

**First ASEM Rectors' Conference: Asia – Europe
Higher Education Leadership Dialogue
“Between Tradition and Reform: Universities
in Asia and Europe at the Crossroads”**

Dinner Speech

“Universities as the Core of Worldwide Science
Systems”

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President, German Rectors' Conference (HRK)

Tuesday, 28 October 2008

Dear Dr Rathchavy,

Dear Ambassador Khanh,

Dear Professor Lenzen,

Dear Professor de Maret,

Dear Mr Ehrenberg,

Dear Representatives of Ministries and Politics,

Honourable Ambassadors,

Dear Representatives of our Partner Organisations,

Esteemed Colleagues and distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to meet all of you here tonight. The German Rectors' Conference, as the voice of German universities, is proud to be one of the hosts of this inaugural meeting of higher education leaders from Asia and Europe. Thank you for joining us here in Berlin and for contributing to this first ever ASEM Rectors' Conference. I hope you are enjoying your stay in Berlin.

The organisation of the First ASEM Rectors' Conference is a joined effort by the ASEAN University Network, the Asia-Europe Foundation, the European University Association, the Freie Universität Berlin and the German Rectors' Conference. I should like to thank all our partners for the excellent cooperation.

In this context, I would especially like to thank the Freie Universität Berlin for offering to host our inaugural meeting and for welcoming us so warmly to Berlin. I would also like to sincerely thank the Ministry of Education and Research for supporting this conference generously.

With altogether 355 institutions of higher education – 109 universities, 191 universities of applied sciences and 55 colleges of arts and music – Germany has a well developed, diverse and highly productive tertiary sector. You are visiting Germany at a time when the universities – and the education sector as a whole – are still under the impression of the national education summit that was held only a few days ago, on 22 October, in the city of Dresden. Federal Chancellor Merkel and the Minister Presidents of the sixteen federal states agreed to spend 10% of GDP on education and research by the year 2015.

While German universities recognise and welcome the fact that federal and state governments are inclined to assign high priority to education and research, we still see ample room for improvement. Given the deficits that exist in terms of human resources and physical facilities, the core budget earmarked for university teaching and research faces a financial back-log of 3.5 billion euros per year. In addition, as our calculations prove, an average extra of approximately 2.6 billion euros has to flow into the higher education sector each year over the coming years in order to be able to create the study places that will be needed and to implement the required qualitative improvements in teaching.

I believe that it is the common tasks of all of us, who are assembled here tonight, to convince those who write off investments in education with reference to the current financial crisis that a good education is the best way to secure the future for our young people. And now it is all the more important that business and industry are strengthened by being able to recruit excellently qualified young people. It is now, in particular, that we need universities that are strong in their research, that provide impetus and momentum for social and economic innovation.

Acceptance of the fact that future growth and jobs depend on a well functioning system of research and innovation and on a well educated work force has grown in Europe in the aftermath of the Lisbon meeting of European heads of state in the year 2000. They declared their intention "to make Europe the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world". It is obvious that investment into universities at the core of the European science system and investment into the brains of young Europeans is key to the achievement of this ambitious goal. With a view to increasing global competition, European states agreed to invest three per cent of GDP into research and development by the year 2010. We highly welcome the fact that the German federal government has endorsed the Lisbon agenda and has declared research and development a top priority. With the high-tech strategy and the internationalisation strategy, being implemented under the leadership of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the government has – for the first time – formulated an overarching national strategy, involving all relevant actors.

Additionally, within the European context, the Bologna process focuses on European universities, aiming to strengthen the brand "Higher Education made in Europe". 46 European ministers in charge of higher education

have agreed to introduce a number of reform measures, the most striking feature being the Europe-wide introduction of a two-tiered system of degrees. These recent developments prove that a European Area of Higher Education and Research is clearly taking shape, putting higher education institutions where they belong to be: into the centre of the European science and research system.

Based on these observations, allow me to put forward seven theses on the nature and role of universities in the 21st century:

I. Universities in the 21st century are at the heart of national and international science systems.

All over the world, universities conserve and hand down existing knowledge and create and generate new knowledge. Universities have, since their foundation over 800 years ago, prepared young people for their leading role in society. Through the unique interrelation between study, research and knowledge transfer, higher education institutions are placed at the centre of national innovation systems and global competitiveness. Universities are – and will remain – at the “heart” of our science systems.

II. Universities in the 21st century are prepared for new challenges.

All institutions have to constantly adapt and renew themselves in order to remain competitive and relevant to the needs of individuals and societies as a whole. This is especially true for universities: They are agents of change; while they are undergoing change processes themselves. Now more than ever, higher education institutions are facing tough competition and are increasingly competing with each other. At the same time, expectations from business and the general society towards universities are rising.

With a view to enabling universities to fulfil their mission the German university presidents and rectors consider it of paramount importance that both, the funding and legal frameworks support universities in fulfilling their mission. Universities need autonomy in determining and developing their academic profile, student profile, staffing requirements, internationalisation strategy and research and development strategy in order to remain on top. In return, universities are accountable towards the

government and the tax payer. We are glad to see the relationship between government and universities slowly, but surely shifting from a strongly hierarchical one – this is at least true in the German and mostly also in the European context – to a relationship between partners.

