the international failure of Polish science.

Acceleration of variation of the Polish system based on the traditional principles of competition in science is therefore indispensable: there must be places where prestigious scientific publications constitute the most significant element of academic work. The prestige of academic papers is determined by the global scientific community. Therefore, places also must exist where the intensity of publication is marginal and the staff focuses on teaching students. It is always the former places that set the tone for science and it is there that most valuable scientific achievements are gained and that the best students, doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers can be found. Variation of the system inevitably leads to challenging the traditional model of the university, whose important dimension was the quality of education and of scientific research. This idea is becoming increasingly illusory in the mass higher education throughout Europe, not only in Poland.

Having regard to the foregoing, I am very favourably disposed towards the suggested direction of changes within the framework of the Act 2.0: emphasis on international institutional scientific excellence, strict promotion procedures, increased university autonomy, stronger rectors' colleges and weaker collegial bodies, lack of compulsory habilitation degree and finally a competition to select research universities. What do I miss the most? Even stronger support for competition in science through the selection of a few elite flagship universities, implementation of the "Million for Million" programme, providing attractive academic workplaces and finally, a strong funding for the National Science Centre. Well-considered changes are indispensable, the only thing I fear is their crude form. However, there is no point in waiting for the perfect draft amendments: it is better to correct what is currently being created. The debate over the form of the reforms took many months and the awareness of the need for their implementation is currently much stronger than eighteen months ago.

Academic merger-mania

Should Polish universities consolidate?

PROFESSOR ŁUKASZ SUŁKOWSKI, PhD, *President of Public Consulting Group Polska, scientific researcher at the Jagiellonian University and the Academy of Social Sciences*

Consolidations of research universities are an expression of radical public policy.

In many countries, the science and higher education systems are oriented towards increasing the modernization potential of societies and are to serve as the flywheel of knowledge-oriented economies. The global sources on the subject represent a well-established opinion that the quality of science and of the education system determines the competitive position of the country. Thus far, the awareness of the significance of universities in Poland was rather limited, as evident from the low outlays on education and scarce structural reforms. One of the ways to conduct radical reforms may be strengthening and stimulating the consolidation and restructuring processes by creating legal, financial and operational mechanisms facilitating the implementation of in-depth change projects by universities. University mergers allow to obtain the relevant "critical mass" and "economy of scale" in research and education. Consolidation of universities often improves their prestige level and

international position. It seems that the current proposal of legislative amendments will improve the chances of reinforcing consolidation processes in Polish higher education.

Global university mergers

University mergers are becoming ever more widespread worldwide, among both private and public entities. The consolidation of private universities is usually conducted at the initiative of the universities themselves or of their creators. The mergers of public universities are also conducted at the initiative of the universities themselves, but more often they are the result of implementation of public policy in the higher education sector. The list of countries where extensive consolidation processes at public universities were, or are being, conducted is long: China, the USA, United Kingdom, Australia, France, Norway, Denmark, Finland, South Africa, Russia, Vietnam, Hungary.

In a number of countries, consolidation processes brought positive results such as: increased efficiency of research (grants obtained, publications and implementations), increased global recognizability of national universities and systems (positions in the international rankings) or optimization of operating costs. However, in many countries adverse effects of consolidation also occurred: a lower than expected efficiency of mergers, resistance of the academic circles, increased bureaucratisation of universities and weakening of academic culture. It allows to conclude that mergers may bring positive results if the process of their implementation is efficiently managed.

It has become necessary to conduct strategic analysis (with regard to university complementarity and the assumed synergy effect) as well as to plan and to implement a consolidation strategy. Scientific activity and curricula offered, finance, university image as well as human and individual capital should be subject to a due diligence audit. The strategy is to determine the roles and the stages of consolidation management, it should also be open and allow for flexibility.

Consolidations in Act 2.0

The legislative proposals and the actions of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education motivate universities to conduct consolidation processes. Act 2.0, by stipulating legal solutions in the form of “federal universities”, provides for a possibility of gradual implementation of university mergers. Programs creating university associations and strategic alliances between strong universities in several regions of Poland are currently under development. In the future, they may result in university integration consisting in consolidation of a federal or even unitary nature.

