

**Thomas HESSE**

### **GRÜßWORT ANLÄSSLICH DES HUMBOLDT-KOLLEGS BUDAPEST**

It is my great pleasure and honour to welcome you here today in Budapest on behalf of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Thank you, köszönöm, for the invitation and for the organizing this Humboldt-Kolleg.



*Thomas Hesse, Deputy Secretary General of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation*

## **New Frontiers**

*Neue Grenzen – New Frontiers* is the very topical title of this conference which allows us to hear and discuss a myriad of very diverse talks today and tomorrow ranging from the natural sciences, religious history, and law to social communication in the digital age. For example, we will hear about current changes in the judicial system in Hungary, but we will also learn about the human being 2.0 and the borders in biomedical basic research on migraine.

The issue of borders and frontiers – new and old – accompanies many of us day in day out. You as researchers take on the challenge to overcome new frontiers in science every day, probing the limits of your

disciplines in the search of new knowledge. But, of course, the term *frontiers* is also of great importance to your work as scientists and scholars in its meaning of borders between nation states. After all, these borders have time and again proven to be amongst the greatest hindrances to the free exchange of knowledge and ideas, to the freedom of research. It is one of the great achievements of the European Union that it has made a large part of the European continent virtually borderless, allowing for contact between the people of Europe on a wholly new level. Borders have become invisible, penetrable and are no longer an obstacle to individuals, thoughts and ideas. On a level that only thirty years ago would have been absolutely unthinkable due to the very much impenetrable border of the Iron Curtain. While the physical borders between East and West have largely vanished, the division in the minds of people oftentimes prevails. This is also true for Hungary and Germany. But it is through the exchange of individual, internationally mobile researchers like you, through the personal ties and friendships you foster, that we all can get one step closer to overcoming these last dividing elements between our countries. In the light of recent developments not only in Europe but also worldwide and here especially the rising right-wing populism these lasting bridges between people are becoming more important than ever.

## **Young Scientists & Brain Drain**

Hungary joined the European Union 14 years ago, in 2004. The freedom of movement of people offered by the membership in the European Union is a key element of the successful research undertaken by young researchers from Hungary in collaboration with their colleagues in many other European states. There is, unfortunately, a downside to this increased international mobility of researchers. I am referring to the phenomenon of brain drain which is a real issue in Hungary and other countries of the former Eastern bloc. Many young and bright Hungarian researchers are leaving their home country due to a lack of career prospects. They seek their fortune elsewhere: in the US, in Great Britain, and also in Germany where the general conditions for building a successful scientific career are still very different from those in Hungary. Partially, this may be due to a somewhat outdated academic system which would benefit greatly from the fresh ideas and zest for action of exactly these young and bright minds. Partially, this may also be due to the political developments in recent years, curbing the freedom of research and researchers whenever this research does not fit the worldview of the ruling political parties. I believe that we can all agree that freedom of research is a very valuable good – and that it is at stake when legislation is targeting research areas and academic institutions not in line with a certain political ideology.

## **The Hungarian Academy of Sciences**

Now, it is easy to condemn said actions. Yet, it is of course not as easy to understand all the inner workings of a particular scientific and political system as an outsider. But after all, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation is an organisation with more than 65 years of experience in promoting scientific exchange as part of foreign cultural and educational policy across national and ideological borders. Yes, there might very well be a dire need for reform in certain parts of the Hungarian academic system where perhaps outdated structures forged in very different times and the accompanying imbalances of power still prevail. But even more so than in other areas of society, crucial reforms in academia must come from within the academic system. They must not be driven by a political agenda and imposed from the outside. Standing here today in the main building of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, I am thinking, of course, of this very institution. As you will all be aware, the Academy has recently found itself at the top of the Hungarian political agenda and has been stripped of the autonomy over the larger part of its budget. While a moder-

nization of the Academy may indeed be overdue, the motives behind recent political actions and the ways in which this change is to be brought about appear questionable. The Humboldt Foundation is very willing to make its contribution to overcoming this situation. Please tell us whether we should become active – and we will happily do so.

## The Humboldt Network in Hungary

It was our name patron Alexander von Humboldt who once said: The most dangerous worldviews are the worldviews of those who have never viewed the world. At the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, we therefore strongly believe that one very important tool against today's rising nationalism is fostering international exchange between individual scientists and scholars like you. The strong Humboldt network in Hungary can play a crucial role in this: Up to date, 557 Hungarian researchers have visited Germany supported by the Humboldt Foundation. Amongst them are 20 award winners, the newest one being Professor *Örs Legeza* from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, a former Humboldt research fellow, who was awarded a Carl Friedrich von Siemens Research Award of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung earlier this year. 7 German researchers have come to Hungary on a Feodor Lynen Research Fellowship, making your country one of the most popular destinations in the Central and Eastern European region. Each year, on average 6 new researchers from Hungary join our Humboldt family, a worldwide network currently already comprising over 29.000 researchers from 140 countries – amongst them 55 Nobel prize laureates.



The two organizers of this Humboldt-Kolleg, the President of the Hungarian Humboldt alumni association and her Secretary General, are standing at the forefront of this impressive network in Hungary. Professor *Jakab*, Professor *Herger*, you both know, of course, that keeping in touch with our alumni and fostering their international and interdisciplinary exchange throughout their research careers is an integral part of our sponsorship philosophy: Once a Humboldtian, always a Humboldtian. Events like this Humboldt-Kolleg are only one of the many ways, albeit a particularly important and effective one, by which we try to achieve this aim.

But, ladies and gentlemen, dear Humboldtians, you will be able to learn more about our network and our funding scheme this evening. Now, I would like to wish us all inspiring talks, fruitful discussions and a successful Humboldt-Kolleg!