



22nd Annual Conference

CONFERENCE RATIONALE

Riga (Latvia) - May 10th / 11th , 2012

Hosted by Banku Augstskola Riga

The conference themes are:

- **Lifelong Learning for professional higher education**
- **Professional higher education and the welfare society**

The 22nd EURASHE Annual Conference will bring together leaders in the field of Professional Higher Education for a comprehensive overview of both related themes. The Conference will be held in Riga (Latvia) on May 10-11, 2012 at the Radisson Latvija Hotel. The Conference is hosted by the Banku Augstskola (BSF) in partnership with the FLLLEX project consortium.

The Conference is traditionally a meeting of EURASHE's members, outside experts from a range of academic fields and stakeholders to construct a unique range of educational experiences of relevance to professionals from all geographical regions and sectors of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and beyond. This conference will look at two features which are crucial for today's developments in Europe, namely Lifelong Learning and the Welfare Society.

Lifelong Learning is hailed as by many European member states as an instrument to address the problem of a decreasing working population and to undercut the need for an increasingly better educated labour force.

"At first sight Lifelong Learning may be regarded as an inclusive part of professional higher education, which has always been closely linked to the professional life of its students and alumni. In reality, it is not so evident that institutions cover the entire learning life span of a student.", explains Klaas Vansteenhuyse (Leuven University College – BE, coordinator of the FLLLEX project).

"The conference will present the results of a European funded project initiated by EURASHE about the impact of Lifelong Learning strategies on professional higher education (FLLLEX). The project has investigated how national governments attempt to implement European strategies

into their national legislation. This in turn should strongly influence the (professional) higher education institution, which are generally funded by that same government. Results from our project show that national and European strategies are only implemented in varying degrees. The project further aims to aid institutions in assessing the relationship between their strategy to incorporate lifelong learning within their institution in response to the needs of learners and businesses. This tool will be demonstrated at the conference, along with results of surveys among learners and employers. The project's final publication will be made available to all participants of the conference."

The EURASHE Annual Conference 2012 will also explore and address the challenges brought by another thorny topic: the Welfare Society. It is no coincidence that the European Commission has adopted the theme of 'Active Ageing' as the topic in focus for 2012.

Indeed, in most European countries since the previous century the states structures have included a "social contract" between the state and its citizens: the State takes responsibility for the health and education of its citizens, supports the weak and assists the old. And in return, the citizens work for the state, either directly or through taxation. Various political systems and differences in economic resources have resulted in different models and standards for the provision of services, but the basic construction of a "Welfare Society" has remained in focus, and in most European countries the growing economies after the 2nd World War have also led to expansions of the range or level of public responsibilities.

However, the Welfare Society is now more challenged than ever. Not only are we all facing economic recession and increased global competition, but we are also in the middle of a unprecedented change in the demographic balance, especially with a fast growing percentage of elderly and a just as rapidly decreasing labour-market-active population. For all actors in the public or semi-public sector this means that in a very near future fewer professionals will have to better educate our children and students, nurse our sick and disabled, support the outcasts and assist the old.

This development also challenges the H.E. institutions that educate these professionals. We have to prepare our students for a future where basic knowledge and skills will have to be on par with-job-innovation and an extensive use of IT-based solutions in all fields.

Yet, while the primary partners for institutions to talk to when it comes to lifelong learning seem to be the businesses, the web of our society is much broader than that. Stefan Delplace, secretary-general of EURASHE makes that point: "Many other organisations contribute to our welfare society. This aspect as well needs skilled employees. The connection to Lifelong Learning also seems obvious here.

Schools, hospitals, social and health care, cultural organisations,... they all cover aspects of our European societies beyond the pure economic needs. While it may be daring to discuss these elements in the midst of a financial crisis, EURASHE members have the responsibility to train future professionals for this sector as well."