

**15th Anniversary
of the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland – CRASP**

Address on behalf of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK)

Professor Dr. Klaus Dicke
Rector of the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena and
Spokesman of the Universities Member Group in the HRK

Anniversary Session
at the University of Warsaw, On May 25, 2012

– Check against Delivery –

Madam President Chałasińska-Macukow,
Madam Minister Kudrycka,
Madam President Nazaré,
Mr President Woźnicki,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I.

I am delighted and honoured to convey to you – the members of the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland – the cordial greetings and best wishes of the German Rectors' Conference. I bring special greetings to you, Ms Chałasińska-Macukow, from our recently retired president, Ms Wintermantel.

These greetings and our good wishes go hand in hand with our gratitude for the trust and close cooperation between both our organisations. Cooperation between HRK and Polish partner organisations goes back to a time even before CRASP was founded.

II.

Out of the many joint activities and meetings between representatives of our organisations, I would like to elaborate on three events today.

The first is the visit made by a small delegation of German Rectors' Conference Executive Board members to Poland in March 1997, at a time when CRASP was still under development. Our partner at the time was the Rectors' Conference of Universities in Poland, with which HRK had established initial contacts as early as 1992.

The HRK delegation was led by the then HRK president, Professor Hans-Uwe Erichsen, who was at that time also President of the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences, one of the two founding organisations of the European University Association (EUA).

During three large meetings in Cracow, Warsaw, and Gdansk, my German colleagues met the rectors of almost every Polish university. The central topic of their discussions was the role – or more specifically, the necessity – of autonomous university representation.

My colleagues were extremely impressed by the resolute determination of their Polish counterparts to consolidate the hard-won national freedom with a lobby for all universities across the nation acting independently of existing political structures.

Then, as now, we in Germany and you in Poland were united by the determination to create the best possible conditions for universities, so that they may fulfil their mission in terms of research, teaching, and service to society according to the best of academic traditions.

On this basis, we were able to simultaneously develop productive bilateral higher education collaborations between both our countries' universities, and thereby between our member institutions. The number of higher education collaborations provides a rough but very meaningful indication of this: in 1993, we recorded 322 collaboration agreements between German and Polish universities; today there are almost 1,200.

This leads me neatly to the second joint activity I would like to mention here today. As a contribution to the German-Polish Year 2005/2006, our two organisations jointly hosted a conference in Cracow on the topic of "Overcoming History and Looking to the Future".

The meeting was intentionally scheduled for the period from the 8th to the 10th of May 2005, 60 years after the Nazi reign of terror in Germany and across great parts of Europe had come to an end. The conference took place in Cracow, the city where the German occupiers enforced the so called "Sonderaktion Krakau" in November of 1939 and which also stood as a symbol for the planned destruction of the Polish intelligentsia by the Nazi regime. In full awareness of those events, it was the express aim of the conference to emphasise the great significance of German-Polish cooperation in research and teaching for the benefit of the mutual cooperation of our two nations and to demonstrate its existence in the present.

That university collaborations have today become a reality is proven by the many people involved at our universities, by the students, junior researchers, and professors all pursuing joint scientific interests and goals.

May I, as rector of the University of Jena, add at this point that the Jagiellonian University of Cracow and the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena are celebrating the 50th anniversary of their partnership this year. The first agreement was signed in 1962, it was renewed in 1992. Generations of students, professors, researchers and other staff have studied, taught or done research at the partner university. Most of them are still having close relations to their host university or to colleagues there.

We are, however, aware that enthusiasm for the neighbouring country is frequently an important motivational factor.

When reviewing these developments on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the German-Polish Treaty on Good Neighbourliness last year, we at HRK were delighted to find that German-Polish university relations have developed very favourably not only in terms of quantity, but also in quality, with joint degree programmes and research projects. And it should be noted that this happened without the help of large-scale funding programmes or political framework activities.

Without a doubt, Poland's accession to the European Union and the dismantling of all remaining labour market restrictions last year have created a political environment more favourable than ever before for the continuation of academic cooperation.

Nevertheless, we are convinced that these positive and wide-reaching relationships are first and foremost down to the will and actions of the people themselves.

The bilateral cooperation between HRK and CRASP is demonstrated by regular meetings that cultivate a trusting and open exchange of opinions and experiences. There is, however, also an international dimension to our cooperation, in that CRASP and HRK have developed a very constructive and committed partnership at a European level. This holds true for our cooperation within the European University Association (EUA), as well as for the organisation of joint events.

Such a joint event is the subject of the third example I would like to recall to illustrate our common efforts on behalf of European universities. In autumn last year, CRASP and HRK, together with Universities Austria, hosted a workshop in the European Parliament on the wider issues of research and innovation,

entitled "Looking behind the metaphors". Establishing universities as the core of the European system of science and research, and incorporating universities as the central players within the Knowledge Triangle of education, research, and innovation – that is one of the most important common responsibilities that unites us in Europe, and one that can only succeed and become reality in cooperation with other partners.

These three specific examples demonstrate how the common goals we are pursuing unite KRASP and HRK, and strengthen our friendship despite obvious organisational and structural differences between our two organisations.

Let me give just one example of such differences: due to the state-controlled system of higher education in Germany, HRK is in fact funded by the government, even though it is a non-governmental organisation. It is primarily because of the federal structure of the entire German education system and also due to our objective approach that we in Germany nevertheless remain largely independent of political influence in the scope of our work. It is different for CRASP. The political autonomy of your universities is also reflected in their financial autonomy.

This gives us all the more reason to highlight and celebrate the individual achievements of CRASP here today.

CRASP's political achievements against this carefully preserved independence from political and especially party political influences have a simple and plausible explanation. I should like to mention two key documents explicitly: CRASP's contribution to the development of higher education legislation currently in force and the strategic plan for the development of Polish universities to the year 2020.

This impact on the fortunes of the higher education sector is the result both of the high quality of work and of the transparency of decision-making processes.

Clearly, it is the active as well as the former university management representatives from your member universities – with their untiring commitment and circumspection in dealing with the various interests involved, including those within CRASP – who manage to formulate and combine constructive, pragmatic outcomes with the ability to compromise.

We in Germany are well aware of how difficult this can be and how difficult it is, for instance, to implement both the principles of competition and those of cooperation simultaneously and equitably within a multiform system of higher

education, and – as a political organisation – to present such opinions clearly and unequivocally in position papers.

We are delighted that, in the 15 years of its existence, the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland has managed to become a strong and heeded voice for universities in Poland.

You defend the preservation of academic traditions, the autonomy of universities, and the freedom of science and research.

This responsibility unites us, both in our bilateral relations as well as in our efforts to create an effectively functioning higher education area within Europe – a higher education area that must support both common structures as well as national and individual differences within higher education institutions.

The German Rectors' Conference and I personally wish you continuing success for the future. We also look forward to the next joint meeting of our organisations' Executive Boards in Germany next year.

I thank you for your kind invitation to today's festivities and for your attention.