

EURASHE 22nd Annual Conference

Opening Speech of the Conference

by

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Dear Rector of the Banku Augstskola,

Dear Colleagues and Conference attendants,

It is my pleasure to welcome you at this **22nd Conference of EURASHE**, which we are organising in cooperation with the Banku Augstskola, also called the BA School of Business & Finance of Riga.

The Conference of EURASHE, ***Responding to challenges in European HE: LLL & the Welfare Society*** wants to bring forward the two topics that are themselves a challenge and an opportunity.

- **Lifelong Learning** is hailed as by many European member states as an instrument to address the problem of a decreasing working population and to undercut the need for an increasingly better educated labour force.

The interest of professional HE in LLL can be explained by our close link with the student's professional life, and often also that of the alumni. Still on the institutional level the work in this field varies a lot depending on the country. The conference will present the results of a European funded project initiated by EURASHE about the impact of Lifelong Learning strategies on professional higher education (FLLLEX).

- **The Welfare Society** and the support it may get from lifelong learning is the second theme of our conference. Welfare Society is now more challenged than ever. Not only are we all facing economic recession and increased global competition, but we are also in the middle of a unprecedented change in the demographic balance, especially with a fast growing percentage of elderly and a just as rapidly decreasing labour-market-active population.

The combination of these two topics helps show that education is embedded in the wellbeing of citizens, but I can see another link between the two, namely that both heavily rely on innovation.

Innovation is more than a buzz word. And who says Innovation naturally ends up with education. Can we say that even more than research, Europe has to invest in innovation in the coming years? Innovation is also linked to more segments of our society than research, and no research can do

without innovation. So this is why innovation may have a greater role in future European society than mere research.

Innovation is therefore rightly considered as the key for Europe's endeavours to secure its place in a rapidly changing world, which more than other continents is feeling the impact on society of an ageing population. But it is also the key for keeping our internal balance, by maintaining the achievements of the welfare society, keeping our population healthy and securing its support mechanisms.

Innovation can also help us create new growth and market opportunities for Europe, which is exactly what we need to cope with an ageing population.

The number of Europeans aged 65+ is expected to increase by 45% between 2008 and 2030, and even further to over 30% of the population by 2060. These are figures for the European Union mostly, but they will have a massive impact on a wider Europe as well.

The European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing is part of the EU's **Innovation Union Strategy**, one of the **Europe 2020** flagship initiatives, to turn ideas into jobs, green growth and social progress. This explains why the European Union chose as the theme for 2012, Active and Healthy Ageing.

Neelie Kroes, European Commissioner for Competition and the Digital Agenda, said: "Ageing is an opportunity not a burden. The generation who built Europe deserves to benefit from the technological progress that it has made possible".

We hope to provide you with these and more insights during this 22nd EURASHE conference.

We will do so in the plenary sessions, in which distinguished speakers will provide the broader background of this link between Lifelong Learning and the Welfare Society. Then there are the interactive workshops, where workshop presenters will inform us of latest research results, and in which you will learn from grass-roots experiences about the challenges of the present Welfare Society, and the solutions offered by Lifelong Learning provisions.

It is also the culmination event of a ground-breaking project on lifelong learning, coordinated by an institutional member of EURASHE, and involving a cross-section of our membership. The FLLLEX project, as it is known, is presenting here its final report and will give hands-on experience to both practitioners and institutional managers.

The two parallel conference tracks will in the end come together in a panel discussion, which will focus on the place of continuous education in the Welfare Society.

We are guaranteeing you once again a challenging EURASHE conference.

Thank you.