



Inge Jonsson, Professor and Former Rector, Stockholm University Signatory of Magna Charta Universitatum in 1988

Rectori magnifica, Mr Honorary President, Mr President, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen!
Dr Agneta Bladh was once a highly respected member of my staff at Stockholm University, later on my superior at the Ministry of Education and she is now my colleague as rector emeritus. When a person of her standing invited me to say a few words on this solemn occasion, I felt so honoured that I did not have sense enough to decline her offer. It is true that I represented Stockholm University twenty-six years ago to the day as one of the about 400 European university leaders, who had come to Bologna to celebrate her 900th jubilee by signing the Magna Charta Universitatum. However, when preparing a short talk I discovered much to my regret that I had only a dim recollection of the ceremony in the big square in front of the cathedral.

My presence in Bologna was my first international mission after taking up my duties as vice-chancellor of Stockholm University on July 1 1988, but I had acquired some experience as prorector in four years, and I had in fact visited Bologna three weeks before the event. Thanks to my friend professor Tore Frängsmyr here in Uppsala I had been invited to give a number of lectures at an international postgraduate school in the history of science that he would be organizing in Bologna together with his colleagues Giuliano Pancaldi, Bologna, and John Heilbron from Berkeley. It was scheduled to take place from August 29 to September 9, 1988. It was an attractive offer, and since I had then absolutely no idea that I might become vice-chancellor I accepted it with great pleasure.

Consequently I was in Bologna during almost two intensive weeks to lecture on 18th century science based on the writings of the famous Swedish scientist and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, who incidentally had also stayed there almost 250 years earlier, in August 1739. After my last lecture I returned to Stockholm to deal with such administrative matters, which would take most of my time during the following six years as vice-chancellor of the university.

A little more than a week later I flew back to Bologna, now equipped with gown and chain as the insignia of my office to be able to represent the university properly. To be honest, I did not know much about the background of the ceremony. Nor could I imagine that I would be strongly involved with the organisation, which together with the university of Bologna had initiated the process of creating a document of the freedom of universities, that is the CRE, Conférence des Recteurs Européens, now known as EUA, European University Association. However, I came to participate in their Institutional Evaluation Programme for many years and visited about ten universities in seven European countries as member of various CRE/EUA evaluation committees.

Fortunately enough there were many Swedish colleagues present in Bologna, who could inform me. Mårten Carlsson has just shown me a photo, which proves that we were at least seven Swedes among the signatories. Four of us are present here tonight: Martin Holmdahl from Uppsala, who could give me all the information I needed, as he did to all of us half an hour ago, Mårten Carlsson, rector emeritus of the Swedish University of Agriculture, Janne Carlsson, rector emeritus of the Royal College of Technology in Stockholm, and myself. Our Nordic colleagues Inge Lønning from Oslo and the rector of the University of Copenhagen had also arrived. I remember vaguely that our Danish colleague tried to push past Martin Holmdahl in the queue of signatories but without success. The signing of the document was to take place according to the age of the universities, and since Uppsala had better contacts with the Curia she got her privileges two years before Copenhagen, in 1477, which of course entitled Martin to a higher place in the procession.



Incidentally, in the papal foundation document Bologna was explicitly mentioned as the model that Uppsala had to act on.

I am fairly certain that I remember one incident at the ceremony, or to be more cautious, I do hope that it really happened, because I cannot rule out the risk that I may be mixing it up with the Fernandel movies on Father Camillo that were very popular at the time. The University of Stockholm was founded in 1878, and because of her relatively mature age I had been given a seat from which I could observe the guests of honour. Someone had told me that the meeting of the Communist mayor of the city and the Archbishop might be worth watching. I noticed that the mayor had arrived in good time and was conversing vividly with people around him. However, the cardinal obviously waited behind the scenes until the audience was seated and then walked quickly to his chair, so no greetings had to be exchanged, neither sacral nor profane ones. In other respects I am convinced that I was just as impressed by the ceremony as Martin Holmdahl, who in his memoirs has characterized it as a shining event of medieval splendour. But I also made a trivial observation: an ankle-length cloth gown in dark blue and golden colours, covering a full evening dress, and a heavy metal chain around the neck are not the best outfit to wear, when a late summer sun is shining.

