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Signatory of Magna Charta Universitatum in 1988

Today 26 years ago 18/9- 1988 at an impressive ceremony in medieval age style, Magna Charta Universitatum was signed by several hundred executive heads of European Universities – a document for which CRE, I.E. the conference Permanente of Rectors, Presidents, vice chancellors, des Universitees Europeéens was largely responsible. CRE was founded in 1950'ies as an unpolitical organization for European university leaders. In the preamble of its constitution it is said that members should be attached to the fundamental requirements of their task: Freedom of study, research and expression.

Only a few universities in the then so called Satellite States and none from Soviet Union applied for memberships. The situation changed in March 1985 with Michail Gorbatjov and his Glasnost and Perestroika. Already in April that year at a special UNESCO conference held in Vienna representatives of eastern European universities met with CRE bureau members. I had the honor to serve on the CRE bureau under the eminent leadership of the former rector of Genoa University, Carmine Romanzi who was the president of CRE during the 1984-89 quinquennium.

I was asked on my way to Vienna to visit Rector Ceska, Charles University in Prague which Uppsala University had a bilateral agreement of cooperation. These discussions in Prague and in Vienna played an important role in reducing suspicion on both sides by firmly pointing out that none government cooperation between free universities was essential for scientific and cultural progress. Romanzi stressed that CRE was still not willing to change its constitution, which reflected the emphasis placed by western countries of the autonomy of the universities and its teaching and research.

Already in 1986 Romanzi received a message from the eastern side through Rector Ceska, that the eastern universities including the soviet ones would be ready joining the CRE as it stood and, if any constitutional change where felt to be necessary would ask for amendments according to the organizations normal rules.

Romanzi acted swiftly to let it be wildly known by proposing signing of a Magna Charta of the European universities at the Bologna 9th centenary.

For the wording of the Charta CRE bureau was largely responsible. Besides the autonomy of the Universities another at that time (and still) important problem was that teaching and research in Universities must be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind changing needs and advances in scientific knowledge. Both this problems many universities including my own at the time had to deal with, and still have.

In a meeting in Warsaw in June 1988 several eastern universities became members of CRE, and in the ordinary CRE spring conference 1989 held in Uppsala CRE could be said to be for the first time a Pan-European organization.

Finally I wish the Magna Charta Observatory all success. It was initiated by the rector 1988 of the Bologna University Fabio Roversi Monaco, whom we have the pleasure to welcome here today. I will also take this opportunity to thank the chairman of the meeting Professor Anders Ekström for inviting a risky old timer, and my thanks to Agneta Bladh, vice chairperson of the Uppsala University consistorium, member of the Council Magna Charta Observatory for her suggestion to hold this meeting on University Integrity – Societys Benefit in Uppsala.