Dear Council Members,

Please allow me to begin by thanking the Rector for his kind invitation to give a speech at the honorary session of the Senate. I was unable to refuse his invitation due to my own experience with searching for speakers. This is however an honour that comes with a few difficulties. What is appropriate to say in such a speech and what is not? The history of the University and its problems with the new 2011 – 2020 National Higher Education Programme, science in general or the Research and Innovation Strategy of Slovenia for 2011 – 2020? Perhaps something else?

An honorary speaker should speak with enthusiasm. I personally know people who are able to speak with enthusiasm about things that they do not believe in or which they know nothing about. What is more, the audience should agree with the honorary speech. However, if all agree, this can mean only one of two things – either that they did not listen or that you spoke a lot but said nothing. Or both. So what to do? One thing that remains is to search for old speeches, copy a lot of that into the new speech and then comfort yourself that this is also how science is made and that the majority of the listeners are new or that they have already forgotten the previous speeches.

In the last decade, I usually concluded my speeches with the thought Ceterum censeo, Carthaginem esse delendam. This time, I will begin with it. I again raise the old question of whether the University, and not just ours, will survive the Bologna Process. Perhaps. Will it be possible to return to the principles of the Magna Charta Universitatum signed in September 1988 by the Rectors of European universities celebrating the ninth centennial of the University of Bologna? Eleven years later, ministers of 29 European states again met in Bologna signing the Bologna Declaration. Was the Bologna Declaration only a practical side to the Magna Charta, are the documents even related or did the latter annul the former? Personally, I believe the latter to hold true. While the Magna Charta stresses autonomy and diversity, the inseparable nature of teaching and research, the academic freedom and the humanist tradition, the Bologna Declaration stresses the unification and marketability of education without connections to research and national culture. It reflects the belief that everything can be solved with a market and that universities are some kind of economic entities that need to constantly adapt their offer to demand and produce something that is called “human capital”. It sees the university as some kind of a factory that students come to as pieces of reproduction material and emerge, having been given added value, as finished products.
To say that the Bologna Process did not bring anything good would be wrong, but now probably even the silent majority already agrees that the damage often exceeds the benefits. Is it only in our country that it turned into some kind of bureaucratic nightmare? I do not think so. Are we the only ones adding and subtracting nonsensical measurement units, breaking subjects into smaller pieces and trying to determine how it is possible, with different ECTS credit points, to remain with the old, move from the old to the new or transfer from the study of biology to a PhD in law? Are we the only ones dealing with hundreds of nonsensical procedures such as accreditation that reminds us of the ISO standards or self-evaluation that is reminiscent of the former Chinese self-criticism? Probably not. Did the study process get shorter and better? None of the above. However, this was all to be expected. We never received an answer to the simplest of questions such as where to put the main subjects – either at the beginning or the end. Should the programme of students who are supposed to continue their studies on the second level be the same as the programme of those are supposed to finish it after the first? Is it possible to skip the basic study of an individual science at the first level and take some payable preparatory courses before enrolling in the second or third level of a completely different branch of science?

Repeating these old questions now would make no sense and nor would blaming politics for the current situation. We or our own hypocrisy are to blame. During the implementation of the Reform, I attended several conferences on the Bologna Reform as Rector and I often witnessed such hypocrisy. While sitting at our tables in the evenings, many rectors indignantly raised the same questions that I mentioned before but the next morning, when taking the stage, they uttered the winged words from previous meetings with great enthusiasm, adding new winged words invented by the organisers of the respective conference.

It is true that my inquiry into the “emperor’s new clothes” was based on the experience that the Bologna Reform was again something that had already been invented. Only the name was different.

When I enrolled in the Faculty of Law fifty years ago, “social requirements” (they would now be called the requirements of the labour market) caused a two-tier oriented study to be implemented and the study programme was ruined accordingly. Two years later, “social requirements” disappeared and all of us, save for one of our colleagues who died, continued our study on the second level. A few years later, the two-tier study process was abolished and I myself became a lawyer who never took Roman Law.

Thirty years ago, we got the Career-Oriented Education Act that was supposed to ensure the “usefulness of education” – what would now be called “employability”. The proverbial dilatoriness of the University helped prevent even greater damage, as the concept only influenced its organisational form, since the University of Ljubljana dissolved into unconnected faculties at the time and changed into a kind of composite organisation of associated labour, if you allow me to use a term from that time. It was only in 1994 that the University of Ljubljana again received the characteristics of a legal person.

