*Spoken word applies.****Acad. Prof. Dr. Jože Mencinger***

Esteemed Mr Chancellor, Professors Emeriti, dear attendees,

Allow me to begin by thanking the Chancellor for inviting me to deliver this guest of honour speech. A request to speak at the Academic Staff Chamber cannot be refused, especially when it is to address one’s peers upon the bestowment of Professor Emeritus titles. And since I myself have been a Professor Emeritus for a year now, I shall count myself in your midst; I also know virtually every single one of you personally. Apparently, we are a generation of more or less voluntary retirees; the main credit for this goes to mother nature – old age, that is – and it could be partially attributed to the infamous Fiscal Balance Act.

I do not know to what extent your retirement was voluntary, but most of you probably remained employed for a year or so after the introduction of the said Act. Likewise, I do not know whether your respective Faculties were overcome with joy, sadness or relief after you had left. As for me, I can only say nice things about my departure from the Faculty and its attitude towards me, but if I am honest, I think that they were nonetheless relieved when I left. The subject I taught, Economics of the EU, was immediately abolished, arguably for being useless; perhaps they were afraid that it might be corrupted after I had left, although I heard of rumours in the corridors – whispers – that it must have been good for nothing to begin with. So it would appear that for lawyers, all that seems to matter are procedures, not substance. Any reflections as to what hides behind unintelligible legal norms of European authorities, like why the unemployment rate is so high in the EU, how the EU got knee-deep into crisis, why people at the southern rim of the EU are in such a bad situation, what has been wrong with the monetary union from the very beginning, why a fiscal union is utopic and why the banking union will be an expensive fiasco, are all supposed to be unimportant. What really counts is that lawyers are able to read complex directives a hundred thousand words long, which even the people who drew them up do not understand, but this might probably even be in line with the doctrine of Slovenian politics – obedience. In order to be obedient, it helps if a person neither knows much about things nor thinks about them too much. Or maybe the abolishment of the subject was not rooted in indirect support to obedience, but simply about the struggle for one's daily bread. In these times when money is tight, it is important to accumulate all the lecture time one can get, be it real or merely formal.

On the other hand, I think it is good that I no longer have to deal with things I had to deal with primarily during my time as Chancellor; at the time, it was simple, but now it seems a lot more complicated. It is also true that I was not a full-time Chancellor, and I still believe that it’s good if a Chancellor does not have a lot of time on his hands, otherwise he will think too much about strategies and reforms.

I presume it would be weird if my speech did not deal with my "Carthage", my pet peeve – the Bologna reform, which was, at least in my opinion, the most fateful mistake in the history of universities, including the University of Ljubljana. I have been speaking about it for a decade to anyone who cared to listen. The number of those agreeing with me is increasing and decreasing at the same time. There are fewer and fewer teachers who know both systems, while younger staff and students who do not know about a normal pre-Bologna Accord university have no grounds for comparison. For the latter, may I repeat a few things, and I promise that this is the last time I will talk about it.

In September 1998, on the occasion of honouring the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna, the rectors of European universities signed a document entitled "Magna Charta Universitatum", which announced four principles: that universities are autonomous, are organised in various manners, that the basis of research is freedom, and that universities are the guardians of European humanist traditions. Eleven years later, 29 ministers in the same city signed a declaration, which is what we now refer to as the Bologna reform. Its objectives were to establish a uniform European higher education area, increase employability and mobility as well as international competitiveness of European higher education, and to create a knowledge-based society. This was to be achieved through: the adoption of comparable diplomas, the introduction of two study cycles, a bizarre new standard called the ECTS, European quality assurance and the abolition of obstacles to mobility. I would not say that the second document clearly jeopardises the first, or that the second document contains nothing of value. That said, the first document highlights autonomy and variation, the inseparability of research and teaching, freedom and humanist traditions, while the second emphasises competitiveness, mobility and the creation of a labour force with high added value. It transforms a university into a company that admits first-year students as a kind of reproduction material. Given that intelligence is a normally distributed variable, the material deteriorates each time as the mean quality rate decreases with the growth of the share of those who successfully complete secondary education. Still, the university must ‘refine’ them and turn them into a high-added-value labour force. It does not matter if they understand things or not, what counts is that they are able to do them, or ‘to have competences’ as they call it nowadays. This is like modern-day devices, such as mobile phones, which all of us know how to use, but, save for a precious few, we have no idea as to how they actually function.

I do not blame the ministers for the Bologna reform, the culprit is the hypocrisy of the universities. I say that from experience or from my participations at rectors’ conferences; when we would sit down for dinner, many rectors were far more critical than I was, but when they appeared at the podium the following morning, they enthusiastically repeated on queue the new-fangled utterances about excellence, competences and the like.

What went missing was the autonomy of universities that we are talking about all the time, declaring it sacred. A university only has autonomy if its faculties have it, and faculties have it if teachers and students have it, and all of us have as much of it as we manage to claim for ourselves.

