

commUNICAtion

Newsletter of the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe

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Summary:

[Report from the President](#)

[Välkommen till Stockholm](#)

[RACISM, XENOPHOBIA and ACADEMIA](#)

[UNICA Administrators Mobility Program](#)

[Study visit at University of Vienna, Austria, 17th – 21st May 1999](#)

[Internship at the University of Amsterdam 20. -26.09.99](#)

[ESN - Erasmus Student Network](#)

[The role of the National Agencies in SOCRATES II](#)

[A new challenge](#)

[News](#)

[Agenda](#)

Message from the President

UNICA will soon hold its ninth General Assembly, which will take place in Stockholm from 25- 27 November. One decisive event at this assembly will be elections for president and members of the Steering Committee. Several excellent candidates have demonstrated their support for the network by offering to run for office. The scientific segment of the General Assembly will consist of an international colloquium on the issue of racism and xenophobia.

In 2000, UNICA will celebrate the tenth anniversary of its creation. The Université Libre de Bruxelles, a founding institution of the network, has already agreed to organize this important anniversary.

To commemorate the year 2000 and the millennium, the Freie Universität Berlin (FUB), also a founding member of UNICA, is planning a major initiative by organizing a university-wide discussion on the topic, "The Idea of Europe", that will involve every university in the network. The aim is to allow for groups of students from each participating university to exchange their perspectives on Europe in a "European Student Conference". Students will be required to examine another country's point of view by means of an innovative approach. Specific courses will be held in each university to prepare the students for the interaction as well as a debate. The meeting will be held in Berlin in autumn 2000. The newly elected president of the FUB, Prof. Peter Gaehtgens, invites all members of the UNICA Network to be part of this initiative. Full details have already been communicated to the network's university members.

Upcoming events to remember include a conference to be organized in Brussels by the DG XXII concerning the SOCRATES program, which is entitled "Responding to Challenges for European Universities: Implementing Changes in Institutional and Disciplinary Cooperation". Several Rectors, Vice-Rectors and Presidents will represent UNICA at this conference.

I must unfortunately announce that Ms. Jeanine Hermans, who has occupied the position of Secretary General for over a year, is leaving UNICA to assume an important position at her home university, Wageningen, in the Netherlands. We would like to thank her for her dedicated and efficient work for the network and wish her all the best in her future career plans. As in the past, Ms. Nathalie Carton will ensure the smooth flow of operations. UNICA is looking for a successor to Ms. Hermans for the position of Secretary General.

Pierre Ducrey, President of UNICA

Välkommen till Stockholm "Stockholm University"

Among the things awaiting those of you planning to attend this year's General Assembly in Stockholm is a city that has changed vastly in the past twenty years. Very much a part of the Information Age, Stockholm has seen a change in attitudes and lifestyles that has brought it closer to Europe, while leaving intact the cultural components that make Sweden so unlike other cultures. The long, bright days of summer that evolve into equally long, dark nights kept alive by the light of candles plays an important role in defining the Swedish way of life. The unique Swedish cuisine, theatre arts, product design and technology, together with a deeply rooted love of nature, are just a few of the things that can be experienced on a visit to Sweden.

Situated between the Baltic Sea and the fresh water of Lake Mälaren, Stockholm has retained a kind of pristine cleanliness, with the surrounding waters playing an important role in the lifestyle of the people here. Sailing, fishing and walks along the many shorelines have always been a part of everyday life. But today you'll find a thriving culture featuring theatre, restaurants, world-class museums and not least, a vital academic environment attracting both students and researchers from afar - all of which help make Stockholm feel like a dynamic, but still "small" European capital city.

But aside from this there are several other reasons why participation at the General Assembly should be seriously considered this November. A number of important UNICA activities will be taking place this time, among them the election of both a new president and a steering committee. In addition, the theme this year will be racism and xenophobia, a presentation that will be made by Stockholm University professor Charles Westin of the Centre for Research in International Migration and Ethnic Relations.

The venue for the Assembly will be the Stockholm University campus Frescati, where you'll find a number of buildings designed by the renowned architect Ralph Erskine. His latest contribution is the award-winning Aula Magna - a 1,200-seat auditorium of wood and glass nestled among old oak trees and carved into a hill of ancient granite. This and other buildings on campus are located in what is believed to be the world's only national city park.

So, take the opportunity to cast a vote and engage in discussion with your fellow colleagues from throughout Europe - while sharing with UNICA one of the last steps out of this century on our way to the new millennium. Welcome!