I am not familiar with the new 2011 – 2020 National Higher Education Programme but I am already worried by the fact that we even have one. Reformers and strategists of all kinds are continually convinced that the world begins with them, that it needs to be changed and that constant reforms are necessary. They are a little less certain of what their objective should be and
of the differences between the objectives and the results continually confirm their conviction that reforms need to be more intensive or that new strategies and reforms need to be implemented that they will push in the opposite direction with the same zeal as the previous ones. So much for my first option for the honorary speech. Allow me to conclude this part by saying that it is time to think about how to return to the pre-Bologna Reform position, causing as little additional damage as possible.

3.

As mentioned before, the second option for an honorary speech is to speak about Slovenian science in general, if science can even be Slovenian, European, applicable or fundamental or of an institute or university and not just good or bad. However, science is not an area that I know much more about than anyone else present here today. Among the questions relating to science that I do not know the answers to is the European and also national planning of scientific discoveries. When European Science Ministers met in Lisbon in March 2000, they decided that in 2010, the European Union would be the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world with full employment. This was supposed to be possible by establishing a European Research Area that would ensure scientific discoveries. But did it? Can scientific discoveries be planned and can researchers be told what and how they should discover? Are discoveries guaranteed by meticulously handled procedures for how to apply for them and following the instructions included in the financing tenders? Isn't science above all intuitive and full of surprises? The plain old rat race has always been, and still is, behind the seemingly fruitless actions of rearranging science that never had much to do with science itself. In order not to loose money, we fill in stupid forms – in paper and electronically.

Well, let us assume that rearranging science will bring new technological discoveries. Will these bring prosperity to everyone or just wealth to some and even more poverty to others? Can economic growth even be infinite in a finite world? Will it bring new jobs to replace the ones that technological advances will suppress? Would technological development really make the European Union more competitive against other societies that are socially much more ruthless? Is it really possible to sell them the knowledge that is supposed to be generated by the knowledge society and get enough for it to be able to buy the products generated by cheap labour? It seems not. However, here we again knew in advance what would happen.

I again do not know what the new 2011 – 2020 Research and Innovation Strategy of Slovenia brings, but I find it somewhat suspicious that it is included in the National Reform Programme – the strange papers that we recently sent to the European Commission in order to show it how structural reforms will be implemented to realise its smart, sustainable and inclusive growth objective set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy. This is yet another document that is based on beautiful but empty words and illusions. Reforms, and especially structural reforms, are supposed to solve problems themselves; how they should do that, no one knows but questioning all that is already in the sphere of the “emperor’s new clothes”.

4.

Luckily, this brings me to economic dogmas that I should know more about. We economists claim that economics is a science, a fact corroborated by the Nobel Prize in Economics.
However, we are often merely preachers of the currently valid religion on the performance of the economy. Perhaps this makes us more like theologians than scientists; the predecessors of the modern economics are not Albert Einstein or Isaac Newton but more Thomas of Aquinas and Martin Luther. Even the father of modern-day economics, Adam Smith, was a moral philosopher who, by the way, was not too pleased with his studies at the Oxford University where “the greater part of the public professors have for many years altogether given up even the pretence of teaching”. However, he obviously learned enough at this university where, he said, the system worked “for the interests, or more properly speaking, for the ease of the masters” to write the famous Wealth of Nations in 1776, which was translated into Slovene this year. This is a sort of Bible of Economics and, similar to the actual Bible, is now being claimed by all economic groups as it is possible to find confirmation for any economic dogma in it. It is best not to poke around in his dissatisfaction with the University of Oxford, as we might come across something that really has no place in the honorary session of the University of Ljubljana.

Last year, we received the translation of another Bible of the Economics – Marx and Engels’ Communist Manifesto from 1848. Twenty years ago, my prejudice would not have allowed me to even touch it. Now, it surprised me with an incredibly accurate description of the situation in the global economy – not that of 150 years ago, which I am not familiar with, but that of today. The Manifesto describes multinational corporations, globalisation, financial deepening, hyperproduction, the crisis and other problems and detours of modern times. It just uses a different terminology.

