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# Legends of Czech Science Who Succeeded Against the Odds Remembered at the Anniversary Meeting

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“We might be the best out of Czech homebodies, but we should be much better than this”, was one of the key ideas of Rector Václav Hampl’s speech at the ceremonial meeting celebrating Charles University’s 663<sup>rd</sup> anniversary on April 7. With Rector Hampl at the meeting of the Czech Conference of Rectors, the speech was delivered by the Prorector for International Affairs and Mobility Professor Jan Škrha. The speech urged the academic community to create high quality international environment at all faculties and suggested to establish a national fund to finance or co-finance exchanges of young researchers between 25 and 35 years of age and reciprocal exchanges of young researchers from abroad.

“With the upcoming division of Czech universities into the categories of research universities and “the rest”, Charles University must be aware of the requirements that are inextricably connected to achieving and maintaining the status of excellence”, Rector continued.

Rector asked the academic community to rethink the role of international university partnerships, of which Charles University has over 200, and use them in a way that is more relevant to research and education of young academics. In his view, postdoctoral and young assistant professor exchanges should not be just one semester long, but they should instead follow a research plan and allow for participation in research projects abroad. He also criticised the insufficient numbers of students taking advantage of the Erasmus exchange programme.

**“Not even the legends of Czech Science worked in ideal conditions – and yet they succeeded”**

Those gathered in the Great Hall of Karolinum surely appreciated the mention of the fight against ministerial bureaucracy, which consumes a large portion of academics’ energy. Rector reminded the audience that “already back in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, many scholars whose results secured them their own departments spent the rest of their productive life as academic bureaucrats out of touch with actual research. But we cannot afford to waste our potential this way”. He also urged the academic community to find creative ways of reducing routine work and come up with mechanisms of opposing the dictate of sheer quantity of research output established by the system of governmental funding.

Rector mentioned the Egyptologist František Lexa, the Hittitologist Bedřich Hrozný and Jaroslav Heyrovský as examples of the positive effect of international collaboration at Charles University in the past. According to the Rector, Charles University’s internationally renowned scholars excelled in the fields in which vigorous international collaboration was a pre-requisite of academic existence. The negative effect of the lack of international collaboration can prove fatal, as shown by the example of the excellent physiologist and neurologist Professor Vilém Laufberger, who was in the 1950’s nominated for the Nobel Prize for his 1935 discovery of ferritin, but in the end remained a star of only Czech, not international science.



Left to right: Professor Jiří Pešek and Professor Jiří Kraus

“If we wish to succeed in our mission of mining for knowledge, we must collaborate in both national and international academic community”, concluded the Rector, reminding that collegiality is one of the key values of the academic community, even though it is at odds with the extreme individualism and pragmatic egotism which plagues the Czech academia.

In the following speech, Professor Lubomír Mlčoch from the Faculty of Social Sciences commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Professor Karel Engliš, the greatest Czech economist.



Right to left: Professor Josef Petráň with his wife, assistant professor Dr. Martin Čížek and the wife of Professor Milan Sojka

Professor Josef Petráň received the Representation Award for his book about the building of Karolinum, published by the Karolinum press. The Creativity Award was granted in memoriam to Professor Milan Sojka for his book "The History of Economic Theories". The publication sums up Professor Sojka's lifelong work. Dr. Martin Čížek from the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics was also awarded the Creativity Award for his paper "Experimental Results for H-2 Formation from H- and H and Implications for First Star Formation" published in the Science journal.