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International Conference on Higher Education and Its Pioneering Journey of the Last 40 Years

I would like to thank Prof. Ludvik Toplak and Prof. Barbara Toplak, our hosts, and ICHE president, Professor Ignaz Bender, for making this meeting possible.

My presentation is a tribute to the memory of Professor Ihsan Dođramacı, who started *ICHE, International Conference on Higher Education*. It has been an exciting journey through 40 years of ICHE's history, history of the world and history of higher education. ICHE saw a lot of changes taking place in higher education, trying to respond to these changes in its own way. When I was getting ready for this presentation, I had to find a suitable topic for our ICHE activities in the last 40 years. And I remembered a Turkish traveler in the 17th century, 400 years ago, Evliya Çelebi, who wrote a 10-volume book of travels, translated into all the major languages of the world. He narrated his travels that took him 40 years to complete, a 40-year journey. After more than 400 years, it is still famous as a reference and respectful companion of knowledge. He begins his book with a dream in which he sees the Prophet and begs for his intercession so he can go to heaven. In his excitement he does not ask for *şefaät* (Intercession), but asks for *seyahat*, a journey (travel), which is very close in pronunciation. And the Prophet smiles and says: "I will give you both, *şefaät* and *seyahat*". So, he goes on this journey and after 400 years, his journey is still famous, and his words were well taken.

Ours has been an exciting journey through history: we saw a lot of changes in higher education. Was it a case for weeping or celebration for us? Our 40th anniversary is a cause for celebration and not for weeping because it has contributed to the field in its own right.

Meanwhile in Turkey, universities in the 1970s saw very bad times. Academics and administrators were helpless. There was a military coup in 1980. Order was restored remarkably easily, and then came the time for serious reforms in higher education.

Professor Dođramacı was an academic in Paris in 1981, after 25 years in university administration in Turkey (12 of those as rector in two universities). He had also held internationally acknowledged high positions in UNICEF and similar bodies, ...

Professor Dođramacı, a doyen of Turkish higher education, was invited by the Turkish Government to return and advise on a reform of higher education. In this connection, he organized the first ICHE to which he invited 10 rectors from Europe, the USA and Canada; the Secretary General of the Standing Conference of European Rectors; 17 out of the 19 Turkish rectors, 35 deans of various universities (and I was one of them). At the end of three days of discussions to evaluate the newly passed University Law in Turkey, the first Conference was held in Ankara in December 1981, at which the attendees pronounced themselves in favor of the new Law.

Through this reform, Turkish higher education was revamped. The number of universities went from 19 to 28, and they were organized similar to public universities in the United States: multi-campus, state university systems with a *higher education council* as the *national board of trustees*. There was centralized control and coordination of the higher education system, general restructuring of curricula, selection and placement of students, and finances. And the idea of private universities, organized by non-profit foundations, was brought into the picture. Unfortunately, later amendments introduced by politicians in 1990's undermined some of the crucial reforms.

The consequences of the 1981 reform of Turkish higher education were:

- Turkish higher education was integrated into European higher education
- The Turkish universities first became members of the CRE (Conference of European Rectors) and later of EUA (European University Association)
- Turkish universities had bilateral relationships with European countries, especially with Yugoslavia in those days
- Turkish rectors signed the Magna Charta in Bologna in 1988, and the Turkish universities continue to be in the Bologna area
- Turkish universities joined student mobility programmes, such as Erasmus
- Private higher education – mostly universities – was brought into the picture
- Turkish universities experienced a reverse brain drain to some extent
- Developments in information technology and the internet have transformed the higher education area.

There was a second ICHE meeting in 1989. I was the rapporteur for private universities. There were three topics:

- 1) State higher education institutions
- 2) Private higher education institutions and
- 3) Finances

Ninety persons attended from 21 countries, including Laurence W. Klein, Nobel Laureate, and the academic and rector of the University of Zagreb, Professor Vladimir Stipetić. There were international rectors, Turkish rectors, Turkish Higher Education Council members.

I would like to highlight the subjects pertaining to the section on private universities. We discussed the mission of the private universities, academic freedom of private universities, comparison of private and public universities in many aspects. Discussing the funding of private universities, we proposed state contributions, endowment contributions and fundraising, tuition fees for students, and encouraged entrepreneurial university income. Student admission and quality of education, governing bodies, and executive heads were also discussed.

