

VIETNAMESE STUDENTS AGAIN AT THE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF OSTRAVA

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Abstract - The Technical University of Ostrava (TU Ostrava) is the fourth oldest Czech university. Nearly fifteen thousand students both at pregradual and postgradual study programmes visit its six faculties. Very many Asian students from China, North Korea and Vietnam used to study at the TU Ostrava before the Velvet Revolution. The Czechoslovak government within the frame of an international support of communist countries sponsored them. The tradition was then interrupted.

Index Terms - international students, Asia, cooperation

INTRODUCTION

The Technical University of Ostrava (TU Ostrava) is the fourth oldest Czech university. Nearly fifteen thousand students both at pregradual and postgradual study programmes visit its six faculties. Many Asian students from China, North Korea and Vietnam used to study at the TU Ostrava before the Velvet Revolution. They were sponsored by the Czechoslovak government within the frame of an international support of communist countries. The tradition was then interrupted.

Two years ago, we started preparation works to revitalize a study of Vietnamese students at TU Ostrava. There were many reasons for it. Among them: a decreasing interest of Czech students to study technical disciplines, many our graduates at good job positions in Vietnam, an initiative both of the Vietnam association for Promoting and Supporting Educational Development in Hanoi and the organisation of Vietnam community in Ostrava and Northern Moravia.

For many reasons it has been decided to organise study in a Czech language. TU Ostrava has made an Agreement on Training Co-operation with the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies (HUFS). According to the Agreement, a selection of students and the first part of training students in Czech language is ensured by the HUFS. The second part of preparation of selected students for studies in Czech language is organised already in Ostrava. This academic year –2001/02, twenty one Vietnamese students are studying at four faculties and continuing to study Czech language. The paper will discuss problems and dilemmas concerning the preparation and implementation of the project, present results and future ideas.

The studies were organised completely in Czech language after the students had passed through 1st year

course of Czech language in Podebrady, and it was realized in a frame of international agreement. The number of Vietnamese was increasing till 1970 - 1972, when it was 70 students = 70 % of all international students at TUO.

Students have started attending also Faculty of Mining and Geology. Within 1967 - 1995, approximately 29 students a year were studying at TUO more than one-third of all international students at TUO. In 1983, the second wave of the international students at the mentioned faculties graduated at number 41, which was 38 % of all international students at TUO. After 1989, students were only finishing their studies, there were not new ones coming.

INITIATIVES TOWARDS RESTORING THE COOPERATION

First ideas to attract new students from Vietnam to our university were initiated for two reasons:

- a) Decreasing interest of Czech students in technical disciplines
- b) interest from the Vietnam side to restore studies of their students at TUO

Nowadays, only about 17 percent of all applications to universities are directed to technical branches and also quality (knowledge, education) of applicants has been decreasing. Interest of Vietnamese side comes both from Vietnam as around 90 thousand people in Vietnam speaks either Czech or Slovak language and lots of them work at high and valued positions - inclusive of the deputy of prime minister of Vietnam government who graduated from TUO, and from Vietnamese community living in the Czech Republic. Officially, this initiative is supported by:

1. Vietnam Association for Promoting and Supporting Educational Development (VIPAJEO)
2. The Hanoi University of Foreign Studies
3. Embassy of Vietnam in Prague
4. Vietnamese Association in the Czech Republic (its vice-chairman has also graduated from TUO)

We have considered preparation of courses for Vietnamese students both in English and in Czech language according to the Higher education act 111/1998. As the main criterion was to avoid a tuition for Vietnamese students, the courses in Czech language were chosen over English ones, because students do not have to pay a tuition if they attend the same courses as Czech students. We have co-signed mutual agreements with Vietnamese institutions involved in the cooperation – our university, VIPASED

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and Hanoi University of Foreign Studies. The agreements specify methods of selection and preparation of students for TUO.

THE FIRST GROUP OF VIETNAMESE STUDENTS AT TUO

Based on mutual agreement, 32 students in 2 groups were trained in Vietnam to start with their studies at TUO in 2001/2002. Students had passed through 3-month course of Czech language organized by the department of the Czech and Slovak language at the Hanoi university of Foreign Studies.