I have not changed my views on university education; for me, the university remains an institution where one has to learn how to think and acquire the capacity to doubt what appears self-evident. Self-evaluations, ISO standards, ENQA and similar concepts offer no help with that. I am afraid of reforms in education, and I have lived through quite a few during my primary and secondary school years, at university, as well as while teaching. The reformers always firmly believe that something needs to be reformed but do not know too well the reason why and, even less so, what those reforms will lead to. Of course, it is very likely that in a few years’ time they will reform the reformed with equal zeal, but they will fail to tell us – or they might not even know – that what they are doing is actually counter-reform. But let me return to the example of the Faculty of Law which I know well and which was a lot more reluctant than some other Faculties in adopting the Bologna reform. In spite of that, everyone did continue reforming something all the time, discussing the "3+2" model, from there moving on to the "4+1", then back to a sort of "5", inventing reasons as we went along for one or the other model, moving subjects up and down, deconstructing them, merging them or abolishing them as unnecessary, while the most intrusive of teachers managed to negotiate the so-called "deepening of the subject matter", as if there was anything else left they had to say.

I also spent a few decades in the Slovenian research "sphere", where the decision-makers most often originated from "the sphere", yet each new minister started rearranging it. The rearrangement criteria were fields, circles, areas, projects, programmes, fundamental development and applicative investigations; basic research projects, target research projects, FTE’s, centres of excellence, classifications and scorings of all types. If I am not mistaken, "smart specialisation" seems to be in fashion nowadays. Behind these fruitless endeavours, one could always sense the looming shadow of various lobbies – it has always been and it still is all about the money. In order not to lose it, we lauded or at least kept quiet when faced with "the emperor’s new clothes" and the filling out of various increasingly complicated forms.

My firm belief is that good education is only possible in strong connection with research. It is the research work of academic staff alone that enables us to adapt education to new accomplishments and requirements, and especially to exercise the fundamental function of a university – to form a human being able to understand, think and integrate things. Even though it is very likely that most of us will keep discovering what has already been discovered or, in the best case scenario, add a little something to the discovery, the research work of teachers remains the foundation of their work. They must and cannot let go of it, or else their educational work will turn to the repetition of truths that are in fashion at any given time, or "truths" in quotations. It is crucial that what we do interests us. If people have to be forced into research work, if they have no time for research because it is "eaten up" by the students, if they count the hours spent doing research or focusing on the share of the employment relationship earmarked for research, then they would do better to let go of it all. They are simply not interested in the whole thing. Equally important as curiosity is a fair assessment of one’s own work. This also includes recognising the contribution in research from younger colleagues and perhaps admitting that they are smarter than us. The established practice according to which "co-authorship" is more or less forced upon our younger colleagues cannot be a source of pride for us. This holds true regardless of any potential mutual benefits in publishing due to the more or less well-known name of the professor, who might have even read the article he or she signed. It is even more despicable should someone, in order to protect his or her own grandeur and ignorance, undermine their young colleagues and perhaps even indirectly drive them from the University.

It is not easy to assess what is good and what is bad in research, but it is certain that we will not find the answer in the rearrangement of science through agencies, directorates, centres of excellence, university incubators and similar organisational fads intended primarily for the distribution of money. The notion and practice of measuring the quality of one’s research work by the amount of published articles, the number of times abstracts were checked in a month, counting downloads or citations, has led to absurdity, plus there is a lot of horse-trading behind that at all levels, as well as connections of all kinds. It must be said that today’s teachers are in a much less favourable position than we were. We were able to climb the academic ladder without so many publications, but we also wrote when we had or at least we thought we had something valuable to say. Nowadays, they have to write for the sake of writing; in the past, they even paid us for the published work, while current authors often have to pay from their own pockets in order to get published.

And since I like to meddle in everything, I could continue by reflecting on the EU, the economic crisis in our country and around the world, the state of mind we have created in Slovenia, on the refugees and the disgraceful barbed wire we are surrounding ourselves with. As if we will be able to prevent terrorism that we helped create – indirectly or at least symbolically – by joining NATO, adhering to the Vilnius Declaration, sending four soldiers to Iraq and a whole company to Afghanistan. Being an economist, I am primarily interested in how much something costs the State, so I have been working on the problem of whether Europe will falter under the costs that the refugees are supposed to bring about, as claimed by some colleagues. And so I calculated that three million refugees in the EU, if granted all the social rights we have ourselves, would cost us 1.4 per mille of our product per annum. But being an economist, I also know that marginal utility decreases with an increase in quantity. The same applies to the marginal utility of speeches. Therefore it is only right that I should finish.

I do realise that a solemn address filled with questions and doubts instead of praise of our achievements and merits for the University of Ljubljana might not be the most appropriate for a ceremony and even less so to honour our Professors Emeriti. Therefore, allow me to at least finish on a different note. First of all by thanking you for everything you have done for the University, with a wish that, as retirees, you will not have enough time to remain interested in the things you have been dealing with for decades, that you will continue doubting anything that appears self-evident, and with the hope that we will have enough snow this winter. Thank you for listening and for your patience.