Turkish higher education now is a real giant. I just want to share some numbers with you. There are over 8 million students in Turkey; of these, 3.8 million are in full time (classroom) and 4.2 in part-time (distance) education. And there are over 215,000 international students from 82 countries. Turkey is No. 10 in student mobility in the world.

The journey of ICHE has continued with 25 meetings held in 16 countries on 3 continents. And our 14th meeting, held in 2000, was also in Maribor, organised by Prof. Ludvik Toplak on the main topic of Ethical Considerations in Research and Teaching.

What was the world like 40 years ago?

It was a “bipolar” world, almost in the medical sense. There was a Western Block and a Socialist Block. There was also a non-influential Non-Aligned Block. Colonialism was still going on *incognito*; higher education was very elitist and conservative.

What is going on in the world today, at this moment? Impressive commitment to higher education on the international scene. From elite education, when only about 5% of the age group entered higher education, to mass higher education with the aim of reaching 35%. The number of institutions has expanded; many polytechnics have been given university status. As higher education expands, it faces great difficulties. In the European area, there will be trouble unless special care is given to the higher education institutions.

The most important issues in the last 40 years were:

- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Accountability
- Quality.

Sometimes, it seems as though these issues will never be solved.

The concerns of affordability and access are the main issues now, and we are still confronted by them: we have to gain the public’s trust so that our institutions can play their role to the fullest and retain their independence.

Throughout its journey, ICHE has emphasized the following university values and I think these values should be emphasized in private higher education, too:

- Academic freedom
- Institutional autonomy
- Accountability
- Social responsibility
- Equal access.

During the journey, the ICHE participants have witnessed:

- Two generations of 20 years each
- A changing world
- An evolving higher education

The past meetings of ICHE have been:

- Far-sighted
- Relevant
- Up to date

- Pioneering.

We can see the range of themes reaching from university mission and values to ethics, governance, quality, structure, leadership, staffing, student mobility, market forces, internationalisation, impact on development, globalisation, global cooperation, fundraising, financing, and accreditation. As early as 1989, privatization of higher education, the entrepreneurial university and integration were among discussion topics of ICHE.

In the global economy, the keys to survival and success are science, technology, invention and intervention. In the emerging knowledge economy, knowledge is the driving force that brings huge returns on investment in it. Private sector competition, access to new technology, best-trained workforce and knowledge production are necessary. The bottom line, as a new dilemma between sharing knowledge and intellectual property rights arises, is: will the university's knowledge monopoly come to an end?

This changing global context happened because there was victory over illiteracy, democratization, market economies, globalization, technological innovation and changing public/private HEIs on the scene.

Six themes of achievements in the 40 years:

- 1) Freedom with responsibility
- 2) Life-long employability
- 3) Mobility in the global higher education arena
- 4) Compatibility
- 5) Quality assurance and accreditation
- 6) Competitiveness and cooperation (at home and in the world).

What needs to be done in higher education?

- Increase resources by improving the infrastructure, adding new curricula, recruitment and retention of the faculty and increased equality of access
- Improve efficiency by strengthening the governance and improve and develop educational programmes
- Improve access and graduation rates
- State support for the private HEIs (higher education institutions).

What prevents us from doing what needs to be done? There is firstly the absence of vision on the part of politicians and bureaucrats. Secondly, there is a lack of political and financial commitment, initial disadvantage for some and lastly, disruptions caused by globalisation that show in brain drain, economic fluctuations and information revolution that requires investments.

Are we coming to the end of the journey? Let's take a look at the Steering Committee of ICHE: members have shown a commitment to being creative and dynamic contributors in the global higher education arena. Their commitment is to be up-to-date, innovative, successful and the driving force behind the relevance and vitality of ICHE, the International Conference on Higher Education. There are currently nine members on the ICHE Steering Committee; the

by-laws say the number can go up to 15. With additional young members, ICHE can continue to be a dynamic contributor in the future of global higher education.

Let me conclude with my thanks to our hosts; to Professor Ali Dođramacı who took on the responsibility of ICHE after his father's passing; to Dr. Ignaz Bender who has been President of ICHE for a long time; to Ms Phyllis Erdogan, who has been our Secretary General all this time; to all the people who have presented in past conferences and to those presenting at this conference, and to all the unsung heroes who have made this journey of 40 years possible.

Thank you.