So, where did this surprising applicability of over two hundred and thirty and over one hundred and fifty year old teachings come from? The economics and other social sciences (and I assume the situation is similar with natural and technical sciences) constantly go through some self-evident cycles. The only thing that changes is the length of these cycles, when almost everybody is repeating the same phrases and swearing by the same dogmas. At least there were quite a few in my lifetime. In only half a century, the turnabouts in economics are similar to the turnabout in the dogma that the Sun revolves around the Earth to the truth or dogma that the Earth revolves around the Sun. Of course, I do not believe that all of them always believed what they were saying but saying something that you do not believe in is probably much worse than saying something that is not true but that you do believe in.

Competition, efficiency, profit, privatisation, liberalisation and globalisation were the magical words of our time until October 2008. The constant increases in the efficiency of companies that were supposed to enable them to survive in the competitive struggle that they themselves created in their pursuit of market shares, takeovers and mergers gradually turned into economic cannibalism on the level of national economies and on the global level. Together with global competition, the global market was supposed to be the foundation of economic growth, of new opportunities for the dismissed to find new employment – a sort of magical drug to solve all other problems, an alternative to the social state and the public financing of healthcare, education and social security. The so-called flexibility of the labour force market (and by the way, this expression reminds me of my time serving in the army where we learned about the destruction of enemy forces) only seemingly solves the problems as, under the given circumstances, it might mean that it is easier to dismiss employees and reduce their salaries and wages or other rights and turn them into modern-day just-in-time day labourers.
Globalisation is another thing that was supposed to bring benefits to all. It does not seem that way, though. In 1960, one fifth of the world's population who live in the richest countries had thirty times more income than the fifth living in the poorest countries. Just before the crisis, the first fifth earned over seventy times more than the second fifth. This brings us to the situation described by the economist Thorstein Veblen as early as 1899, calling it a predatory phase that is only attained when the predatory attitude has become habitual and accredited and the fight is the dominant note of development. When the announcement of a merger that will enable the dismissal of a few thousand employees causes their shares to rally, the predatory stage has become the fundamental business and political logic. However, this also rocks the foundations of the market economy that is based on greed and predatory attitudes and generates hatred. The fault for that supposedly lies with two old men who are running around some rough terrain in the middle of Afghanistan, wearing medieval clothes and old rifles, using a mobile phone to terrorize the world. They are probably long since dead but we need them, as they generate millions of jobs.

The economic crisis has not changed our way of thought yet, even though not much remains from the economic teachings of the previous cycle. Listening to the economists and politicians, including our own, it seems as though the economics is still a "dictatorship of the only alternative" – saving the poor and no redistribution from the rich to the poor. But these are the teachings of the European Commission, which the crisis took by surprise even though these same teachings contributed to it mightily. It only started driving it away once it had started and did so by repeating the nonsensical maxims and empty words of the Lisbon Strategies.

Even though some economists and politicians know how the pensioners and their pensions will destroy the world in 2060, which I am not actually very interested in, the fair answer to the question of what will happen tomorrow or next year or how to come out of this crisis is that we do not know. Already the numbers that we are dealing with in terms of debts on the one hand and virtual wealth on the other are increasingly becoming like the numbers dealt with by astronomers when measuring distances in space. How much, for example, is three thousand five hundred billion euros, the supposed amount of loans given by the Spanish banks? It is no wonder that all the “smart” solutions of global institutions, central banks and governments are failing. The crisis will not end until the accumulated virtual wealth on the global stock markets and in financial institutions fades away and until financial deepening is not regarded as fraud or gambling. Until then, we are like Christopher Columbus not knowing where he was going when he left and not knowing where he was once he landed.

I am aware that an honorary speech full of questions and doubts instead of praising achievements or chanting mantras of reforms and strategies is not the most appropriate thing for a celebration and even less so to honour today’s recipients of honorary awards. Therefore, allow me to at least end it on a different note; with the hope that the Bologna Reforms will not ruin the university and with the belief that today’s honourees are true university teachers, which means that they believe it is their fundamental duty to doubt everything that others consider self-evident. In the recently translated *The Economics of Innocent Fraud*, J.K. Galbraith says that an intellectual, if he wishes “to be right and useful”, should deal with the continuing divergence between approved belief and the reality or innocent fraud that is generally accepted and should be believed in even though it is contrived nonsense.
Thank you for your patience and disagreement!