

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me the Minister of Education of a small central-European country to participate in this event of an international importance.

I am pleased to see that this conference to which representatives of many countries have accepted invitation knows no limits in the area of education.

European education has been built on two traditions – the one of Demokritos oriented towards knowing objects and acquiring skills and the one of Plato linked to one's self-creation.

In Slovakia, education underwent significant changes. In particular during the last 20 years of the existence of the Slovak Republic. Ten years ago Slovakia became the Member State of the European Union. This has opened new opportunities for us for funding material equipment of schools subsequently modernising their educational processes at the level of primary and secondary education: Knowledge Planet, Learn Through Play, Healthy School, Thinking School,...are only a few of the projects that have successfully supported the innovative learning methods, ecological and sport activities, e-learning forms or education through information and communication technologies.

Tradition of the Slovak schooling system has always been based on values, namely family, respect and ethics.

Technological development as well as societal, social and economic events force us to get education and upbringing closer to the needs and interests of the young generation. Children from regions namely those of national minorities come to schools with additional language: Hungarian, German, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian and Czech. Slovakia as well has been fighting high unemployment, in particular of young school graduates in recent years. Thus the priority for the Government is to tackle labour market issues also via changes in education. The acts on dual vocational education, schools funding and on the status of teachers are currently being drafted.

This includes more intensive teaching of English and other foreign languages at primary schools since the third year of studies. Further, classroom hours of mathematics, physics and natural science are being increased just like the classroom hours for developing technical and labour skills. The aim is to prepare young people better for their future jobs. DIGIPEDIA 2020 – the digitalisation of the education and learning materials has been continuing.

Twenty years ago secondary grammar schools were attended by elite students with outstanding results. Nowadays the quality is lower. This is why the entrance examinations to these schools are made more

demanding now and compulsory school leaving examination also in mathematics is being introduced. Similar situation is at vocational schools. This makes us to focus on dual education and to support practical instruction within companies. In other words theoretical preparation at school and practical experience in a company.

Today, in our little Slovakia we have three supranational automotive companies: Volkswagen, Peugeot – Citroen and KIA Motors. In East Slovakia there is the United States Steel Corporation from Pittsburgh. Since 2009 the cooperation between Robert Morris University and several Slovak universities has been growing. Based on a student project and on-line workshops for example the project of Eurovea Bratislava – Eurovea Pittsburg has been carried out. This is the cooperation we would like to build upon further together with other universities and tertiary education institutions.

Agriculture and renewable resources however are also important. Not only automotive industry but also other industries need young and skilled people. We negotiate intensively with many employers' associations, employers themselves and the corporate sector as such. In real life this should result in creating learning contracts between students and employers, acquiring practical experience already during their studies, supporting students financially and so very importantly in motivating students via the perspective of their future job. At this

stage we speak of the so called dual education system included also in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

In this process, the Government takes into consideration the tasks and the status of tertiary education institutions. It creates room for matching tertiary education with the needs of the society and for new joint study and scientific programmes. I would wish also cooperation between Slovak and American universities develops in this area. I believe that a long-term strategic scientific cooperation will develop not only between Slovakia and the US but even between the V4 countries and the US in the near future.

It is the Slovak Republic that will take over the presidency of the Vysegrad Group since July this year. We wish to propose thus to hold a meeting in Slovakia already this year between the representatives of the V4 countries and of the US on the topics of research, development and innovations. There we would like to talk of creating more space for closer cooperation for example through exchanges and study stays of young scientists up to the age of 35 years.

More than one billion of euros were invested in research and development thanks to the EU structural funds over the last seven years. Those funds were mostly used for supporting universities and for creating or completion of Centres of Excellence. Universities may pride themselves now on their state-of-the-art equipment of their

laboratories. I would like to mention here also research centres and the Slovak Academy of Sciences that thanks to many of their projects cooperate significantly also with the private sector and achieve very good results at home and abroad. Just to mention one example: there are only two unique apparatuses in the world for analysing solar corona – one in Slovakia and the other in the Hawaiian Islands. This example shows that however far our countries may be we are able to work together excellently and openly.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as sports is part of my remit, as well, and the Chicago Blackhawks currently hold the Stanley Cup thanks also to our great ice hockey players Marián Hossa and Michal Handzuš, allow me to conclude in harmony with sporting spirit: let cooperation, friendship, fair-play competition also in education, science, research and innovations serve development, mutual respect and good partnership.

Thank you.