Tom Morrel,
Stockholm University

RACISM, XENOPHOBIA and ACADEMIA

Social exclusion, and particularly racism and xenophobia, are becoming serious problems in many parts of Europe and a major obstacle to European integration. From 30-31 August 1999 representatives of UNICA universities and a selected number of invited experts gathered at Stockholm University for the UNICA seminar on Racism, Xenophobia and Academia.

The problems of racism and xenophobia have varying origins. In many countries racism has its roots in the formation of the nation state and the status of ethnic, cultural and linguistic minorities in the nation-state framework. In other countries these problems stem from post-colonial and labour market-oriented immigration, but also from mass-flight situations generated by war, political oppression, human rights violations and ethnic cleansing. In some countries the problems of social exclusion, racism and xenophobia are linked to a combination of these factors. In many countries unemployment statistics show that persons of immigrant origin are usually much harder hit than native-born citizens. Undoubtedly discrimination is an important explanation. What is an adequate academic response to racism and xenophobia in society? What can universities do to raise the level of awareness? What role can universities play in collecting and analysing information on racism and xenophobia? Does discrimination on racial and ethnic grounds take place at universities? The truth of the fact is that nobody really seems to know. Although universities are generally regarded as bastions of tolerance in these respects, there is also reason to assume that universities may well reflect social and political trends in society.

The UNICA-sponsored conference, organized by the UNICA working group on racism and xenophobia, addressed these issues by inviting young researchers from different European countries to outline the situation in their own countries, in the capital cities, and at their own universities. The twenty-five participants were primarily Ph.D.-students and post-docs. The countries and universities that were represented were Belgium (Université Libre Bruxelles and Leuven), Finland (Helsinki), Germany (Freie Universität Berlin), Ireland (Dublin), Italy (Rome III), Netherlands (Amsterdam), Sweden (Stockholm) and Switzerland (Lausanne and Neuchâtel). In addition there were participants from the Higher Education Equality Unit, Cork, Ireland; the Vienna Institute for Development and Cooperation, Vienna, Austria; and the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, Paris, France. To allow for comparison, the papers that were presented were structured in similar

ways. Each author was free to frame the paper and synthesize available information. There was a general agreement that the burning issues of inequality on grounds of sex; race, ethnicity, religion etc. need to be put on the agenda by the

"Charles Westin, professor"

universities. If the increase in racism and xenophobia in Europe may be seen as a process, combating racism and xenophobia can only be achieved by initiating a counter-process. The UNICA network can play an important role together with other organisations and networks in bringing about an awareness of these problems.

An afternoon was devoted to working out recommendations to be presented at the UNICA general assembly in November about measures that universities can take to counteract discrimination, racism and xenophobia. The papers presented at the conference will be published in an edited volume published in 2000.

Charles Westin, professor

UNICA Administrators Mobility Program

Study visit at University of Vienna, Austria, 17th – 21st May 1999

The UNICA Administrators Mobility Program enabled me to spend one week at the Vienna University International Relations Office. I think it is very important and useful to organize such programmes within the framework of UNICA because they help develop closer cooperation among member universities. Particularly within the scope of the Socrates/Erasmus program, such programmes enable administrators from Central and Eastern Europe to take advantage of the experience of administrators from Western universities, and are also very helpful for developing a common Socrates/Erasmus policy within UNICA.

Favourable geographic conditions and membership in the UNICA network provide the potential for further development of close cooperation between the University of Vienna and Comenius University in Bratislava.

The visit achieved its goals, and it was extremely useful for me. My knowledge of the host institution was enhanced, and I obtained an inside view of the functioning of the Vienna International Relations Office. I was received with extraordinary hospitality. Mrs Maria Schmidt-Dengler, who did an excellent job organizing my visit, was extremely kind and helpful to me.

The Universität Wien - University of Vienna is one of Europe's largest universities and the oldest German-speaking university in the world. It comprises eight faculties: Medicine, Humanities, Basic and Integrative Sciences, Formal and Natural Sciences, Social and Economic Sciences, Law, Catholic Theology, and Protestant Theology. It was founded in 1365. Its faculty has contributed 8 Nobel Prize winners.

One of the aims of Vienna University's international policy is to provide each of its fourth-year students a year of subsidized study abroad. In the academic year 1998-1999, the approved and actual student mobility was 910 and 651 students going abroad, respectively. For the academic year 1999-2000, the approved mobility is 1,000 students and 7,189 student-months.

