***East-West: meeting at the heart of Europe***

**Five years of IRUN**

On 10-12 May 2012 the International Research Universities Network (IRUN) celebrated its fifth anniversary in Kraków. It was an occasion to evaluate the IRUN activities and discuss future challenges. The meeting gathered ca. 60 people: rectors, vice-rectors, scholars, representatives of international offices, carrier offices and communication officers as well as students from 10 universities.

IRUN was initiated by Radboud University Nijmegen on 7 September 2007. Currently, its members are: Westflälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Universität Duisburg-Essen, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, Pázmány Peter Catholic University of Budapest, Universitá degli Studi di Siena, Universitat de Barcelona, Université de Poitiers, University of Glasgow, University of Ljubljana and Jagiellonian University. It is worth adding that till the end of 2012 the Jagiellonian University (Rector Prof. Karol Musioł and Vice-rector Prof. Andrzej Mania) is part of the IRUN Steering Committee.

This year’s meeting consisted of three parts: meeting of IRUN working groups, students’ conference and rectors’ meeting. The international relations officers met twice on 10-11 May, the representatives of communication and promotion offices had their meetings on 11 May, members of carriers offices worked on 10-11 May and students first gathered to discuss the topics of their conference and then presented the results of their debate at the conference (10-11 May).

The main event of the fifth anniversary of IRUN was the conference entitled *East-West: Meeting at the heart of Europe*, held in the aula of Collegium Novum on 11 May. It gathered ca. 100 participants. The conference was opened by the JU Rector Prof. Karol Musioł and the Rector of Radboud University Nijmegen Prof. Sebastian Kortmann, who gave Prof. Musioł a tulip bulb, promising that he would send 648 tulip bulbs on the occasion of 648 years of the Jagiellonian University’s existence that fell on 12 May 2012.

The first speaker was Prof. Mikhail Katsnelson from Radboud University Nijmegen. His talk was titled *Combining the best of two worlds.* Prof. Katsnelson is a Russian physicist-theoretician who immigrated to Holland. He spoke about the history and foundations of the Russian science and higher education. The Russian Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg (founded in 1725) and the Moscow State University (1755), where M. Lomonosov worked, were part of European science. In the 19th century Russia had great achievements in mathematics and chemistry (D. Mendeleev). The beginning of the 20th c. brought the Nobel Prize in Physiology to I. Pavlov (1904) and the Nobel prize in medicine to I. Mechnikov (1908). After the revolution of 1917 there was a degradation of the humanities in the Soviet Union but the sciences kept the world standards. The Soviet universities offered very broad education and stressed multidisciplinary character of research. Such an education and approach allowed Prof. Katsnelson to develop his research interests and conduct pioneering research on graphene at the University of Nijmegen together with Prof. A. Geim and Prof. K. Novoselov (both received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 2010). After the presentation of Prof. Katsnelson there was a discussion led by the student-referee from the University of Glasgow.

The second speaker was Prof. Zdzisław Mach from the JU Institute of European Studies.His talk *Transformation of economic and political systems* described the influence of transformation on Europe’s identity. Prof. Mach outline a few elements of this process of transition, which were crucial for understanding what happened in Central-Eastern Europe: political liberalization, pluralism of world views and interests, change of the position of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, position of national minorities, including sexual ones, feeling of uncertainty, also the economic one, cultural pluralism or changes in collective identity. Uncertainties, loss of orientation, and frustrations caused by difficulties of transition often result in an growth of populism among politicians, and a turn to traditionalism and even fundamentalism among the weaker, older, less educated or simply less lucky members of the society, who need government’s support. They can lead to frustration and xenophobia. The discussion that followed Prof. Mach’s talk was led by a student of the Jagiellonian University. The final element of the conference was a short film made by the IRUN Communication Group.

On 12 May the Rectors’ Meeting was held in the Bobrzyński Hall in Collegium Maius. The Rectors’ meeting gathered 9 rectors and 10 representatives of international offices. It consisted of three parts: early session, participation in the solemn JU Senate meeting and afternoon session. At first, the rectors discussed membership in the steering committee, possible enlargement of IRUN, a strategic view where IRUN wants to go in next 5 years. Taking into account the agenda of the EC and the EU member states IRUN should focus on interaction between teaching and research as well as interaction between employability and research (e.g. student enterprises). With a clear strategy IRUN could try to influence EU instruments (calls). Several members underlined the importance of research and related topics (recognition of doctorate/double and joint degrees). Others stressed the opportunities for the network in the field of education and employability (career services; internships; student entrepreneurship; work experiences for PhDs).

In the light of co-operation in the field of education and employability, all partners were invited to join the initiative by Radboud University for a project proposal within the EU pilot ‘Knowledge alliances’. The rectors discussed the IRUN activities over the last five years and concluded that the volume of activities in the network was substantial. For instance, the growing number of initiatives for (EU) projects clearly shows the added value of the network. Project officers have taken the initiative to organize a meeting this autumn to discuss a more efficient (and more timely) way to prepare for international project applications. PhD students of law from Radboud University will organise a conference on commercial law on 14 December 2012. It is one of the initiatives to foster PhD exchange within the network. It was suggested that the IRUN Erasmus co-ordinators organise a workshop on administrative staff exchange.

The next issue debated over at the meeting was the recommendations of the IRUN Student Questionnaire. Exchanges between student organisations, sports clubs, orchestras, etc. could be stimulated by inviting them for joint activities at important events, such as a university anniversary. The responsibility of universities for employability and the wish to organize international internships within the network has been stressed several times.

The IRUN Excellence Programme started in Nijmegen in August 2011 and proved successful. Therefore, IRUN partners were invited to start IRUN Excellence Programme modules according to their own needs and wishes. Similar programmes have already been started at particular universities, e.g. in Münster and Kraków.

Finally, the representatives of the IRUN working groups presented the reports of their activities. The IRUN Communication Group showed the new IRUN slogan and the logo going with it, the new IRUN movie, presenting various common activities. It is worth stressing that the move was made virtually without any budget.

The IRUN Career Services Group reported on its activities and meeting. The collaboration took place mainly on a bilateral basis. This form of co-operation proved successful and is gradually extending with new pairs. The Career Services can provide students with information and try to make use of employers’ networks. Each Career Service will create on its website a section to present the bilateral IRUN activities; with a link to internships possibilities and a link to the IRUN partner Career Service in the respective countries.

There are plans to organise an IRUN Careers Day for Career-Service-staff engaging all members of the IRUN Career Services Network in Duisburg-Essen. It was proposed to start IRUN internship programme to foster international placements, thus raising awareness of IRUN among students. All rectors will study the possibility of offering annually 5 paid internships at their university for duration of approx. 3 months each.

The last report was given by the IRUN Contact Persons. ‘Sharing' is an important key word for the Contact Persons. Thus they decided to jointly prepare for the new ‘Erasmus for all’ Programme in order to make an optimal use of it as a network. The IRUN Contact Persons at the Universities of Barcelona and Siena will make an overview of the opportunities for the network.

The next IRUN meeting will take place at the University of Poitiers in 2013.

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