“Brazilian-Hungarian Relations in The Internationalization of Higher Education - motivation and factors of decision in selecting a foreign university” was the theme of a symposium held in the Senate Hall of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. The event was generously hosted by the Hungarian Rectors’ Conference (HRC). Invited guests included a delegation representing ABRUEM (The Brazilian Association of Rectors of State and Municipal Universities), consisting of 21 HE administrators from leading Brazilian institutes of Higher Education, among them a total of 12 university rectors and 4 vice-rectors. The association boasts of 45 affiliated universities in Brazil, the student populations of which total over 700,000. Brazil, as one of the BRIC economies, is an important source of foreign students in Hungary’s internationalization strategy. Also in attendance at the symposium were numerous members of HRC.

The conference opened with a warm welcome to the participants from Dr Péter Szalay, Vice-Rector for Education and professor of the host University. In his opening speech he outlined features of Hungarian-Brazilian co-operation, starting from the early 1990s. Dr Szalay mentioned the 50 Brazilian students currently registered at ELTE and the Hungarian lectors teaching Hungarian language and culture at Brazilian Universities.

Following the Vice-rector’s welcome, the first plenary speaker of the day was Mr Gábor Dobos, Head of Department for Study in Hungary at the Tempus Public Foundation, and responsible for the implementation of the government’s Stipendium Hungaricum programme and the Campus Mundi mobility project. Support for the internationalization process in Hungarian HEIs also falls within his remit. Mr Dobos commenced his presentation with a general introduction to the work of Tempus, initially outlining the range of grants and scholarships administered by the Foundation. Turning to an exposition of facts about the Erasmus programme’s external international network, he pointed out that 65 partners are now working in collaboration with the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship scheme, with the total number of scholarships standing at 5288. He went on to give the conference participants some basic
statistics about Hungarian Higher Education, highlighting the specific participation of Brazilian students in Hungarian HE, which at its peak in 2014/15 was around 1300. He subsequently mentioned Hungary’s Higher Education Internationalization Policy, the aim of which is to increase the number of foreign students studying in HEIs to 40,000 by the year 2023. He added that the number of Brazilian students annually receiving scholarships via Tempus in Hungarian Higher Education was 250, of which 100 were at bachelor level, 120 at master’s level and 30 engaged in doctoral programmes. He completed his presentation by talking in some detail about Research and Development Activities in connection with The Campus Mundi mobility scheme.

Dr Mar Gutiérrez-Colón, ex-Vice-Rector at Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV), Tarragona, Spain succeeded Mr Dobos with a presentation on her responsibilities and achievements in the internationalization process at URV during her recent tenure as Vice-Rector. She carefully emphasized the importance of executing a process involving both students and staff, not only academics but also including administrative personnel.

The next plenary speaker was Dr Lukács Eszter, Vice-Rector for Educational Affairs at Széchenyi István University, Győr. Having first expressed her gratitude to Dr Zoltán Dubéczi, Secretary General of The Hungarian Rectors’ Conference for inviting her to speak at the symposium, Dr Lukács commenced her presentation with a mention of SZE’s partnership with the University Rovira i Virgili (URV), Tarragona, Spain. She acknowledged the role played by Dr Mar Gutiérrez-Colón, ex-Vice-Rector of URV, as well as that of Dr Barnabás Kovács, Consul General at the Hungarian Consulate in Barcelona, in encouraging the strong links and the areas of cooperation existing between the two institutions in Győr and Tarragona.
The thrust of Dr Lukács’s presentation was her exposition of the dynamic pace of Széchenyi University’s current internationalization strategy. She provided details of the plan to offer 22 English-taught major study programmes from September 2019, reminding conference participants that prospective students from the 65 partner countries who are eligible for these study programmes may apply for Stipendium Hungaricum funding via the Tempus Public Foundation. She further highlighted two other new international postgraduate programmes available from September next year in the field of Law and Governance run by the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences. As evidence of the University’s strong commitment to internationalization she emphasized the exponential rise in the number of English-taught programmes on offer, rising from seven in September 2018 to twenty-four in September 2019.

Emphasizing the continuous efforts of the management of Széchenyi University to extend the internationalization process to all aspects of academic life, Dr Lukács mentioned the establishment of an international branch of the Students’ Union as well as the international facilities offered by the University’s state-of-the-art library. She further underscored the University’s drive towards attracting international students to Győr as she portrayed the continual renewal and expansion of the institution’s infrastructure. As an example of this, she quoted the high quality and well-equipped Halls of Residence in which all foreign students are guaranteed a room on-campus and which also served as accommodation for competitors in both the 2017 European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF) and the European Athletics U18 Championships held in Győr in July 2018. In her concluding comments, Dr Lukács noted how the Győr campus has an increasingly international feel as it is now common to hear English spoken in the hallways, offices, lecture halls and aulas of the University.

Subsequently, it was the turn of Dr José Celso Freire Júnior, Provost for International Affairs at São Paolo State University (Unesp). The themes of his presentation included ‘Global mobility: science on the move’, and ‘Determinants for mobility of PhD. students’, followed by an overview of the Brazilian HE system and the graduate system. Dr Freire Júnior concluded with an investigation into research areas in Hungary and Brazil from 2013-2018.
The next speaker was Secretary General of the Hungarian Rectors’ Conference and Head of Programme for Science without Borders (CSF), Dr Zoltán Dubéczi, whose presentation was entitled ‘The path leading to a strong Brazilian-Hungarian cooperation’. His talk initially centred on the topic of the HRC’s role in internationalization, followed by a brief overview of Hungarian Higher Education and an analysis of the 2200 CSF scholarship holders in Hungary 2013-2016. His talk emphasized the bilateral element of the cooperation, as he described the sponsored Hungarian Language and Culture Courses in operation in Brazil in cooperation with the local expatriate Hungarian community.

The final presentation, given by Dr Barnabás Kovács, Consul General of Hungary in Barcelona, centred on a joint research project carried out by Dr Kovács and Dr Dubéczi on the quality of the international students’ study experience in Hungary. His analysis was accompanied by a series of slides illustrating results in a range of feedback areas extracted from the student questionnaire.

As Secretary General of HRC, Dr Dubéczi subsequently gave a brief summary of the symposium and wished the Brazilian delegation a good journey back to their homeland.