



## **The Universities Project of the Salzburg Seminar Visiting Advisors Report**

**Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica, Slovak Republic**

**May 11-15, 2003**

### ***Team Members:***

**Dr. László Frenyó** (team leader), Former President, Hungarian Rectors Conference; Dean of Faculty, McDaniel College Budapest Program; Former President, Hungarian Higher Education and Research Council

**Ms. Marlene Johnston**, Chief Executive Officer, NAFSA, Washington, DC, USA

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### **Introduction**

The Visiting Advisors Program (VAP) team of the Salzburg Seminar visited Matej Bel University (MBU) at the invitation of the University. In the course of the three-day visit, the team met with the Rector, Vice Rectors, Deans and an extended group of students.

Prior to the visit, MBU identified the following major topics for discussion:

- Meeting the students needs and the role of students in the University (the introduction of credit system, the course evaluation system and the controversial topic of tuition fees were especially emphasized);
- The role of the University in civil society (relationship with other institutions of civil society; improving the relationship of the University towards the local and regional community).

Upon arrival at MBU, however, it turned out that while these topics might have had relevance for consideration, the emphasis had to be placed on strategic issues. The University was facing major changes announced by the Rector just around the time of the arrival of the VAP team. The team was asked to meet with the leadership of each of the eight Faculties before convening a communal meeting where the draft report of the advisors was offered.

Prior to the visit, the VAP team received information from the University concerning the history and current status of the establishment, as well as the most important facts and figures related to the activities of the Faculties. The preparation of the visit was supported by the Vice Rector responsible for international relations.

From additional documents, including policy-papers provided by the Salzburg Seminar, the VAP team learned that a new Law on Universities and two other laws relevant to the structure and function of higher education in Slovakia (Law on Labor;

Law on Civil Servants) have recently been passed by the parliament, creating substantially new conditions.

During the many discussions the team had with the University representatives, the aim of the VAP was always emphasized: we were at MBU to discuss issues targeted by the institution, to share our observations and experiences from an international perspective, and to offer recommendations. The atmosphere of the meetings was open and friendly, clearly based on collegiality.

Following an intensive discussion among the team members on the basis of our individual experiences and observations, the report provided here represents the unanimous views of the advisory group concerning the visit.

### **Background of the University**

In 1805 the Seminary of St. Karol Boromejsky was established in Banská Bystrica. From 1856 a preparatory school of teacher training was also founded. In 1949 a branch of the Pedagogic Faculty of the Slovak University in Bratislava was established in Banská Bystrica. Later on, in 1964, this became the Pedagogic Faculty. In 1973 another higher education institution began its activity in town, which was a branch of the Faculty of Commerce of the School of Economics in Bratislava, which later became the Faculty of Economics and Tourism. The above two institutions then merged in 1992, creating the new academic institution called **Matej Bel University**.

Banská Bystrica, the home of MBU, has a very nice location. It is about two hours' drive east of Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. It was a mining town, which activity is still present though to a lesser extent than before. Currently tourism is taking over as the determining industry in town as well as in the region.

There is only one other higher education establishment in Banská Bystrica: a small Academy of Art. Matej Bel University, therefore, plays an important role both in the economic and in the intellectual life of the city. While the University has already established some relationship with the surrounding community, its role in serving civil society could be improved further. The many values of MBU are a great asset, which should certainly be shared with the society.

### **The University Today**

Matej Bel University has a relatively complex system of 8 Faculties, 72 departments, several institutions and additional units. It is considered to be the third or fourth largest higher education institution of the country, offering a great variety of programs. Beyond the academic values, sport and cultural activities are also high in the agenda, providing an outstanding environment for student activities.

The premises of the University are clean and well maintained, offering comfortable and effective environment for teaching and learning. The scattered location of the Faculties and the lack of adequate transportation among them, however, create certain difficulties, especially for students.

Among the many values of MBU, the following are especially important for consideration:

- The positive traditional values of Slovak higher education
- The geographic location of the University, providing central role in the region
- The academic commitment and enthusiasm of the teaching staff
- The progress already achieved in relation to ECTS implementation and the adaptation of the Bologna concept
- The highly international orientation of the University community

### **Why Does Matej Bel University Need to Change?**

MBU has to change because there is a new law for universities, which creates considerably new conditions, and which needs to be accommodated.