III. Universities in the 21st century are diverse.

The unity of research and teaching is still essential to the German universities of today. Just as Humboldt's principle is part of the idea of "universitas", so is a wide and diverse spectrum of academic subjects.

The German university presidents and rectors have been promoting the diversification of the higher education system – within and between different types of higher education institutions – for a long time. Ideally, each and every institution will be able to find its adequate role and place within a diversified system. This requires a system of academic institutions with highly diversified profiles, based on equality of esteem for different missions. However, we need to take a close look, ensuring that the overall system is fit to cope with the challenges of international competition. This process can only be fair and beneficial for our universities within a framework of sustainable state funding.

IV. Universities in the 21st century are innovative and entrepreneurial.

Alexander von Humboldt was a well-travelled man. In a lecture in Berlin in 1827 he held the view that national systems of higher education and research on the one hand and business and industry on the other hand are highly interdependent and would have to face international competition in a concerted effort in order to thrive and prosper.

Higher education and research systems must be further oriented towards the transfer of technology and applications for research. Teaching must be far more connected to actual practice. But the orientation towards ultimate application in research should not be understood as weakening pure research, it should rather be seen as better utilisation.

Cooperation between companies and universities can assume many different shapes: from informal cooperation to contractual agreements or even to the establishment of joint research centres. But most importantly,

in order to enhance cooperation between industry and academia mental flexibility and a vision with regard to the application potential of research results and the protection of intellectual property rights is called for on both sides. Only when trust has been built up and fair “rules of the game” have been established, a win-win situation can be created. Above all, our highest commodity – our academic freedom – is to be protected.

V. Universities in the 21st century are socially responsible.

Universities accept their public responsibility for promoting social equity and an inclusive society. They have to make every effort to widen access to all members of society and to provide opportunities to succeed to all those who have the potential to benefit from higher education. This requires partnership with governments and other parts of the educational system.

Our university graduates shall not only be well-trained experts with specific competencies, but open-minded, true global citizens with an understanding of local, regional and global issues who are ready to take on responsibility.

In this context, lifelong learning is one of the core tasks for universities in the years to come, both with regard to continuing education and training for well-qualified graduates and to initial education for various societal groups.

VI. Universities of the 21st century are transnational.

Higher education institutions have “open doors” to the world. Since their beginnings, universities have been acting in an international context. Nowadays, just as in the past, international collaboration enriches research, teaching and study. Therefore, the mobility of students, teachers and researchers is a prerequisite for the successful operation of universities and the competitiveness of national science and research systems.

However, in the long run, it will depend on the ability of the entire university to design and implement a broad strategy for internationalising, based on the university’s profile and mission and encompassing all areas of a higher education institution – from studies to teaching, research, services and administration.

Rather than re-acting to external globalisation forces, universities must become actors themselves, striking a balance between cooperation and competition. Successful, effective and sustainable internationalisation will depend, first and foremost, on a self-concept of the university as a global institution. What is required is not the internationalisation of teaching, studies and research, but transnationality of the university as a whole.

VII. Universities in the 21st century are creative workshops for the future.

Universities are key players for a successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society. They offer the institutional structure that allows both, the creative development of the individual, curiosity-driven research effort as well as strategic research initiatives. At the same time, they serve as centres of applied research in close cooperation with industry and business.

Nevertheless, universities need to preserve their responsibility as being the “guardians” of research knowledge as a public good. The open access to and dissemination and preservation of scientific data are of central importance for the competitiveness of higher education and research systems worldwide.

Universities worldwide contribute to the development of our societies and life on our common planet. Climate change, energy issues, increasing longevity, the rapid pace of technological change, growing global interdependence and rising economic inequality: All these issues require investigation, fundamental research as well as technological and social innovation, solving problems as they arise and ensuring economic success combined with social stability.

With a view to the global challenges at hand, it is clear that we need to strengthen international collaboration in teaching, research and development. The exchange of researchers – especially the joint promotion of early-stage researchers – and the joint use of scientific and technological potential will help us to solve global problems and create and market innovative products more quickly and efficiently.

We need to educate our young people in a way that enables them to shape our future world actively, confidently and responsibly. For our mutual benefit, we need well educated people who know and have

experienced different cultures and we need sustainable international linkages.

The German Rectors' Conference has always emphasized the importance of international cooperation. We have always been – and still are – actively engaged in facilitating international collaboration for our member institutions. As Asia and Europe are emerging, at the global level, as two major players in the field of higher education, universities in both regions need to adjust their internationalisation strategies, in order to respond to these changes.

We all know: Establishing mutually beneficial cooperative links is not always easy: Diverging interests need to be negotiated and common interests need to be defined.

We need to build up trust in long-term partnerships.

We need to build bridges between the universities of our two regions.

This is why the First ASEM Rectors' Conference is so important and why we are gladly part of it. Thank you all for joining this important initiative.