

A Message from the Heart of Europe

Prague Declaration II

The **Prague Declaration I** was published in May 2016 on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the birth of the King of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor, Charles IV, the founder of Charles University. The Rector of Charles University, the Czech Minister of Education, representatives of the Coimbra Group, Europeum, UNICA and representatives of 79 universities throughout Europe and the USA, signed the Declaration.

The signatories pointed out: “Our world has changed dramatically since the era of Charles IV, but the critical mind of free men and women and the free exchange of opinions were, are and will be the most powerful tools and the most precious values in our civilization. We cannot solve any of today’s global problems without science and education.” The institutional autonomy of universities, inseparable from individual academic freedom rights, represents a precondition for such a free debate.

In October 2018, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the foundation of democratic Czechoslovakia, the **Prague Appeal** was adopted and signed by the representatives of Charles University, the Coimbra Group, Europeum, LERU and UNICA. The Prague Appeal, which was launched as a response to Brexit, called for the inclusion of all, openness to cross-border and international cooperation, regardless of local politics or partial interests.

We are gathered here at Charles University on September 24, 2021, to evaluate the role of universities and their networks in Europe, and launch a **Message from the Heart of Europe (Prague Declaration II)**. Since the first Prague Declaration I, our cooperation deepened and proved to be essential in many fields. We organized many ventures and launched many joint documents.

But, we cannot remain only optimistic.

The world and Europe five years after Prague Declaration I are not a safer place: the limitation of academic freedoms in some countries, populism, restrictions caused by the pandemic, the questioning of experts, have all come to the fore. Research needs a free atmosphere guaranteed by the institutional autonomy of the universities, a truly free exchange of opinions and information and mutual respect. The close cooperation of scientists and truly international open science are essential for the solution of any crisis. We experienced that especially during the Covid crisis.

Closer cooperation in teaching and research are essential for articulating, discussing and solving complex questions. The Prague Declaration I warned against simplified solutions and growing populism. The danger is still there and democracy, tolerance, humanism and open-mindedness are still under threat. Universities can contribute to addressing this threat, by enabling and supporting a free exchange of students, academics, staff, knowledge and best practices, by creating a universal polis of freedom and by nurturing and defending a common set of values and principles such as critical thinking and academic freedom.

Universities and their networks welcome their inclusion in the consultation processes for the formation of a new Education and Research Area on the national and European level. They call for the respect of universities' autonomy and individual academic freedom.

Global challenges need global solutions. An open society and free universities exist to serve the common good of humankind. Our students, the young generation, are key to overcome the challenges of the future. Autonomy, freedom, humanism, open-mindedness and respect for "otherness" have been the basic principles and values of universities in Europe, throughout their long history, and they will continue to be in the future. These values, together with top research and higher education, are the common ground for creating the future of global society. This is our mission!

Signatories:

Prague, September 24, 2021

Tomáš Zima (Charles University, Rector)

Ludovic Thilly (Coimbra, Chair of the Executive Board)

Michael Murphy (EUA, President)

Andrew Graham (Europaeum, Board of Trustees)

Kurt Deketelaere (LERU, Secretary General)

Luciano Saso (UNICA, President)

Prague Declaration <https://cuni.cz/uken-551.html>

Prague Appeal <https://cuni.cz/UKEN-837.html>