

Eramus Celebration 25 years, May 8 2012.
By Rector Ralf Hemmingsen

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Commissioner, Minister, distinguished colleagues and guests.
It is a great pleasure to welcome you all at the University of Copenhagen. That you have chosen to celebrate the first 25 years of the Erasmus program in our Ceremonial Hall seems appropriate indeed, since this Hall also has a certain international aura.

This is where we welcome our international students - keen as we are to make a good first impression! And this is where we receive speakers from all over the world to debate with our students: Prime ministers, foreign ministers, the general secretaries from UN and NATO, European Commissioners and top researchers from all over the world. They have all passed through this Hall. The first time the Finnish foreign minister Alexander Stubb was here, he called the Ceremonial Hall "a classic example of Scandinavian Minimalism"

This witty remark was of course referring to the Hall's many ornaments and paintings. One of these paintings depicts a famous alumni of this university - Ludvig Holberg. In the painting, Holberg is attending a performance of his play Erasmus Montanus. Now of course, the name of the mobility programme does not come from this particular Erasmus. The programme is - as you know - named after the philosopher and humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam, who in the 16th century lived and worked in several parts of Europe, in quest of knowledge and experience. Holberg's Erasmus was - as you also know - a quite self-righteous character. A little bit too full of himself and his newly acquired knowledge, annoying the people from his village - and terrifying his own mother. He takes the university way of arguing to an absurd level, claiming that "a stone cannot fly, my mother cannot fly - thus my mother is a stone". Much to his poor mothers despair!

A good example of what can happen, if you do not challenge your own ways of thinking and match them with reality - for example by going abroad! Erasmus' "father" Holberg, on the other hand was a good example of the Erasmus spirit. That is: The spirit of the mobility program - not the character! Holberg lived a modest life in his youth. But he received support from a grant to travel to other universities in other countries, searching out those places where the discussions were the loudest and the experiences were the largest.

During the coming days we are going to celebrate 25 years of a systematized European effort of giving the opportunity to young people to do exactly that:

Travelling to other educational institutions in other countries in order to gain new experiences. The importance of the program has been enormous. For the individual student of course. But also for the development of an international atmosphere at our educational institutions. Going abroad to study is a huge challenge. But also a huge joy. It challenges your way of thinking
It brings new knowledge. It helps our students' ability to compete in a still more globalized world. The Erasmus program began towards the end of the cold war evoking the beginning of a new era of European mobility. You could say like education expert Ben Wildavsky that the Cold War's arms race has been replaced by "a brain race". Cities and countries compete for talents and brain power because they consider them imperative to success in the global economy.

As a University, we can only appreciate governments who try to win this race. Which is why we have been pleased to notice that the Minister has been working very actively in order to give even more Danish students the opportunity to travel and study abroad. And we are of course looking forward to the results of the negotiations on the Commissions' proposal of a considerable raise of the investment in the Erasmus for All program.

It is also an important part of our own strategy as a University to strengthen the Erasmus spirit of our students:

- By enhancing our students' language skills.
- By making them aware of the international job market through international career fairs
- By offering courses in cultural understanding
- By offering an international environment "at home" with an approximate 5000 international students out of 40.000 students in total
- And of course by encouraging our students to go study abroad through Erasmus and other programs.

As a university we have benefitted a lot from Erasmus and we are honored to host this celebration. And as our travelling alumni Holberg might have put it: "A stone cannot fly, Erasmus flies, thus Erasmus is certainly not a stone".
I wish you all a fruitful conference tomorrow – and an enjoyable dinner in this international setting.