In addition to the national context, as of May 2004 Slovakia will be a full member of the European Union. This means that MBU will be not only the third largest higher education institution in Slovakia, but also one of the smaller European higher education establishments. If individual Faculties maintain their isolated nature, there will be no chance to create competitive academic and scientific profiles on a European level. Only the joint efforts of all Faculties, together with the management of the University, acting as single, strong unit, will open opportunities for MBU. The University can become not only a survivor, but also a competitive partner within European higher education.

### **Reorganizing the University Structure**

In a highly competitive world where higher education has an important role, establishments must have a structure that can be efficiently maintained and developed, provide an environment for maximum flexibility and creativity in order to adapt to the rapidly changing world of providing knowledge. Maintaining the rather conservative nature of university structure, would certainly reduce the competitiveness of any higher education institution. The European trend, therefore, is to dramatically modify the governance and management system of universities in order to adapt to the global requirements, while preserving the high academic values characteristic to the European higher education traditions.

Matej Bel University should also join that process and be proactive if MBU would like to take a lead and be a successful participant in the competition.

In order to have an effective and transparent structure, a powerful funding mechanism must also be established on a national level. Universities must have a single budget and a transparent and dependable allocation mechanism. The new Law on Universities has created the legal framework for this in Slovakia.

In a political negotiation process of financing higher education, the university must speak one voice. This applies for MBU as well.

From the international point of view of the advisors, there is an unavoidable need to strengthen the central coordinating capacity of the University management while restructuring MBU, but this does not mean centralizing the University.

The University must maintain the principle of subsidiary, which means that all activities that are best performed on a Faculty or Department level should remain the responsibility of the particular decentralized unit. However, the University must also be efficiently managed as a whole.

Responsibilities for decision-making on each level must be clear and transparent in order to be most efficient in terms of the overall resources of the University to achieve the goals.

In its current status, MBU lacks an adequate central management infrastructure. Therefore, one of the most important challenges to this University would be to negotiate a new balance between the Rector and the Faculties.

A new structure, which has been mentioned above, cannot be established in one step by the single order of the central authority. Rather, it must be worked out through a cooperative and iterative process of reorganizing the University.

That re-organization must include a new concept of funding mechanisms and allocation of State budget, which enables all Faculties within the University to cover the full cost of their necessary and approved activities. In addition, formulas must be created to provide incentives to the Faculties to generate external revenues to add to the program, expand resources for the Faculties, and contribute at the same time to the University as a whole.

Needless to say that all the above activities depend on a consistent legal environment. One can only hope that the legal framework of the Slovak higher education will become more stable and support such reforms.

### **Implementing a Corporate Strategy at Matej Bel University**

The implementation of a corporate strategy has to be a process of some years and will only be realized step by step. The process will be more successful and efficient if as many Faculties and members of the University community are involved as possible. The strategic goals must be realistic and shared by the entire corporate community.

The Rector and Deans of Faculties are responsible for negotiating an agreement about the corporate strategy of MBU as well as the process of implementation.

The Salzburg Seminar could support the negotiation between Rector and Deans by helping to identify an international expert. It might also be helpful for the University to hold a two- to three-day conference in a neutral setting (away from the University environment).

The Rector should also try to find an internationally experienced consulting firm to support the implementation. Some of these firms are ready to give this support *pro bono*.

On the basis of the marketing strategy, once this has been worked out by the Rector in cooperation with a collegium of Faculty representatives and other members of the academic community, MBU should organize the process of implementation as a joint activity of the Rectorate and the Faculties. This process will need about three years.

The Rector's collegium as the Steering Group of the process, should establish four projects, concentrated on specific themes:

- Structure and organization,
- Teaching and learning,
- International policy,
- Research policy.

Each of these projects should be led by a Project Group with representatives from each Faculty. In addition to this, specific groups must offer room for feedback from certain interest groups of the University community. For example, the Project Group for “Teaching and Learning” should include two or three students, while the Group for “Research Policy” incorporates two or three younger scholars. The Group for “International Policy” should include two students and two younger scholars.

