



August 11th 2009

Re: The Position of the Academic Community on the Future of Research and Development in the Czech Republic

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you to express my serious concern regarding the imminent liquidation of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and its consequences, in particular the disappearance, for lack of adequate resources, of much primary research in the Czech Republic. We understand that, following a proposal of the Research and Development Council, the institutional budget of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic to be cut by one half over three years. This draconian step would lead to the redundancy of many highly qualified experts, to serious long-term damage to the academic and research infrastructure of the country, as well as to the very serious damage, if not to the disappearance of, the current internationally-recognised network of academic institutes of high standing.

The consequences of these developments will be felt throughout Czech society and beyond, and will have medium- and long-term effects on both the cultural capital of the state as well as on the educational and economic potential of the country. Institutions of higher education, with which the ASCR co-operates very closely in a number of areas - from the guidance of graduate students, to instruction in a number of unique and irreplaceable fields - would be directly, and negatively, affected. The victims of the proposed budget would be both basic and applied research on the one hand, and tertiary education, on the other. The long-term damage which future generations would undoubtedly come to recognise would certainly be seen as a mark against the members of the current Research and Development Council, both individually and collectively, with all of the political, cultural and moral implications this would have.

It is generally recognised in both Europe and North America that the maintenance of humanities research at all levels makes a major contribution to the cultural well-being of any society. Much more importantly, however, it is also generally recognised that the indirect feedback between humanities and natural and industrial sciences is not to be measured in terms of direct cost-effectiveness models, nor in terms of visible returns on investment - indeed, in those states where a simplistic utilitarian model of economic and industrial development has been applied, the results have been disastrous, damaging social and cultural development as well as reducing the potential to co-operate sensibly with other nations. Quite apart from this, it must be apparent that the humanities promote an understanding of social, historical and cultural difference and complexity, and it is generally those with such skills

from whom a nation's most versatile and insightful international representatives and national leaders have been drawn. The damage inflicted on this reservoir of Czech cultural wealth by the currently planned measures would be extremely difficult to make good over fewer than several generations, and would without a doubt damage the Czech Republic's ability to compete in the modern competitive world, both in European terms as well as on a wider basis. It would also almost certainly drive some of the Czech republic's most talented young scholars abroad, people who could make a great contribution to Czech society, but who may well be irretrievably lost if the infrastructure within which they can be nurtured is damaged. *It would, in effect, consign the Czech Republic to a third-rate status in the eyes of the world – surely a result which the planned proposals do not intend, but which – on the basis of similar and parallel examples elsewhere - I and a number of colleagues, believe will certainly follow.*

It seems to us, in consequence, that the action of the members of the Council for Research and Development are bound to have the most serious and unfortunate consequences. We would therefore urge Prime Minister Jan Fischer to alter the composition of the Research and Development Council forthwith, to ensure that it consists of a properly qualified and representative body capable of ensuring the needs of *all* research and development in the Czech Republic, and thus of the long-term interests of Czech society, economy and culture, and to review the budget plans for research for the Czech Republic in light of both current and future economic as well as cultural demands and pressures: *the economic health of a nation is not to be divorced from its cultural health.*

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Haldon', with a long, sweeping underline stroke extending to the right.

John Haldon
Professor of History

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