

I would like to conclude this speech by stressing the vital importance for the international community, for governments and universities to become involved in the reform of Russian society as a matter of priority.

I am convinced that greater cooperation in the fields of education and research between the URAL universities and the University of Ghent can fulfil a pioneering role in the context of Russian-EU cooperation. The URAL universities also have to continue to play a leading part in the Russian academic community.

I hope that our joint endeavours will be fruitful for both communities. A lot of work is waiting for us as well in the next months as in the further years to come.

Лив Ван ден Боссе-Браке

УРАЛ: ПОВЫШЕНИЕ РЕГИОНАЛЬНОГО АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОГО УРОВНЯ

Статья руководителя отдела международных связей Гентского университета Лив ван ден Боссе-Браке "УРАЛ: повышение Регионального академического уровня" представляет собой ее речь на встрече с ректорами университетов г. Екатеринбурга (3.02.95г.).

В своем выступлении автор подробно останавливается на основных вопросах международного сотрудничества между университетами по проекту УРАЛ, проводимому в рамках программы ТЕМПУС-ТАКИС (TEMPUS-TACIS). В заключение Лив ван ден Боссе-Браке выражает надежду на продолжение совместных действий по программе ТАКИС и на выработку эффективной стратегии для международного сотрудничества в системе высшего образования Урала.

Der Artikel "Ural: die Erhoehung des regionalen akademischen Niveaus" macht den Leser mit der Rede von Lieve Van den Bossche – Bracke waehrend des Treffens mit den Rektoren der Jekaterinburger Universitaeten (3.02.95) bekannt. In ihrer Rede konzentriert sich die Autorin auf die Hauptfragen der internationalen Zusammenarbeit zwischen den Universitaeten und erklaert das Wesen von TEMPUS – TACIS – Programm: seine Ziele, Aufgaben, Schwerpunkte und Arbeitsformen.

Zum Schluss drueckt sie ihre Hoffnung auf die Fortsetzung der Zusammenarbeit im Rahmen des TACIS – Programms aus.

On September 12th 1994, I had the opportunity to address some of you already during my first visit to Ekaterinburg.

In the last sentence of that speech I said, and I quote:

"In between my short visit and the next visit in February together with my other Santandergroup colleagues a lot of work has to be done on both sides. "

And indeed, a lot of work has been done already: preparatory work on a Tempus-Tacis JEP proposal by means of the pre- JEP entitled ***URAL: Upgrading of Regional Academic Level*** with a very ambitious subtitle: ***Introducing the Ural State Vocational Pedagogical University in Efficient International Cooperation to Support Future Academic Developments.***

Talking about the activities that already have been achieved, both groups of Russian trainees in the University of Ghent have learnt by now the meaning of the expression: "Blood, sweat and tears".

Being confronted with new aspects of academic life, getting acquainted with a different type of workload, experiencing a cultural shock, working in an environment in which it is a natural expectation to take initiatives, assuming new responsibilities: these attitudes are all part of the challenge for our Russian friends.

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However, before dealing with Tempus-Tacis pre-JEP and JEP related matters, I would like to dwell on some ***general issues of international cooperation.***

Universities nowadays are aware that in the field of international cooperation ***priorities*** must be set to develop strategies in view of a long term policy with coordination at different levels, linked to the core functions of the university: education, research and high level service to society.

By cooperating with partner institutions, universities should not fail to compare and revise aims, standards and methods of education and research. They should continuously try to improve their work by learning from each other. This is true for any university in any 'cycle' of its development. Self-analysis, self-assessment, quality-control, these ought to be keywords for the management of any contemporary university.

The whole political, social and economic setting of institutions, regions, countries, Europe, even the entire world has changed more rapidly in 50 years' time than in the 5 previous centuries. These changes also have repercussions in the academic world.

Institutions of higher education, urged to adapt to new situations have to determine new strategies for the future if they want to strengthen their competitive position ***in a global perspective.***

Furthermore universities are expected to redefine their role in society to meet the expectations of this rapidly changing society. And this is even more important for universities in Central and Eastern Europe after half a century of relative isolation.