The Project Groups should be chaired and managed by a member of the Rectorate or a Dean as Project Manager. He or she should be supported by an administrator with competence and expertise for the theme.

If MBU is interested in receiving independent advice, the Salzburg Seminar could try to find an international expert as moderator. For the process to work, it is necessary that the Project Groups report regularly (perhaps every three months) to the Steering Group.

Some key topics of the projects:

The project “Teaching and Learning” should define the 3-cycle-study-structure, the principles of modularization and credit system and the procedures for evaluation of lectures, courses and study programs.

The project “International Policy” should analyze European and international programs, elect partners for cooperation, implement internationally comparable credit systems and grades, and develop a supporting system for the international mobility of students and scholars.

The project “Research Policy” should work out a concept of cooperative research, focused on those areas where MBU has internationally reputable scholars or research groups. Around these persons or groups should be concentrated the activities of other scholars to form clusters of cooperative research and fields of excellence. Resources ought to be allocated with priority on these research clusters, while maintaining a certain level of support for individual research. At the same time, the allocation of research funds should give incentives for raising external funding.

### **Academic Structure of MBU**

From an international perspective, MBU has a largely fragmented academic structure, which does not seem to adequately serve the needs of the institution. The fragmented nature of the University, the many redundancies, the inefficient use of both the intellectual and the financial resources should urge the University to revisit its structure, even if this leads to the merging of certain Faculties.

During the many meetings of the VAP team with University representatives, quite a number of colleagues at MBU seemed to agree on the necessity of reducing the number of Faculties to 4 to 6 units.

These many discussions convinced the VAP team that there is a considerable willingness to participate in that reshaping process, providing there is a high level of mutual trust based on the assumption that neither the central authority nor the Faculties have a hidden agenda.

## **Teaching and Learning**

During the dramatic political transformation of the Central Eastern European region, including Slovakia, the effects of globalization created a new socio-economic environment and generated very intensive competition. Some of the new phenomena of that era are:

- The increasing enrollment demand (massification),
- The breakthrough in the field of information communication technology (ICT),
- The dramatic changes in funding structures in higher education (the emergence of private-, foundation based-, corporate-higher education),
- The non-traditional way of knowledge providing (ODL, virtual learning, e-learning, etc.).

Moreover, the joining of the Slovak Republic to the European Union in 2004 offers unique opportunities for the Slovak higher education, including MBU.

It is a challenge to teachers and learners to establish a Common European Higher Education Space according to the Bologna declaration, to which Slovakia has also joined.

There is no alternative to the adjustment of the University system to the three-cycle structure (bachelor, master, PhD). That, however, does not mean that the structure must be identical in all disciplines. There must be room for the different requirements of specific disciplines, such as medicine and other specialized fields.

The guiding principle, on the other hand, for all programs should be modularization based on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

ECTS has already been introduced and implemented – in an incremental way – within the first two academic years of training currently at MBU. Concerns of students, as well as certain Faculty members, however, were mentioned regarding the practical application of the system. A number of students have had difficulties in receiving credit for courses taken at foreign universities. There are even more serious concerns related to the mobility of students between the different Faculties of their own University

The ability of students to transfer credits from one university to the other, or from one Faculty to another, is essential in becoming a successful University.

## **Strengthening MBU as an International University**

MBU already participates successfully in different European and international programs. These activities can be strengthened by more efficient coordination of the activities of the Faculties. There is administrative capacity for international relations at the Rectorate as well as in all Faculties. The special expertise of each administrator could be used more efficiently by all Faculties if they would regularly work for one or two days per week as a coordinating and supporting team on the University-level. This cooperative structure would facilitate the exchange of knowledge of specific programs or activities between all Faculties. At the same time, the coordinating team could develop and support common projects as well as joint activities of more than one Faculty.

A committee of the Vice Rector for International Relations and all Vice Deans for International Relations would have to work out the international strategy of MBU and supervise the coordinating team. To create an incentive for participating in

international and European activities, the committee should have a certain budget to finance additional costs of the Faculties that are incurred through international cooperation.

