

”Check against delivery”

Grundlag for prorektor for uddannelse, Kristian Cedervall Lautas velkomsttale ved Jubilæumskonference ”Danmark og EU gennem 50 år”, KU’s festsal den 9. januar 2022.

President Koen Lenaerts
Vice-President Lars Bay Larsen
Vice-President Margrethe Vestager

Dear colleagues and EU professionals.
Thank you, Ulla and Karsten for your kind words of welcome.

Although I have joined the ranks of management
I still have some hours a week – or rather minutes –
as Professor of Disaster Law
dealing with all kinds of calamities - from Covid to climate change.

Here’s a rule of thumb:
When my field of research sees a rise in demand
and Ulla’s field of research – EU law – is disregarded by the media
you know the world is going bonkers.
And I really hope my field will soon be out of fashion again.

Allow me to use this opportunity to thank the conference organisers:
Ulla and Karsten
– as well as the Faculty of Law
and the Danish Association of European Law for co-hosting.

Today, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Denmark’s EU membership.
In retrospect, it has been the finest hour of democracy and the Rule of Law.

A small country, the size of Baden-Württemberg, not coerced into compliance by the majority.

But allowed to take the bumpy road of democracy and compromise.

- Yet another treaty.
- Yet another referendum.
- Yet another opt-out – from vacation homes to common currency and defense – and back again.

What is the driving force behind this exceptional democratic process?

Could it be the European institutions – The Court of Justice, the Commission, the Parliament?

- Yes, possibly!

Could it be the Franco-German engine, willing to accept integration “à la carte”, rather than swallowing “*the Acquis*” in one bite.

- Yes, probably!

Could it be the negotiating skills of Danish civil servants and politicians?

- Certainly.

But I will claim that the universities of Europe have also been a major driving force, bridging the gaps between the countries and cultures of Europe.

And I am not only talking about the most concrete results of student exchange

-the 1 million Erasmus babies

-and the 27% chance of meeting your future partner on Erasmus.

Take a look at the walls of this glorious ceremonial hall.

What you see is the history of the University of Copenhagen.

Is it a story of isolation, seclusion and self-indulgence

– an Ivory Tower divorced from the outside world?

No, it is a story of the university tied, attached, entwined, entangled

- with Europe.

- Above me, the inauguration ceremony of the University in 1479.

Did the idea of establishing a university fall from the blue sky like the Danish flag?

No, the decision to establish a university was blessed by the Pope in Rome.

- What about the great scientist, Hans Christian Ørsted.

Did he discover electromagnetism by staying at home in Langeland or Copenhagen.

No, he joined forces with German scientist Ritter and travelled to Paris to get the blue stamp of the Académie Française.

- And Ludvig Holberg – from where did he get his ideas of the Enlightenment? Not from his hometown Bergen, but from Paris and from Molière.

- Tycho Brahe, same story. The famous astronomer and mentor of Kepler. At the picture, he receives the King of Scotland at his observatory in present-day Sweden (Hven) – and later, he went to Prague to work for the Emperor.

My point is this:

The European Union is not just an institution, but an idea.

Not only a state – but a state of mind.

And today, we are gathered at a place that has educated generations of European citizens, researchers, civil servants and public officials.

A university doesn't teach a specific ideology – federalism, functionalism or Euro-skepticism.

But it teaches the virtues of academic learning which are instrumental to democracy and the Rule of Law:

- The power of the argument.
- The authority of facts.
- The peaceful resolution of disputes.

So today, I think we should not only celebrate five decades of EU-membership.

But also the five centuries, Denmark has been part of the European and international scientific community.

I will underscore my point in three ways.

First, today a book is published, drawing on the insights of 45 EU experts from both academia and civil service.

The book – and indeed this conference – prove that my rule of thumb

I stated at the outset, will not stand.

The field of EU Law is strong and vibrant.

Second, the University of Copenhagen is actively pursuing the vision of the Commission - to create a network of European universities.

We do so within the framework of 4EU+, alongside the universities from Sorbonne, Heidelberg, Charles, Warsaw, Geneva and Milan.

Third, in a moment I have the privilege of introducing the next two speakers.

They are the living proof of the close ties between universities and the EU.

I am pleased to welcome President Koen Lenaerts.

Mr. Lenarts has maintained close relations with the academic environment, teaching EU Law at his Alma Mater, KU Leuven.

And I am pleased to welcome Margrethe Vestager who not only carries the title of Vice-President of the Commission, but also the (even more prestigious) title of Honary Alumna in economics from this university.

Washington Post also called her Queen Margrethe III. And you are not only famous for your knitted elephants, but also your ability to curb the power of digital elephants – like Google or Microsoft.

More than ever before, we need you -academics and public officials at the highest level – to promote the virtues of academia and the Rule of Law.

Margrethe Vestager, the floor is yours...