Mrs Maria Schmidt-Dengler gave me information about the organisation and management of the Socrates/Erasmus program. It was especially helpful information that I consider to be the "panacea" for the Socrates/Erasmus dilemma between Institutional Contract and Institutional Commitment, more precisely, the dilemma as to which level - rectorate / faculty / department - should sign bilateral agreements. Despite the fact that the Socrates/Erasmus headquarters no longer insists that the Rector sign bilateral agreements, some partner universities still demand it. At the Vienna Socrates/Erasmus Office, there is a two-stage system. Preliminary bilateral agreements are first signed at the department level. They are subsequently summarised for every partner university and signed by the Rectorate in this form. (There are thus two deadlines.)

I became acquainted with the organisation and management of the Socrates/Erasmus program, especially the division of competencies between faculties and rectorate, organisation of student mobility, organisation of teacher mobility, financial management, implementation of ECTS, provision for incoming students, information packages, involvement in Socrates thematic network, and application of new information technologies. I also learned about other activities organised by the Vienna International Relations Office, especially other European programmes, e.g. CEEPUS and Leonardo da Vinci, as well as bilateral cooperation.

On the first day of my visit, I had an extraordinary opportunity to participate in the Socrates/Erasmus Information Day, organized by the BEB (Büro für Europäische Bildungskooperation - Office for European Cooperation in Education, <http://www.beb.ac.at>) for administrators from the Vienna area responsible for the Socrates/Erasmus programme. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Josef Leidenfrost. The BEB not only provides universities with information, coordination and advising (like our National Socrates Agency), but also awards scholarships for Socrates/Erasmus students. In Austria, there is also complementary funding for Socrates/Erasmus provided by the Ministry of Education and local authorities. A priority of the Socrates/Erasmus policy is ECTS. The system of on-line processing of Socrates/Erasmus documents in the framework of BEB is being developed.

Mag. Maximilian Kudler, the Director of the Büro für Ausländische Beziehungen, described the historical background of the Socrates/Erasmus program. He explained how the ECTS is used. I was surprised to learn that the existence of a course-credit system at a university is not a necessary condition for the use of ECTS. The ECTS - based on the so-called workload and the Gauss curve - is a tool for the comparison and transcription of records. It does not provide an evaluation, but rather information for foreign universities. In practice, ECTS often sends a letter stating that "the student has completed the full-term workload". The only faculty in which the ECTS has already been introduced is the Faculty of Medicine. The reason is that the curricula in medicine are the same everywhere. (A similar situation exists with respect to law schools: constitutional, administrative and criminal law.) One year of study represents 60 points; 6 years of study therefore represent 360 points. These points are divided by individual classes. In general, a class lasting 2 hours weekly represents 2 points. (This system eliminates the tendency of many professors to evaluate their own subject as the most important.) Course descriptions are all on the Internet. In this way, coordinators from two universities can compare their programmes. It is the content of courses, rather than points, that is most important.

During my visit, three representatives of Masaryk University Brno (Czech Republic) responsible for the Central European Studies Programme (Don Sparling, Jan Pavlík, Tony Claudino) paid a visit to Vienna University. I was present at their discussion with Ms. Renate Kugler from the Faculty of Management about the possibility of future cooperation. Because of the geographical proximity of its campuses, the Vienna - Bratislava - Brno triangle has strong potential from the point of view of future cooperation.

I participated in the presentation about the start of the administrative information systems project at the University of Vienna. The project - called UNIVIS (<http://www.univie.ac.at/univis/>) - is just beginning. Its head is Mag. Schindler and its coordinator is Dr. Martin Polaschek. The firm CSC (Computer Science Federation) Ploenzke will create the UNIVIS.

Zuzana Ladzianska
Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia

Internship at the University of Amsterdam 20. -26.09.99

Taking part in the Administrators Mobility Program was a highly positive experience, and my internship at The University of Amsterdam (UvA) exceeded my expectations. Much of this is due to the UvA staff, who helped me set up a very interesting schedule and in many ways contributed to a fruitful and pleasant stay. During my week in the Netherlands, I had meetings with a number of people in the UvA administration as

well as from other institutions (see enclosed schedule). This contributed to a thorough and balanced picture of the UvA and to a certain extent the Dutch higher education system in general. I encountered different views related to the field of internationalisation, which in many ways will benefit our own debate and future strategy here at the University of Oslo. Not only has my stay at UvA been important (and inspiring) to my own professional development, but I also hope to share my experiences with my colleagues at the International Office in Oslo.