MBU should not try to establish as many international contacts as possible, but rather concentrate on selected programs and partners of special interest. The individual international cooperation of academics, however, must be open and should not be limited. Special support should be given for the international cooperation of younger scholars.

International study programs in the English language can be established in certain areas where MBU can offer content of special interest and excellent quality. A feasibility study (that includes inviting foreign experts to contribute in the preparation) would be necessary in order to get the maximum value out of such a program.

### **Meeting Student Needs**

Matej Bel University students acknowledge the quality of courses, are knowledgeable about the new structures of the University program and are enthusiastic about the quality of services such as student housing, despite the limits of availability.

At the same time, the VAP team noticed their frustration about the lack of transparency in transferring credits between Faculties here at MBU, or from foreign universities to their Faculties here. The students see little, if any, cooperation or coordination among different Faculties. Some even commented that it is easier to study at a foreign university than at another Faculty.

It appears that there is very limited knowledge or understanding about the Bologna Process among Matej Bel University students. They expressed a strong recommendation that efforts be made to inform high school students about the new structure in university degree programs. Both of these issues suggest that particular attention needs to be directed at communication strategies in this area among university students as well as to high school students planning to attend a university.

There is strong desire on the part of students to have a course evaluation process, which is already a requirement in most universities of the European Union. The recently passed Law on Universities makes it mandatory to introduce this in Slovakia as well.

The VAP team recognize the anxiety that this concept sometimes causes among teaching staff, yet the advisors also know that there are many very successful evaluation models currently being used in EU universities or in the United States, which have been developed by teaching faculty/student collaborations. The VAP team urges MBU to move forward to create such a program.

The advisors recognized the serious limits on resources for library services, computer support and Internet access. Students expressed their openness to the notion of paying fees for some of the services when such fees are tied to specific expansion or improvement of services. MBU is urged by the VAP experts to explore such opportunities as a means of improving student services and the access to information for students.

## Recommendations

The Visiting Advisors team would like to emphasize some of the statements made above in this report:

- The governance and management system of MBU must adjust to the new European trends.
- Strengthening the central coordinating capacity of the University management is unavoidable, which does not mean centralizing the University. Therefore, the Rector and the Deans of the Faculties should negotiate an agreement on a new corporate strategy and the process of its implementation.
- The new structure should be worked out through a cooperative and iterative process.
- The University must maintain the principle of subsidiary. Responsibilities for decision-making on each level, on the other hand, must be clear and transparent.
- A new concept of funding mechanisms and allocation of the State budget should be established. Special formulas also need to be introduced, which provide incentives to the Faculties to generate external revenues as well.
- MBU should revisit the fragmented academic structure and reduce the number of faculties even to 4 to 6 units.
- The already introduced ECTS should be completed and made functional in order to provide maximum mobility for students within MBU as well as between it and other universities.
- International activities of MBU can be strengthened by more efficient coordination of the activities of the Faculties. A University-level coordinating and supporting team should therefore be established.
- MBU should not try to establish as many international contacts as possible, but concentrate on selected programs and partners of special interest.
- International study-programs in the English language can be established in a few areas where MBU can offer content of special interest and excellent quality.
- The limited knowledge and understanding about the Bologna Process among Matej Bel University students must be corrected by providing adequate information and explanation for the undergraduates in order to get them engaged in the process.
- A fair and high standard course evaluation system should be established (as it is already stressed by the new Law on Universities).
- The serious limits on resources for library services, computer support and Internet access are difficult to overcome. Stimulating an increased capacity for earning extramural revenues could provide a partial solution to the problem. MBU is urged by the VAP experts to explore charging fees to the students, as a means of improving student services.
- The role of Matej Bel University in serving civil society should be improved further.



## **Concluding Remarks**

The advisors firmly believe that Matej Bel University could have a prosperous future in Slovakia and in the European Union, if steps are taken as emphasized in the above recommendations. The VAP team is aware of the difficulties related to this transformation at MBU. We firmly believe, however, that facing the challenge to become a full member of the European Union will stimulate willingness to participate in the necessary changes of the University life, which will surely put MBU in position to become a highly competitive partner of the European higher education arena. The high level of dedication within the academic community at the University will certainly help to make that happen.