After some problems with visas for studies in Czech Republic, 11 students have arrived (instead of originally planned group of 17 students) to TUO in May 2001 and another 11 member group came in the second wave (originally 15) in October 2001. Both groups immediately started attending intensive courses of Czech language.

In spite of the fact that most of the students had passed at least one year of university education in Vietnam by then, they were enrolled to particular faculties as follows:

- Faculty of Economics: **16** students (the original contracts between TUO and Vietnam have been initiated by EF)
- Faculty of Mechanical Engineering: **2**
- Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Informatics: **2**
- Faculty of Civil Engineering: **1**

The Czech language course was organized by our department of Foreign Languages and financed by Vietnamese side. In the middle of June 2002, first exams – both oral and written – of the Czech language took place. The final exams and study results during the whole year enabled us to make a decision about further “existence” of the Vietnamese students at TUO. All the students of technical faculties have gained necessary credits to follow in the second semester and despite their low knowledge of Czech language they successfully passed such subjects as: Basics of Mathematics, Basics of Physics, Constructive geometry, Mathematics I, Linear Algebra, Chemistry and so on. There is a strong expectation that they all will progress to the second year.

On the other side, Vietnamese students of our Faculty of Economic, where the need of better dictionary of Czech language is much stronger, have passed exam from Maths only. They got permission to repeat the 1st year after they had successfully passed an exam of Czech language.

One student who was not interested in studies at all has been sent back to Vietnam on his expenses.

Study results for the first year stay at TUO were sent to Vietnam to VIPASED, inclusive of suggestions of further proceeding and to Hanoi University, to inform parents of the students

FIRST EXPERIENCES AND MEASURES TAKEN

Based on up to now experiences with Vietnamese students, we have proposed some additional conditions and rules besides the generally valid ones of the law 326/1999 on Foreigners' Stay in Czech Republic.

The up-dated conditions for applicants for studies at TUO are:

- 1) students will be enrolled in the first year of a university education or studying at a high school with a nostrification and achieving excellent study results
- 2) students will have a close investigation by a doctor already from Vietnam
- 3) students will have sufficient financial funds for their studies in the Czech Republic including the one year course of Czech language in Ostrava
- 4) students will study Czech language at least for 3 months in a preparation course at the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies
- 5) at the end of the course, students will have to pass successfully two exams: a) written test of Czech language b) written test of Mathematics; the tests will be prepared at our university and delivered to Hanoi university by Czech consul in Hanoi
- 6) students will be admitted to our Faculty of Economics only as an exception, they will be admitted preferably to one of our 6 technical faculties inclusive our new Faculty of Safety Engineering and Risk Management .

The recommendations were consulted and proved by our Minister of Foreign Affairs in Prague. To speed up the visa procedures for Vietnamese students, it was also agreed that a delegate from our consulate in Hanoi would be looking after entry exams already at the Hanoi University.

These days, 20 new students are being prepared for their studies at our university. They have to pass exams from Maths and basic of Czech Language in Hanoi on the July 15 2002. 15 of those who will succeed will be accepted to one of our technical faculties and to 1-year intensive course of Czech language in Ostrava.

CONCLUSIONS

After many years of “absence”, new Asians students have got enrolled in studies at TUO in 2001. The students came from Vietnam based on new agreements between TUO and VIPASED and Hanoi University of Foreign Language. Two groups of 21 students from HUFL had to pass 3-month course of Czech language and afterwards had continued in an intensive course of Czech language in Ostrava. In October 2001 they got accepted to Faculty of Economics and to 3 technical faculties.

After the 1st year of both good and bad experiences with the students, our university management had to accept additional conditions for next groups of students from Vietnam. Among the most serious newly set conditions were presumption of much better knowledge of Czech language, more careful medical control taken already from

Vietnam and closer cooperation of our delegates with Vietnamese university in visa application procedure. Also experiences from our Faculty of Economics proved that only exceptional students who would pass difficult entry exam could succeed there.

We do realize that beginnings are never easy and “serve” as a basement for further improvements. We learn from our mistakes as we wish to develop our cooperation with Vietnam in future.