The Ministry of Science and Higher Education also acted as a stimulator for two emergency mergers which led to the inclusion of weak public vocational colleges into the structures of regional universities. The first university to implement such a solution was the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce which assimilated the State Vocational College in Sandomierz into its structures in 2016. The second consolidation is the assimilation of the State Vocational College in Sulechów by the University of Zielona Góra. The regulations implemented provide for additional funds for five years following the creation of a consolidated university by way of merger.

Requirements for a successful university merger

The key requirement for a successful merger is the participation of the main stakeholders. The high level of involvement may be achieved by establishing bottom-up initiatives regarding university mergers, based on many years’ experience in cooperation. Top-down decisions carry a risk of increasing resistance at universities, lack of possibility of integration during the consolidation process and – as a result – of destabilization of universities. Stimulating university consolidation through

financial and systemic support has proved a good solution worldwide, for instance at numerous Scandinavian, French, German and American universities. Consensus, involvement and cooperation between the stakeholders are the most significant for strategic consolidations which are to result in improved international status of the university and of the country.

Act 2.0 should therefore significantly extend the possibilities of implementing university mergers. However, the experiences of the recent years show that despite the legal opportunities provided by the previous regulations, strategic consolidations have not become widespread in Poland. There will now be other conditions favouring the development of mergers: the implementation of central consolidation support programs and increased awareness and determination of the academic circles in the reform process. The low social capital level and the highly distant authorities do not create a favourable cultural context for consolidation processes.

Ł. Sułkowski, *University mergers. Is there a method to the madness?*, PWN, Warsaw 2017

The work by Professor Sułkowski is extremely valuable and timely as it has a great potential to change our way of thinking of the future of this sector and furthermore, it constitutes an amazing scientific achievement. The book is a giant leap ahead within the framework of the studies of higher education as a significant segment of applied social sciences. It shows scientific boldness combined with a certain delicacy required during the period of potentially extensive structural changes in a significant sector of the economy: it has been written from unorthodox scientific positions and it demonstrates how the output of one sector (business) may be valuable for the future of another (primarily, the excessively fragmented public sector in higher education). It is the first book within the framework of study of higher education (as organisation) which has enormous application potential at the moment of its publication.

Excerpt from review by: Professor Marek Kwiek PhD, director, Centre for Public Policy Studies, UNESCO Chair for Institutional and Higher Education Policy Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan.

An in-depth reform of Polish science requires large amounts of money

CONVERSATION. Łukasz Sułkowski, Associate Professor at the Jagiellonian University and the Academy of Social Sciences, president of PCG Polska and Jerzy Woźnicki, Associate Professor at the Warsaw University of Technology and president of the Polish Rectors Foundation.



Photo (from left): Professor Jerzy Woźnicki and Professor Łukasz Sułkowski.

What we need is a breakthrough or a reforming movement that will stimulate the excellence mechanisms in Polish science and higher education

During the Lumen 2017 conference, the challenges posed by the works on the new higher education law, i.e. Act 2.0. were discussed. Do the suggested changes arouse controversies?

PROFESSOR JERZY WOŹNICKI: We have already completed the first stage of consultations and we are encountering various opinions and reactions. Rousing support for the new solutions requires time, and in certain circles such support cannot be expected.

What circles are those and why won't they support the change?

PROFESSOR JERZY WOŹNICKI: Some members of the academic and scientific circles are extremely attached to the academic tradition and generally unfavourably disposed towards change, as it has negative connotations for them. This phenomenon is further amplified by the fact that not all people have a knowledge of the terms of the current reform. They are often the ones who deal with the implementations of scientific projects in laboratories and for whom each such change is an interference with their surroundings, an impediment. We need to take into account such reactions and the fact that the part of academic circles which does not like the act will express its opinion ever louder.