Let me come back to what I said last September by referring to some important ***reasons for and advantages of international university cooperation:***

In the first place international cooperation is to the benefit of our clients: the students. Their curriculum with a multi-disciplinary, multi-ethnic, multi-national approach should prepare them adequately for a career which is likely to contain, at least to some extent, international components.

Second, the academics will take advantage by the opportunity to get scientific feedback from their colleagues abroad.

And last but not least, institutions can benefit enormously from setting up cooperation with partner institutions abroad to adjust to the already mentioned new needs of society. Cooperation on institutional and on faculty level can vary from student exchange to staff mobility, from joint development of curricula to setting up PhD and research programs, along international standards for quality control of the research and teaching process.

Furthermore quality standards should be enhanced on all levels: design of curricula, academic recognition, credit transfer, individual monitoring of students, language preparation, accomodation, visa requirements, etc.

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So far my general point of view. Let's talk business now. Tempus-Tacis business!

To create an efficient and outstanding international profile, universities are bound to develop a strategy leading ultimately to a permanent *framework of flexible structures*.

To achieve the aim of high quality international academic standards the university management should be able to provide the necessary *tools* to face the necessary conditions and the obvious obstacles

One of the conditions for effective international network management is to provide an adequate communication system for spreading *regular, rapid, reliable and relevant* information.

To meet *all* these *requirements* the academic staff of *the* university should be able to rely on a task force, *a* unit, *which will* coordinate and *support* such *administrative and logistic needs*.

Our bilateral cooperation agreements together with the *TACIS programme* already allow the compatible university-network of the URAL universities to create an ideal platform for internationalisation together with the European consortium of the University of Gent (B), the Erasmus University of Rotterdam(NL), the universities of Valladolid (E) as well as the other universities of the Santander Group.

The aims of the JEP application we are now preparing in Ekaterinburg is *the improvement of university management*.

We will focus on

1. the strategic development of management of international relations by the "Regional Office Responsible for Promoting International Relations":

2. the organization of a European University Information Network Center, along with the creation of a "Center of Computer Network" connecting the USVPU and the other universities with European Universities;

3. the organization of a Modern Language Center;

4. the design of an institutional unit for the development of degree awarding structures both on institutional and faculty level.

In a first phase to reach these aims the envisaged *pre-JEP* activities were and are still carried out: eg. short fact finding visits by the partner universities to and from Ekaterinburg, intensive training periods for staff, purchase of essential equipment.

In the following JEP phase we envisage to strenghten the management of these units, and start the development of master's degree courses with teaching periods, study visits and even student mobility, not only by the Tempus-Tacis funds, but also by means of our bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements with the Ekaterinburg universities.

We hope to be able to continue our TACIS activities to develop an effective strategy for international cooperation in the higher education system of the URALS. The creation of a specific department for international management, the active participation in European education programmes, the upgrading of either bilateral cooperation agreements or network cooperation with the universities of the Santander Group are some of the tools for our common strategy for the upgrading of the higher education system in the Sverdlovsk Region.

However, the policy to create and support an outstanding but permanent framework of flexible structures with a high-quality academic standard will only be effective if this internationalisation policy is the result of a fine-tuning of administrative and academic forces with the same forceful European spirit.

Or as our Russian trainees in Ghent often said and sighed: we must learn to think in a different way, we must learn to act in the most adequate manner, we must learn to take initiatives, we must come forward with our questions so as to find proper solutions and we must not loose our courage.

I will never forget our joint endeavour to explain and understand all about the very special and sometimes confusing Tempus-Tacis jargon such as: "*clear-objectives, concrete outputs, eligible activities, dissemination of information, new management practice, day to day operations, priority subject areas, formal requirements, internal decision making process, concrete outcome of activities, new skills, operational structure*" etc...

In other words: we must learn to speak the same language !

Our cordial and positive experiences so far with our Russian colleagues, allow us to believe in the successful realisation of our common goal.