

Lifelong learning and higher education.

Words of appreciation and gratitude – on the occasion receiving the title of Professor Honoris Causa by the University of Bucharest

Heribert Hinzen

Honorabilis, Spectabilis,

Distinguished Colleagues,

Dear Family and Friends,

First and foremost – my deepest gratitude to the Senate of the University of Bucharest to award such prestigious title of Professor Honoris Causa to me today.

It is an honor which I personally, my family, and my organization, DVV International of the German Adult Education Association, appreciate greatly.

The Senate decided to recognize someone from Germany who throughout his professional life worked intensively to integrate the theory and practice of adult education and lifelong learning in comparative studies at University as well as in local and global perspectives of development cooperation for a better future in a world we want.

I therefore see it as an honor and recognition for the triangle of a rather new academic discipline called lifelong learning, an institution involved in the practice of international development, and a person devoted to comparison and cooperation as a lifetime achievement.

The occasion seems to be well chosen. The University of Bucharest now proudly celebrates its 150th anniversary. An important part of a wide range of ceremonies is our coming together on this first University of Bucharest Lifelong-Learning-Day which conceptually is close to the festivals of learning or adult learners' weeks in other parts of the world.

However, early roots of the University of Bucharest date back more than 300 years. Its history shows several interesting examples of European exchanges through a diversity of scholars and languages from neighboring countries, and of course vice versa. The University of Padua, Italian, Greek, or French influences hail back far beyond the modern times of Erasmus or Leonardo as part of European Union programs. Congratulations to all who created the structure

of the modern University of Bucharest with around 30.000 students, and more than 200 agreements related to international cooperation with other Universities.

The University of Bucharest went through difficult times also, and we should not forget that it was closed down due to German occupation during parts of World War One. "The past is never dead. It's not even past." is how the great novelist William Faulkner reminds us. DVV has been networking on „Remember for the Future“ now for several years. EAEA, the European Association for the Education of Adults, has chosen as Grundtvig Award theme for 2014 „Remembering World War I for the Future – Adult Education promoting peace and cohesion in Europe“, and the prize giving ceremony will be part of a major regional conference of DVV International office in Sarajevo. It would be our pleasure to welcome the University of Bucharest being represented there.

Celebrating a Lifelong-Learning-Day shows that the University is looking ahead towards a role which goes beyond the earlier services of extra mural studies for the public to a new paradigm for education, training and learning to include a dimension which extends to all spheres to be life-long, life-wide and life-deep as given in a UNESCO document on the future of education in the 21st century. The Delors-Report “Learning: the treasure within” went on to call for: “Learning to be, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to live together”. This sounds simple, but if we read the news of today then we realize how far away we are from cohesion and living together peacefully.

We all have a certain notion on what lifelong learning means to us. We can approach it from common sense, local wisdom, or through a historical comparative perspective. In German we talk about “Von der Wiege bis zur Bahre”, very close to the English “From the cradle to the grave”. While doing research in Sierra Leone I came across a proverb of the Mende ethnic group: “Learning starts in the womb, and ends in the tomb”. During my doctoral studies in Tanzania, the President of the Republic, Julius Nyerere, used as a slogan for his New Year speech: “Education never ends”. When the EU started to create more attention on adults in their approach to lifelong learning, they called their two communications: “It is never too late to learn”, and “It is always a good time to learn”. No need here to go deeper into comparative analysis of important historical figures like Confucius and Comenius who in their ancient times were strong advocates of lifelong learning philosophies and systems.

The Laudation covered extensively aspects of Romanian and German cooperation in the field of adult education. Actually, I was Director of DVV International headquarters in Bonn when we opened our office in Bucharest in the year 1993 for cooperation in Romania. We are proud that our long standing Romanian colleague who joined as Coordinator later became our Country Director. Today she is the manager of a Romanian association called EUROED, and she serves on European level as Board Member of EAEA as well.

Our first German Director in Bucharest started already the cooperation with Universities in Romania, especially with the University of Iasi, and Prof. Laurentiu Soitu, the Director of the Lifelong Learning Institute. She eventually wrote her PhD dissertation on Romanian and German adult education cooperation – in Romanian language. There can be no doubt that Prof. Soitu's early academic interest and research into adult education, media and community work contributed strongly to all our joint efforts. His energy to create a series of International Adult Education Conferences, based at his University but for national, regional and global information and exchange, created opportunities and milestones for the young and established generations of the scientific community. In consequence, he was the first Romanian member of the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame.

TEACH was the short name for "Teaching Adult Educators in Continuing and Higher Education", funded within the EU Grundtvig program to develop the new modules for the Master degree in our field following the Bologna process. It was another innovative project which Prof. Soitu supported so strongly for his University in Iasi as well as a consortium of Universities, Governments, and adult education providers throughout Europe. I remember too well when a decade ago I joined his University as Honorary Professor for the teaching and testing of students in Iasi, including the consultations of their Master's thesis. Important was also the extension work for TEACH together with colleagues from the University of Pecs in Hungary with presentations at the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj.

I am now serving as Regional Director of DVV International for South and Southeast Asia in Vientiane, Lao PDR. It is another great challenge to support the development of policy, theory and practice of adult education and lifelong learning through cooperation. It is a highly interesting period and region which some call already the Asian century. My work includes again initiatives with Governments and civil society in non-formal education for youth and adults, and I currently teach comparative studies at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, which both, just like the National University of Laos, are still missing within the long list of agreements signed by the University of Bucharest.

This may change soon as ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is going through a process of integration which in my view is very close to what we have here in Europe: The EQF, the European Qualification Framework turns to be the AQF, the ASEAN Qualification Framework, and the ECTS, the European Credit Transfer System, provides orientation for the ACTS, the ASEAN Credit Transfer System, regulating exchanges of staff and students between Universities of the region and beyond. ASEM, the ASEAN and EU Meetings, have already created their ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning which brings together more than 100 researchers and policy makers.

Research and teaching have been the major functions of the University, especially for the younger generation. But as our societies are getting older, the role of higher education changes also. More mature students return to the University for a second or third degree. And the so-called University of the third age is gaining ground. Some even go that far to declare also the Universities as centers of lifelong learning, and create University chairs and professorships for lifelong learning.

This is in line with the latest survey on adult skills of OECD, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, which followed on PISA, the Program of International Students Assessment, with PIAAC, the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. A huge number of adults in Europe need to improve and enlarge their skills for work and life, for employability and citizenship. Lifelong learning opportunities must be there for everybody, otherwise the challenges and chances of the knowledge and learning society cannot be met.

It should not take us as a surprise that UNESCO in preparation of the next World Education Forum in Korea in the year 2015 has started to call for “Ensuring equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030”. We still have to find out what does this mean for the Universities in Romania, Europe and indeed globally.

Next week we shall all meet for the Fourth International Conference on Adult Education at the University of Iasi. There, in a joint paper, we shall look at “University engagement and the post-2015 agenda. What are the roles and functions to support adult education and lifelong learning?” It will be my pleasure to follow-up deeper from where we reached today at the University of Bucharest award ceremony, and it’s Lifelong Learning Day.

Again, thank you so much.