PROFESSOR ŁUKASZ SUŁKOWSKI: In my opinion, Act 2.0 is based on an accurate diagnosis of the situation. What we need is a breakthrough or a reforming movement that will stimulate the excellence mechanisms in Polish science and higher education. However, the implementation of the solutions stipulated in the act is a process that will take a number of years.

There will be no revolution and quick advancement of our universities in the global rankings?

PROFESSOR ŁUKASZ SUŁKOWSKI: We cannot count on a quick, revolutionary change which will make Polish universities go high up in the global rankings within two years. What is possible is the launch of certain excellence mechanisms. Act 2.0 provides greater autonomy to universities, but also imposes greater liability. It also aims toward accountability of universities, especially of the public ones, i.e. the verification how they are meeting their obligations with regard to pursuing science and education at a relevant level.

What is needed for the act to succeed?

PROFESSOR ŁUKASZ SUŁKOWSKI: The involvement of the scientific circles and of the universities themselves is very important as the bottom-up process of changes in management within the universities themselves may take on various forms. The necessary condition for the success of the act are financial issues. For example, as research shows, consolidations of public universities require involvement on the part of the central authorities and considerable funding in order to be successful. It is particularly important in case of strategic consolidations, when strong universities merge to create even stronger centres, visible worldwide.

The ministry announced there would be more money for science and for universities.

PROFESSOR ŁUKASZ SUŁKOWSKI: If the reform is to make science and higher education the flywheel of the entire Polish economy, the inflow of funds should be considerable.

What amounts are needed?

PROFESSOR JERZY WOŹNICKI: The Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland already presented the 4 x 1 GDP postulate in the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education 2010-2020. What it means is 1 per cent GDP from the state budget for higher education, another 1 per cent from the budget for science and research – and the same amount for each of the areas from extrabudgetary sources. I believe that the postulate is worth reinstating, by increasing the funds from the state budget allocated to science and higher education so that, within a foreseeable timeframe, they reach a total of 2 per cent GDP, especially given the fact that according to the declarations of the deputy prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki, the outlays for research and development are to amount to 1.7-2 per cent GDP, jointly from the budget and from other sources. The in-depth changes as contemplated by Act 2.0 should be introduced in a well-considered manner, but financed dynamically in order to bring results. Without higher outlays, the act cannot be implemented quickly, as the passive resistance at universities will increase proportionately to the discrepancy between the financial expectations of the academic circles and the budgetary reality. The increase in outlays for scientific research of a little under PLN 1 billion, as planned for 2018, will not be capable of lending a dynamic to the process of implementation of the act. We hope that the budget for 2019 may bring a breakthrough.

One of the topics at Lumen 2017 were strategic university mergers. Is that supposed to be the consolidation requested by the experts, who emphasize the pathological dispersion of resources in the system which currently comprises over 400 universities?

PROFESSOR JERZY WOŹNICKI: In Poland, there has been one established path of consolidation: institutional fusion through liquidating universities and combining them into a single entity. That was the way the University of Warmia and Mazury, the West Pomeranian University of Technology and the University of Zielona Góra, among others, were created. Act 2.0 suggests two other paths, including the creation of so-called federal universities, and obtaining the status of research university this way. It should be related with a kind of contract concluded by universities which will assume specific, accountable outlays and results.

PROFESSOR ŁUKASZ SUŁKOWSKI: There were several waves of mergers all over the world, comprising both private and public universities. They were conducted in several dozen countries, with varying degree of intervention from the central authorities, but often with their strong support. In most countries, the results of such mergers were positive. The flagship example is China, where about a thousand top-down mergers were conducted. It would be worthwhile to copy the solutions implemented, for instance, in France, which, through federal fusions between various universities, increased their visibility in international rankings and improved the quality of their operation and their internationalization. However, if such mergers are to be successful, they should be implemented largely on a bottom-up basis, not imposed top-down, as in the latter case, the resistance of the academic circles may undermine the entire project. What is definitely necessary is reducing the fragmentation of Polish universities through strategic fusions, which will allow to improve their position in the rankings. Recently, one of the rectors regretted that he could not develop cooperation with the Chinese, as his university was not in the top 500 of the Shanghai list, and the Chinese do not obtain public funding for studies at universities which do not meet that requirement.

