
Reforms are worth carrying out, says Prime Minister Petr Nečas after meeting students

11. 5. 2011, By: Lucie Kettnerová, Translation: Pavla Horáková

Using the “language of numbers” Prime Minister Petr Nečas attempted to convince Charles University students as well as members of the academic community of the necessity to carry out the government-proposed reforms. On Tuesday May 10, the crowded Great Hall of the Faculty of Arts listened with interest to his arguments in favour of a speedy implementation of – above all – the pension reform. The discussion which followed included questions as well as criticism of the current government. The meeting was opened by Charles University Rector, Prof. Václav Hampl, the discussion was chaired by the Dean of the Charles University Faculty of Arts, doc. PhDr. Michal Stehlík, Ph.D.

At the start, Charles University Rector Prof. Václav Hampl welcomed Prime Minister Nečas to the Faculty of Arts, mentioning that the university, too, had experienced the reforms concerning both the financing of research and university education. The Prime Minister had approximately 40 minutes to convince the audience of the necessity of the government’s reform. “We are facing two significant challenges, not only as a political representation but as a country, as a nation and as citizens. The first challenge we need to tackle is the demographic development,” Mr. Nečas said and added, “The second challenge ahead of us and ahead of the whole world is globalization.” He outlined the demographic development, saying that by 2050 the ratio of economically active and economically inactive population will be 1:1.

Many questions were asked in the following discussion with the Prime Minister. The Dean of the Faculty of Arts used his privilege to ask the first question to inquire about the steps the reform of research financing should take next. The rest of the questions were asked by members of the audience.

The Prime Minister described the reform of research funding as one of the most important reforms (even though it does not get as much media attention) because it had a fundamental impact on the country’s future outlook. He also said that while all chapters in this year’s state budget had suffered cuts, the science, research and innovation chapter was the only one actually boosted (to 24.9 billion crowns). According to Mr. Nečas, the Czech Republic’s inability to allocate the money efficiently was a serious problem. He also admitted that he was curious to see the recommendations an audit by the British company Technopolis would produce, and described the current system of science assessment as unsatisfactory. “It is necessary to introduce a different system as quickly as possible in order to evaluate the disciplines in an international context,” the Prime Minister pointed out. He also admitted that discussion on the reform of universities was delayed as the Education Ministry had not made the most efficient use of time in the second half of 2010.