Let us express finally our appreciation related to the hospitality of Matej Bel University. We extend a special thanks to the interpreters and to all those who contributed to make our visit a successful one. We learned a great deal during the visit and are ready to assist MBU in any way we can.

**Schedule of the Visit:**

<b>Date and time</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>Sunday, May 11th</b>			
12.30-13.30	Team arrives at Vienna airport. University car provide transportation to accommodation	Prof. Marta Zágoršeková, Mr. Kyselý - student UMB - timetable co-ordinator	Vienna -airport Phone driver Mr. Hiadlovský: 0905277537
19.00	Welcomme Dinner	Prof. Marta Zágoršeková, Prof. Milan Štulrajter - vice dean for international relations, Faculty of humanities	SNP 11, Zlatý Bažant - restaurant
<b>Monday, May 12th</b>			
10.00 -11.30	Sightseeing tour of Banská Bystrica	Ms. Voskarova, Mr. Kyselý	meeting at 10.00 in accommodation place
11.30-12.30	Lunch	Prof. Zágoršeková	Rectorate, Národná 12
13.00-14.00	Meeting with top management of Faculty of Finance	Top management of faculty, Prof. Medved-dean, Prof. Zimková vice-dean	Faculty of Finance, Cesta na amfiteáter 1
14.30-15.30	Meeting with top management of Faculty of Economics	Prof. Milota Vetráková-dean, Prof. Miroslav Hužvár - vice dean for Study, Assoc. Prof. Mária Uramová -vice dean for research, Prof. Ján Chorvát, PhD. - vice dean for international relations, Prof. Mária Seková - Chair of Academic Senate at Faculty, Prof. Milan Hudec - responsible for Quality at Faculty	Faculty of Economics, Tajovského 10
16.00	Meeting with Rector of Matej Bel University	Prof. Milan Murgaš -rector + top management and Members of Academic Senate	Rectorate, Národná 12
17.00 - 18.00	Team Debriefing meeting		Accommodation place
19.00	Dinner		Restaurant Bašta
<b>Tuesday, May 13th</b>			
11.00-12.00	Meeting with top management of Faculty of Filology	Prof. Vilikovský - dean, Prof. Monceková - vice-dean for international relations	Faculty of Filology, Ružová 11
12.10 -12.50	Lunch		Rectorate, Národná 12

13.00-14.00	Meeting with top management of Faculty of Law	Prof. Marián Boroška - vice dean for study, Prof. Vierošlav Júda - vice-dean for reseach, Prof. Monika Némethová - vice dean for international relations	Faculty of Law, Komenského 20
15.00-17.00	Meeting with top management of Faculty of Education	Prof. Beata Kosová-dean, Prof. Nada Vladovicová - vice dean for study, Prof.Pavel Procházka - vice dean for international relations + Prof. Trajtel - vicedean from Faculty of Natural Sciences	Faculty of Education, Ružová 13
18.00-19.00	Team Debriefing meeting		Accommodation place
19.30	Dinner		Restarant Slovenská pivnica
<b>Wednesday, May 14th</b>			
9.00-11.00	Meeting with top management of Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations	Prof. František Briška - dean, Prof. Peter Kulašik-vice dean, Prof. Drahomíra Ondrová - vice dean, Prof. Ingrid - vice dean, Prof. Koloman Ivanicka - The Head of Academic Senate	Faculty of Political Sciences na International Relations, Kuzmányho 1
11.00-11.30	Coffee break		Rectorate, Národná 12
11.30-12.30	Meeting with university students	Voskárová, Kyselý - co-ordinators	Rectorate, Národná 12
12.30-13.30	Lunch		Rectorate, Národná 12
13.30-15.30	Preparation of the Report		Accommodation place
16.00-17.30	Presentation of the Report	Top management of University, Deans of Faculties	Rectorate, Národná 12
19.30	Farewell Dinner		Restaurant Národný dom
<b>Thursday, May 15th</b>			
	Departures		