PROFESSOR JERZY WOŹNICKI: Internationalization is the key to the success of consolidation projects. I believe that it would be worthwhile to return to the proposal included in the CRASP Strategy of 2009, in which we postulated competitions for consolidation projects and the allocation of EU funds for that purpose. The winners of such competitions should be provided with multiannual projects with sufficient funding, which would encourage universities to consolidate allowing them to reach the position of research universities.

PROFESSOR ŁUKASZ SUŁKOWSKI: Mergers of strong research universities are expensive, but in their case the added value may be the highest. In such circumstances, we have to do with a single brand, which is easier to develop and to promote, it is also easier to optimize the administration or IT costs. In Poland, the first such merger was the absorption of the Medical Academy in Krakow by the Jagiellonian University. It currently operates as the Collegium Medicum of the Jagiellonian University, while retaining its autonomy.

How should the number of universities in Poland be reduced so that the dispersion of resources is no longer an issue?

PROFESSOR JERZY WOŹNICKI: I believe that in Polish conditions, half of universities which operate now would be sufficient.

PROFESSOR ŁUKASZ SUŁKOWSKI: My viewpoint is more radical. I believe a half of public universities, and a fourth of private ones, should remain. Incidentally, due to demographic and market processes, that is more or less the number of universities capable of stable operation.

PROFESSOR JERZY WOŹNICKI: Nevertheless, we need to take into account that the process of restricting the number of private universities has recently been hampered by the pro-quality requirements in the algorithm of distribution of funds from the grants of Ministry of Science and Higher Education for public universities. Establishing the pattern of 13 students per academic teacher and

implementing fines for deviations caused the public universities to restrict the number of newly enrolled students, thus ensuring a supply of students for private universities.

During the few years of discussion regarding the need for reform of science and education in Poland, we focus mainly on their weaknesses. We overlook the advantages which surely must exist?

PROFESSOR JERZY WOŹNICKI: Here, we can refer to the international indicators, which are often above the economic potential of Poland. Our GDP is the 24th in the world, whereas Polish science has the 19th position according to the Scopus scientific publications database. Higher education, following the recalculation of positioning of universities in the Shanghai ranking, is ranked 35th. The ranking underclassifies us somewhat – we score higher in others. Our weakest point is innovation, in which we are only 39th. The focus on the innovation policy is therefore justified. However, we also need to provide more financial support to higher education. In the EU agenda 2007-2013, very large amounts were allocated to the development of the infrastructural base of the universities, i.e. the walls, scientific centres, laboratories. If we now allocate more resources to the brain, there is a chance to bring higher education closer to our general position – 24th globally.

PROFESSOR ŁUKASZ SUŁKOWSKI: From the perspective of economic sciences, the main challenge is to ensure that the most talented doctoral students, who are now leaving to make a career in business, prefer to remain at universities. Perhaps doctoral schools and scholarships will make the offer of universities more attractive for such young people. On the other hand, Polish higher education is competitive, as confirmed by the increasing internationalisation of universities. We are capable of attracting a growing number of students and talented researchers from abroad. In order to move up in the international rankings, we need to join the global talent hunt. It is a challenge for the academic staff, as we will regularly be held accountable for academic output. This will put a pressure on the staff which will need not only to obtain subsequent scientific degrees or titles, but also to provide significant, regular achievements, including international scientific publications.

PROFESSOR JERZY WOŹNICKI: However, we need to take into account the specificity of social sciences and humanities. For instance, research work regarding specific industries, which may be very valuable for the development of the Polish economy, have only a slight chance of appearing in significant international publications. While using scientific metrics, we need to eliminate the threat of the so-called points disease, as well as determine the indices and the quality of research in various manners, adapted to various fields and disciplines.

- Interview by Anita Błaszczak