The enclosed schedule should give a fairly good idea of the topics elucidated while in Amsterdam. I would roughly divide them into three groups, and I'll try to give a brief summary of them below. These topics are of course highly interdependent, but it still makes sense to see them separately:

1. Management structures at the UvA
2. Development of International Study Programs
3. Organisation of support staff within the field of internationalisation

1. Even though UvA and the University of Oslo seen from the outside look quite similar regarding size and scientific profile, UvA seems now to have chosen another path than the University of Oslo when it comes to its management structures. Following a reform in 1996 (in part as a result of a recent government act on Higher Education Institutions in NL), UvA has in many ways become an institution managed top down, which is more in line with a business corporation. A previous system consisting of elected academic boards and deans, very much like the present situation here in Oslo, has been replaced by a system of appointed professional leaders (managers) with a great amount of decision-making authority. On every level (president, deans and heads of department) the leader is appointed by the level above. Even though the university democracy at UvA seems to have lost its traditional role, the university has gained greater freedom from government interference. The most important outcome, of course, is a more professional and effective institution with centralised decision-making. The faculty level also seems to have gained greater autonomy, and the keyword in the system is accountability.

2. The development of International Study Programs in English was also in many ways a particular field of interest. UvA has come a lot farther in this field than Oslo, mostly because the University of Oslo cannot yet charge tuition fees and therefore doesn't "sell" student places in the way UvA does. But things may change in Oslo, and it is generally interesting to learn from Amsterdam's experiences. Several questions were highlighted during the talks at UvA: how are such programs initiated, what are the costs (tuition fees etc.), how should such programs be organized within the structure of the university, how can they best benefit the overall internationalisation of the institution, and finally, is it appropriate for their academic staff to teach in English? Another aspect related to this was marketing and UvA's impressive information facilities.

3. The UvA is going through a period of re-organisation, and the current structures at the central level seem somewhat complicated and uncertain. The former Office for Foreign Relations is now basically taking care of student exchange and is being integrated into the Department of Academic Affairs, and the faculty level also seems to have gained greater autonomy in the field of internationalisation. This is quite the opposite of the situation in Oslo following its recent reorganisation. While UvA faculties have staff working full-time on international affairs, this is not the case at Oslo. Advantages and disadvantages of such structures were discussed with representatives from both the faculty and central level. Having a Vice President for International Affairs functioning as an adviser to the board and a President who is not part of the formal line structure gives UvA particular strength within the field of internationalisation. It probably makes the task of putting internationalisation on the leaders' agenda a lot easier than is sometimes the case at

the University of Oslo.

This was just a brief description of the main topics that were discussed while in Amsterdam, but I still hope they illustrate the benefit of the UNICA Administrators Mobility Program. I highly recommend that other UNICA administrators take the time and effort to learn from a partner institution as part of their own professional development and as inspiration for their home institution.

Svein Hullstein, International Office,
University of Oslo,

ESN - Erasmus Student Network

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is a pan-European, secular, non-political student organisation. It was established in order to help Erasmus students with the practical problems they experience during their exchange programme. These include practical and social integration at the host institution, better/more information beforehand, etc.

ESN was established in 1990 in Copenhagen, Denmark. ESN works in the interest of exchange students in higher education in Europe. Nowadays, ESN is a professional organisation assisting not only Erasmus students, but all exchange students in Europe.

ESN operates on three levels: local, national and international. At the moment, ESN consists of nearly 100 sections in 19 different countries. The local sections are the heart of the network. They provide a mentor system, in which local students are linked to exchange students to help them with any practical problems they may encounter and to find their way around town and university. The local sections also organize social and cultural meetings, trips and activities. Furthermore, the sections can provide local students with information on exchanges in Europe. ESN aims at improving the practical and social integration of exchange students at the host institution, represents the needs and expectations of exchange students, provides relevant information about academic exchange programmes, and helps evaluate the different programmes.

At the national level there is a National Representative, who represents the country's sections and sits on the Board, and a National Platform. During this platform, all the country's sections get together and discuss policy matters, exchange information, etc. Some countries also have a National Board.

The international level consists of the Board, which is made up of all the National Representatives. The international level runs the network as well as activities of European scope. For specific projects or events, ESN cooperates with ESIB and AEGEE Europe and DG XXII. Besides these bodies we also keep in touch with UNICA, of course, EAIE and other organisations.