In his memoirs Martin Holmdahl quite rightly emphasizes the fact that some East European University rectors were among the signatories. However, as deputy vice-chancellor I had represented Stockholm University at the 175-year jubilee of the Humboldt University in East Berlin in 1985. On that occasion I had felt ill at ease, when I had to listen to a servile speech by the rector in honour of those in power in what they called “die Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat” DDR. What I believe that he was forced to say formed a sharp contrast to the spirit of freedom and academic virtues, with which the Magna Charta Universitatum is imbued. With that in mind I had my doubts about what change such a document might achieve in a real world, where a cold war seemed to be lasting for ever. Even if current slogans like glasnost and perestrojka might have arisen some hope, I could not imagine that it would take only a little more than one year before the Berlin wall was torn down and the Soviet empire began to disintegrate. Hardly anyone could do that either, for that matter, in spite of the big amount of cremlological speculations and economic research which had been going on for decades.

The quarter of a century that has passed since the ceremony in Bologna has indeed been a period of fundamental changes, many of which – maybe most of them – of a positive nature. The great peace project, the European Union, has not only survived but also expanded considerably. On the other hand, it has been a period of war in Europe and neighboring regions, on a low scale to be sure, but nevertheless marked by the same lack of common sense and humanity as the disastrous World War I a hundred years ago. It is only too easy to be seized by paralysing doubts about the future of mankind, when media feed you everyday with terrible data and pictures of a world diametrically opposite the spirit of openness, tolerance and love of freedom that you meet in the Magna Charta Universitatum.

When I read that precious document today, it makes me happy to find that - like Shakespeare's Cleopatra - age has not withered it. It is a matter of course that it had to be written in a rather general rhetorical style, if rectors coming from various systems of higher education would be able to sign it. Nevertheless it is focussed on principles that are and must continue to be the fundament of the universities. It is a fair summary of the ethos of the European university tradition, particularly in the modern shape that was a result of the scientific breakthrough in the 17th, the Enlightenment of the 18th and the university reforms of the early 19th century.



The claim that teaching and research must be closely connected, which belongs to the most fundamental principles of the Magna Charta Universitatum, has its roots in this modern university tradition. No doubt such a demand must lead to competition on resources, the outcome of which depends on current values. According to our university law in Sweden, teaching merits are to be given the same weight as research records in evaluating applicants for posts as professors, but my experience of quite a number of such procedures says nevertheless that qualifications in research still play a much larger part than didactic portfolios. To a certain extent this is easy to understand since it is normally much easier to document and thereby also to evaluate the scientific skill of an applicant. However, it is at the same time caused by the attention that research projects attract in media and the higher status that follows. It may very well be that things have changed for the better now - as emeriti we should always be aware of the risk that we like retired generals fight the latest war – but if not, this is a point where the universities have reason to review their practice in the light of what is explicitly written in the Magna Charta Universitatum.

The document emphasizes the duty of the universities to examine critically what is regarded as established knowledge as well as new discoveries and theories without being restrained by political interests or cultural trends. The autonomy of the universities, the academic freedom to teach and to do research, stands out as a *conditio sine qua non*. This is of course as it should be, but it does not permit the universities to isolate themselves from the rest of the society that they belong to as one of its most important parts. On the contrary, the entire document reflects a strong ambition to serve the common good. This is a point that makes me particularly proud of being one of the signatories of the document. I find the talk of a modern university as an “ivory tower” quite annoying, of course not because it originates from a poetic metaphor in *The Song of Songs*, but because it is fundamentally wrong as a concept: of course a true university is no haven but a vital participant in the continuous building of a better society.

The English version of the Preamble uses the phrase “true universities” in article 1. The Magna Charta Universitatum presents the conditions on which the universities may flourish and come close to the ideals it proclaims. But human beings will never be able to realize their ideals fully, and I am afraid that you can meet badly prepared lecturers and students or various types of fraud in research even at “true universities”. This is of course no reason to abstain from formulating your ideals. On the contrary, it makes it even more important to keep the common values alive in the highly complex organisations, which the big universities of today are. It strengthens the need to react strongly against everything and everybody that contradicts the ideal visions and thereby risks to seriously reduce the public trust in the university. At least this is the creed I have tried to practise since the signing of Magna Charta Universitatum in Bologna twenty-six years ago to the day. I wish you a fruitful conference, and I thank you very much for inviting me and for your patient listening!