### Visiting Advisors:

**László FRENÝÓ** is president of the Strategic Committee of Higher Education and Research Council and professor of immunophysiology of the Szent Istvan University, Budapest, Hungary, and serves as dean of faculty for McDaniel College, USA (formerly known as Western Maryland College) Budapest Program. Dr. Frenyó is also involved in the higher education restructuring project by UNESCO-CEPES within the framework of the Task Force Education and Youth (within the Stability Pact for SEE). He served as president of the Hungarian Higher Education and Research Council from 1997 to 2000 and was head of the task team responsible for the Higher Education Reform Project of Hungary from 1995 to 1998. Dr. Frenyó was president of the Hungarian Rectors Conference from 1995 to 1997, and served as chairperson of its International Committee from 1991 to 1995. He also served as rector of the University of Veterinary Science in Budapest from 1990 to 1997, the same institution from which he earned both D.V.M. and Ph.D. degrees. Dr. Frenyó is a member of the Universities Project Advisory Committee.



**Marlene JOHNSON** is executive director and chief executive officer of NAFSA: Association of International Educators in Washington, DC, USA. In 1994, she was recruited by the Clinton administration to serve in the General Services Administration as associate administrator for management services and human resources. From 1983 to 1991, Ms. Johnson was the lieutenant governor of Minnesota; she held an international business fellowship at the London School of Economics, and in 1993 created an entrepreneurship program for Czech women at the College of St. Catherine.



**Jürgen LÜTHJE** has been president of the University of Hamburg, Germany since 1991. In 1973 he became the first chancellor of the newly-founded University of Oldenburg. Dr. Lüthje has served as a legal advisor for the University Parliament of the Ruhr University Bochum since 1970, and in 1973 was a member of the scientific staff at the Federal Ministry of Education and Science. He participated in a Fulbright Commission program for German education experts to visit American universities and has studied abroad in Western Europe and the USA. Dr. Lüthje holds a Dr.jur. from the University of Bremen and received the honorary degree of Dr.phil.h.c. from Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel.



**Anna GLASS** is coordinator for Central and Eastern Europe, Visiting Advisors Program, Universities Project at the Salzburg Seminar. Originally from Maine, Ms. Glass has also lived in Frauenfeld, Switzerland and Paris, France during the course of her studies. She is a graduate of Middlebury College, Vermont, where she studied French, German, and English literature.



## **THE UNIVERSITIES PROJECT OF THE SALZBURG SEMINAR**

Universities throughout the world are undergoing systemic changes in their governance, academic design, structure, and mission. The Salzburg Seminar's Universities Project focuses on higher education reform in Central and East Europe, Russia, and the Newly Independent States as universities in these regions redefine their relationships with governments and try to become more integrated into the global intellectual community.

The Universities Project is a multi-year series of conferences and symposia convening senior representatives of higher education from the designated regions with their counterparts from North America and West Europe. Discussion in the Project's programs focuses on the following themes:

- University Administration and Finance
- Academic Structure and Governance within the University
- Meeting Students' Needs, and the Role of Students in Institutional Affairs
- Technology in Higher Education
- The University and Civil Society

### **OBJECTIVES**

Universities and other institutions of higher learning are seeking to reshape themselves in ways that will prepare them more fully for the twenty-first century. Even as these institutions are considering extensive systemic changes in their academic design, structure, and mission, all desire autonomy in governance and in their intellectual life. Accordingly, the Universities Project aims to promote the higher education reform process by inviting senior administrators to participate in conferences and symposia concerning issues of university management, administration, finance, and governance.

### **THE VISITING ADVISORS PROGRAM (VAP)**

The Salzburg Seminar launched this enhanced aspect of the Universities Project in the autumn of 1998. Under this program, teams of university presidents and higher education experts visit universities in Central and East Europe and Russia at the host institutions' request to assist in the process of institutional self-assessment and change. By the end of 2003, more than sixty VAP visits will have taken place to universities in East and Central Europe and Russia. A full schedule of visits is planned for 2004. The addition of the Visiting Advisors Program brings to the Universities Project an applied aspect and serves to enhance institutional and personal relationships begun in Salzburg.

The Salzburg Seminar acknowledges with gratitude the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which are funding the Universities Project and the Visiting Advisors Program respectively.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For more information regarding the Salzburg Seminar's Visiting Advisors Program, the Universities Project, and Salzburg Seminar programs, please contact one of the Seminar's offices below.

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