The ESN local sections and their universities mutually benefit each other in several ways. The university gains the image of an internationally oriented university because the sections do a good job of welcoming and guiding exchange students. The sections also take some of the load off the shoulders of the international office. Simple questions and problems the exchange students may have are dealt with by the section. The returning students will promote the university as a result of their experience. The existence of an ESN section at a university is very important as it adds a great deal to the experience of studying and living abroad for the exchange student. Going on an exchange programme is not only about a quality academic experience; it is also about experiencing and learning about other cultures and languages. ESN is the organisation that takes care of this important aspect of the exchange programme. Through the cultural and social events the ESN section organises, an extra dimension is added to the programme and the students' stay at the university,

which is essential to the enjoyment of the experience. The sections, in turn, receive support from their university and are seen as playing an important role in improving the programme.
For more information please do not hesitate to contact us at secretary@esn.org. (webpage: www.esn.org)

Suzanne van der Kolk
Vice-President, ESN International
National Representative, The Netherlands

The role of the National Agencies in SOCRATES II

As a follow-up to the UNICA International Relations meeting on May 1999 in Brussels, a survey on the changing role of National Agencies projected by SOCRATES II has been conducted. The UNICA survey consisted of two parts: an examination of the status and organizational structure of the SOCRATES National Agencies; and the relationship between the SOCRATES National Agencies and the UNICA universities. The preliminary results of the survey were presented by Jeanine Hermans, Secretary General, at the informal biannual meeting of National Agencies in Helsinki on October 16, 1999.

Responses by UNICA universities to the questions in part two of the questionnaire, which describes the relationship between the universities and the National Agencies, were remarkably consistent. UNICA universities expressed the clear need for close cooperation with the National Agencies, based on mutual support, transparency and trust. The need to be regularly informed and consulted, both via written materials and national meetings, was another clear opinion expressed by the UNICA Network. In general, UNICA universities stated that they would like to see the working relationship with the National Agency develop in a spirit of teamwork, in which the National Agencies function as a VOICE on behalf of universities to the National Government and European Commission. The participating National Agencies received the presentation very well. Hearing the perspective of the end-user - the role given to the UNICA universities by the National Agencies – was new and innovative. Under the excellent leadership of Michel Jouve of the French National Agency for SOCRATES the discussion then focussed on the question put forward at the conclusion of the presentation: "Double or even multiple roles: Who do the National Agencies represent?"

The final report can be expected in January 2000.

Jeanine Hermans,
Brussels, Belgium

A new challenge

As of December '99 I will leave the UNICA Network to take the position of "special advisor to the pro-rector" at Wageningen Universiteit in the Netherlands.

Let me take this opportunity to say goodbye to all UNICA members. Thank you all for the cooperation and support the UNICA General Secretariat has received this past year. Working for UNICA has been challenging and rewarding and enriched my international experience and understanding.

The enthusiasm and response – even if sometimes delayed - facilitated to a great extent the transition UNICA has been going through as an organisation. The organisation stands, and the seeds for the further development of UNICA's specific identity have been planted. UNICA can look to the future with confidence. The strongest and most valuable asset of UNICA is its spirit of cooperation and trust among the members of the

Network. I think that is the strongest foundation for developing successful projects that one could wish for.

"Tot ziens": until we meet again. Internationalization is a small world after all.

Jeanine Hermans

Wageningen, The Netherlands

NEWS

- Universiteit van Amsterdam

Hilly Goedhart left the university formally as she and her family have chosen to move to the north of the country. Peter Blok also has left the Office of Foreign Relations and started a new assignment as senior advisor for the university in the field of HRM. Marjan Kuiper will act as the coordinator of the office. We, at the UNICA General Secretariat, have enjoyed very much cooperating with both of them.

- General Secretariat

Nathalie Carton will be on holiday from December 1 to January 11 (crossing the Atlantic on a sailboat). The UNICA General Secretariat will stay open: Jocelyn Martin will be in the UNICA office everyday from 8:30 until 10:30. The UNICA office will be closed between Christmas and January 3.

- All Portuguese telephone numbers have changed since October 31st.

Please add a '2' directly after the country code '351'.

- The new contact information for Jeanine Hermans is:

Wageningen Universteit, P.O. box 9101, 6700 HB Wageningen, The Netherlands.

Phone +31 317 48 53 96;

Fax +31 317 48 48 84;

e-mail jeanine.hermans@alg.vl.wag-ur.nl

- The UNICA team wishes you all a very happy New Year and a merry Christmas.

If you wish to contribute to the next issue of '*commUNICAtion*', please send your article to the [General Secretariat in Brussels](#).

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[\(Back to homepage\)](#)