

Welcoming speech by the Minister of Education and Science Algirdas Monkevičius to the conference (delivered by Giedrius Viliūnas, Secretary of the Ministry)

European and International Cooperation between Universities of Technology

Honourable Rectors and Presidents of European Universities,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to welcome such a large group of European universities leaders heading the best technical institutions of higher education of our continent. And it will not be an overstatement to say that Europe relates its future well-being and prosperity hopes to these institutions.

I am also pleased to say that this event takes place in our country at a really relevant time. Today, Lithuania has started a great process of its universities renewal and strengthening. The scope of this process exceeds all previous reforms that have been going on during the past two decades. Five integrated centers of science, studies and business are being developed in our country in accordance with the programme approved by the government. The centers will be consolidating our country's resources in the areas of science and higher education, and will be building new bridges between research and knowledge consuming business. Three of these centres are linked to technical universities. At the same time, the system of state research institutes is being reorganized by integrating them into the mentioned above centers and directly connecting them with universities. About two billion Litas (approximately seven hundred million Euros) have been planned to allocate from the EU structural funds, and two or even three times more of the amount of these funds will reach the projects from other resources.

The reorganization of Lithuania's science and studies infrastructure supplement a just started national integrated programme that envisions the funding of coordinated research, business and specialist training projects in the priority sectors of national economy¹, and national science programme implemented by the Science Council of Lithuania, which has recently been reorganized from an advisory body into science-funding agency following the models of relevant Western and Northern European institutions and European Research Council. Soon, potential brain exchange and researcher career promotion programmes will be started. By the end of this year, the Parliament should also pass the law package that will renew regulations of research and higher education activities, and more importantly, will give universities more powers to dispose their assets and intellectual property, and to establish spin-off enterprises.

I have mentioned all this because I wanted to demonstrate how the reforms we are carrying at present are related to the themes to be discussed at your conference. Therefore, your presence here is very significant and will help us to understand better the context of European reforms. I hope that this visit will also reveal to you, distinguished Rectors and Presidents of European technical universities, that Lithuania will NOT be a weak link in the European research and innovations system, and will show the opportunities for fruitful cooperation with our country.

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1. ¹ Integrated programme of marine sector;
 2. National integrated programme of agriculture, forestry and food economics;
 3. Integrated programme of informational technology;
 4. Consolidated integrated programme of development of Biotechnology and Biopharmacy;
 5. Integrated programme of mechatronics sector;
 6. Integrated programme of sustainable chemistry;
 7. Consolidated Integrated programme of laser, nanotechnologies and applied physical sciences

I wish the conference the very best success.