

Thank you very much for the invitation – and many congratulations on your twentieth anniversary!

Since Alma Mater joined EI together with the other unions of WCT – a decision which is very much appreciated, as we are stronger united – we have had a very good and close collaboration, especially in the European Higher Education and Research Standing Committee.

We are all – in different manners – facing the consequences of the global economic meltdown a couple of years ago. Colleagues in many countries have been faced with demands from their governments on reducing the number of staff in universities and/or a reduction of their wages and pension pay. But I think that Romania is among the worst situations. A decrease of 25% is outrageous and not serious policy from the government if they intend to find a sustainable exit strategy from the present economic crisis. This is the reason why the global EI-conference on higher education and research last month in Vancouver, Canada clearly expressed its support to you and I know that you are in the middle of a correspondence with the EI-secretariat on how this support is best expressed towards you, your members and the Romanian government. But I can at this occasion assure you that you have the full support from all the participants in the conference, and the issue will be taken forward to the coming meeting of the EI executive board next month.

We have during many EI world congresses passed motions on the issue of education – including higher education and research – as the only way forward for the population of all nations. If governments cut in funding and reduces the wages of our members, for the purpose of trying to solve the problems of public deficit – which in many countries is a direct consequence of the decision to nationalise the debts of the financial sector – it is in absolute contradiction to a sustainable development for future generations.

So there is no doubt that you will get all the support and solidarity we can offer in your struggle against this policy.

But it is not only in relation to funding and salaries we are facing big problems in these times. There are many strong international forces – in OECD, WTO, and to a certain extent within the EU etc. – who are pushing for a development where universities are being turned more to become advanced service providers to the private corporations and governmental interests than being universities which have a basic obligation to the society in developing the intellectual capacity of future generation – including the capacity to find new solutions to future problems and being democratic – and critical – citizens. According to many of these organisations a so-called modern university is characterised by a system where collegiality is abolished, where teaching and research are being measured only on the immediate outcomes and relevance for the profit in the private sector and where academic freedom is non-existing.

Many of the discussions on the global EI-conference last month in Vancouver were on how we as trade unions can counteract developments like that.

Fortunately we have also friends out there. And we received reports for the joint Committee of Experts from ILO and UNESCO on the 1997 Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel. We were very much encouraged to use the recommendation more actively than we have done until now – as a speaker from ILO said: Use it or lose it. Perhaps it would be worth for you to consider submitting an allegation to UNESCO on your government's policy, as there are also chapters in the recommendation on fair pay etc.

Let me conclude by once again congratulate you on the first two decades. Our chance of successful outcome of our struggles will improve, only if we stand united around our common goals. We must find ways to explain to politicians and perhaps more important to the public who elect them, that a sustainable future is not coming from cutting the activities and by making the university staff suffer non-attractive working conditions. Only if governments are able to create attractive jobs, they will be able to attract qualified young people into the teaching and research profession. And qualified staff is a prerequisite to high quality in both teaching and research. But of course governments can't do that without a public income. So a system of sufficient taxes, dues etc. will be necessary for the public sector to be able to take up the task we demand.

We are facing many challenges – together we will find ways to overcome them. I hope for further development of the collaboration for reaching our common goals within the EI-family.

Thanks for listening.

Jens Vraa Jensen

Chair HERSC