

**30th Conference of Rectors and Presidents of European
Universities of Technology:
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Opening Keynote Speech

**Friedrich Faulhammer,
Director General,
Federal Ministry of Science and Research, Austria**

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests!

On behalf of Federal Minister of science and Research, Prof. Karlheinz Töchterle, it is a pleasure for me to give a keynote speech in the conference of Rectors and Presidents of European Universities of Technology.

What I am going to address in the next few minutes is first of all the role of Universities of Technology in the European Research Area. Secondly I will stress the importance of cooperation in the futures. Then I will move on to the topic of your conference. And finally, I would like to inform you about the current developments of the Austrian higher education system.

**1. Role of universities and particular universities of technology
in the European Research Area**

It is very important and most welcome that leaders of universities meet in fora like this one in order to exchange information and experience, to learn from each others, to identify and discuss issues of common interest, but also to assess future trends.

Therefore, this initiative which is now in its 30th year has to be congratulated.

Universities form a backbone of the European Research Area. More than a third of participants in the EU research framework programme are institutions of higher education.

In the latest FP7 Monitoring Report from beginning of August, the first 50 most successful (with regard to signed grant agreements) European Higher Education Institutions are listed. Amongst them, 18 are engineering schools. Mr Horvat has informed me that 17 of those are regularly participating in the conference and 13 are also present here in this room today, including Vienna University of Technology. You are most welcome!

This clearly shows the importance of the universities of technology or the engineering institutions.

Networking and cooperation of universities is important in research and education e.g. for:

- Joining forces and combining complementary competences and resources is important in order to be able to address more complex research problems thus making optimal use of the Europe's distributed research potential;
- Widening the experience of students in the course of joint study programmes is an important asset for the future professional career and has also a side effect of inducing a "European spirit" in them.

Collaborative research and collaborative education are competitive advantages of Europe. And it is worth to spend all the money from European tax payers in order to support collaborative research and education. The Framework Programme is – amongst others - a great training institution for researchers working together – for interdisciplinary, intersectoral and also intercultural research. Other regions – such as e.g. the US - have substantial weaknesses in that area as discussed in scientific conferences and at political level in the US.

2. The growing importance of university cooperation in the future

The importance of cooperation will even increase in the future and there are several reasons for that.

First, the scientists themselves go for more transborder cooperation. This has many reasons, one being certainly the Internet and the possibilities offered by the new communication technologies creating also new forms of research.

- Evidence shows that in the last few years, the co-authorship of scientific papers has grown substantially. Today, over 35% of articles published in international journals are internationally collaborative, up from 25% 15 years ago.
- Another interesting indicator is that the average collaboration distance increased more or less linearly from 334 kilometres in 1980 to 1,553 km in 2009. A very clear sign of internationalisation/globalisation of science.

A second reason are the so-called “Grand Challenges” (climate, energy, health, aging population, urbanisation, etc.) that are transnational by their very nature and/or that call for combining the best possible expertise and resources wherever that may be located.

3. Importance of the topic of your conference

As a civil servant in the Federal Ministry of Science and Research and responsible for funding higher education institutions I was very pleased to see your topic “Synergies of education, research and innovation”.

The unity of education and research is a fundamental concept of the universities. Making this a reality and keeping it high of the agenda is already a challenge on its own and the question is how that concept is implemented in reality. As I understand you are

presenting research-oriented Universities of Technology and therefore this is the right forum to discuss that issue.

However, in recent years also innovation has become more and more important and it is a hot topic which the role universities can and should have in the national systems of innovation and in the innovation processes

Since about thirty years the third mission of universities has become an important facet of university activities – universities cooperating with industry and with other societal actors, and universities also providing different kinds of research and education and training services to the outside world. University-industry technology transfer has been an issue since many years. And also governments have developed strategies and programmes to support these activities.

In Austria, exploitation of research result by law is an obligation of the universities and is part of the performance contract that the ministry signs with universities. The government has developed a number of programmes to support this activity – supporting technology scouting and assessment, patenting and licensing but also the development of spin-offs.

But your topic is even more demanding: Synergies between education, research and innovation. The “Knowledge Triangle” is a buzzword that is now high on the agenda in many discussions in the universities but also in the political debate. The challenge is certainly to give it the right meaning and to transform it into reality of the academic life and the interaction with the “real world”.

So, as I am unfortunately not able to stay with you, I am most interested in receiving a summary of your discussions and conclusions.

4. Current developments of the Austrian university system

I would like to give you a short outline of the current of the plan of higher education institutions in Austria.

In Austria Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences have full autonomy. They have their own legal entity and are employers of their staff. What we now need, is an overall framework for the further development of the higher education sector and for the further allocation of budgets. It is important to have a common view of the needs and possibilities in the different fields of higher education. So we will develop an Austrian higher education plan, which is not one single written document, but which is a process, an ongoing debate about the who and the how of the developments in the different fields of higher education.

The core element of this process is the establishment of a conference of the representatives of Universities, the Universities of Applied Sciences and the Ministry of Science and Research. In this conference we will on the one hand formulate the future goals of the higher education system and on the other hand the rules of coordination within the Austrian higher education sector. Next week we will have a preparatory meeting of this so-called "Hochschulkonferenz", where we will discuss a first draft of goals and rules, which we are preparing right now. And we are quite confident that we will find a constructive mindset with our partners from the higher education sector, in order to establish the fundamental procedures of cooperation and coordination.

Part of this new approach will be an overall expansion plan for buildings and for main research infrastructures. The funding system for Universities will be further developed towards a study-place oriented system, which will of course have as a part of it a basic funding for research. With this new framework for an Austrian higher education area we will have the basis for the additional funding for the higher education sector in Austria. It is very promising, that the ministry of finance will allocate 1 billion Euro for the years 2013 – 2015 in addition to the current higher education funds. So, the more we will be successful in coordinating and cooperating in our new conference, the more we will be successful in receiving the additional budgets.

Ladies and gentlemen!

Sorry for being a little bit long, but you know, if your heart is full, your speech is long.

So let me conclude in wishing you a very successful conference and fruitful debates. And I do hope that you will have some time to enjoy the cities of Vienna and Klosterneuburg. Thank you very much and all the best!