

**Speech by Tobias Krantz at the opening of the conference “The Knowledge Triangle – Shaping the future of Europe” in Gothenburg, August 31th 2009.**

Commissioner, colleagues, dear friends.

I'm very happy to you welcome you all here to Gothenburg and three days of intensive discussions about the knowledge triangle.

Let me start by saying that Gothenburg is a very appropriate place for this conference. It has always been a city dominated by successful business. And the private enterprises have been good friends to the academic world. Chalmers University of Technology was founded through a donation in the will of William Chalmers, a successful businessman. Also the University of Gothenburg was founded with the support of private donations. With that background, it's not hard to see why the academic community in Gothenburg traditionally has been very open to the industry and focused on innovations.

One excellent example of this is the blockbuster drug for ulcers – Losec. It was invented not far from here in Astra's laboratory in Mölndal. It was the result of a cooperation between Astra, Chalmers university of technology and the Sahlgrenska Hospital here in Gothenburg.

So, we have certainly gathered in the right place.

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This conference is called “shaping the future of Europe”. That might sound a little overly ambitious, but the name has been chosen wisely.

The knowledge triangle is vital to Europe's future success. To discuss and handle knowledge policy IS to shape the future. It's not something we SHOULD succeed in, it is something we MUST succeed in.

As all of you know, the aim of strengthening the knowledge triangle is to interlink three policy fields – education, research and innovation. Each of these three parts of the triangle is important. We need to strengthen the links between the different parts, but we also need to strengthen each part in itself.

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To start in the middle, with research I, as minister for research, obviously have to start by requesting more money. Sweden calls for a shift in the EU-budget, from agricultural subsidies to research investments. That would give a much higher added

value to the union. But we also need each member state to invest more, because the pluralism of the research funding on the European continent is one of our big advantages.

All research funding have to be based on quality assessments and that is one our big challenges. How can we improve our systems for measuring quality?

Some, including me, would say that new knowledge is important just for the sake of it. Others, also including me, claim that it's important that research can be commercialized and generate growth. I cannot chose one of those positions, we need both.

However, I can understand that in times like ours, when there's been quite a bit of economic turmoil, the public debate tends to focus on the possibility of research creating growth. That brings us to the next part of the triangle – innovation.

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We should be honest. Investing the amounts we do in research, Europe doesn't get enough out of it.

Some call the problem of turning scientific breakthroughs into profit “the valley of death”. In Sweden we are less drastic and call it “the research paradox”.

I'm fine with the fact that not all research can be commercialized. My own thesis in political science was a critical study of the debate on Swedish regions. I couldn't really see any commercial potential in that one. And that's okay, I'm sure it did some good anyway. But I'm not fine with great ideas, a new miracle drug or a groundbreaking new technique to combat global warming being left in a desk drawer just because our system for innovations wasn't good enough.

There is a lot we, who are involved in research policy can do – I'll come back to that. But we cannot bridge the valley or solve the paradox by ourselves. We need help from other policy areas and from the private sector. Taxation policy and industrial policy are two important pieces of the innovation puzzle. A good entrepreneurial climate is another must.

But, for today, let us focus on what we can do on our own turf.

We must make it easier to have multiple careers. It must be possible to travel back and forth between a career in the academy and one in the private sector. I believe that many researchers are hesitant to take a leap of fate and leave the safety of the university for the more insecure business world. I think the common thought is that

an academic career will benefit more from publishing the research result, in comparison to commercializing them.

It's my experience that brilliant researchers are not always great businessmen, although some are. In Sweden we have the extraordinary example of Alfred Nobel who both invented the dynamite and commercialized it to make the fortune that today is used to fund the Nobel Prize. But renaissance people like Alfred Nobel don't come around that often. Instead I believe in match making. Universities should be better at helping their employees find a venture capitalist to help fund the development of their own inventions.

Universities could and should do more to help their employees commercialize their inventions.

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The third part of the triangle is education. As minister for higher education, I'd like to focus on the universities. I guess I'll run the risk of sounding like broken record but I believe the higher education's main needs are money and higher quality.

But universities also need to be more modern. Some would say that's impossible. They would say that the words "modern" and "university" are opposites. I heard a somewhat ironic comment once when someone said:

*"Trying to reform a university is like rebuilding a grave-yard – you won't get much help from the inside".*

But, all jokes aside, modernization is part of existing. Like everything and everyone else universities have to adapt and adjust to the world around them. And what could have higher potential to be more modern than an institution whose main purpose is to create new knowledge.

We live in the era of globalization and I would say that the pressure on universities has never been greater. Every university wants to have the best of the best – students, teachers and researchers. Decades ago the top universities in Sweden had to compete with each other for the best students, or the top researchers. Today, they have to battle Harvard, Oxford and the University of Kyoto as well. If that isn't pressure to modernize and improve – I don't know what is.

So what characterizes a modern university? I would say that two things come to my mind.

**Openness.** A modern university must be open. To new ideas, to new methods and to new ways of cooperating. In today's world there are no boundaries. For example – a student doesn't have to take all courses needed for a masters degree in one university, in one country or even on one continent.

**Autonomy.** An open, modern university must be free to explore all the new opportunities. In many ways the old structures are holding universities back. I can certainly say that that's the case in Sweden. We have laws and rules telling the universities what they can and, mostly, cannot do. They have to ask the government for permission to do anything out of the ordinary. Obviously that is not an efficient system. We are preparing a reform to make the universities more free, as I know many other countries have done, or are planning on doing. It's not easy finding new ways for the universities to exist. I think we can learn a lot from other countries and exchange experiences.

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I think all of us here today agree that education, research and innovation are vital to Europe's future. Some would argue that introducing new words like "the knowledge triangle" is just cosmetics. I would however say that the purpose is bigger than a new word to put on posters. The term "the knowledge triangle" emphasizes the need for a joint European strategy on this field. I hope this being a priority during the Swedish presidency can be the starting point for a renewed effort to build a stronger bridge to overcome that valley of death.

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Let me end by saying a few words on a more general note. The financial crisis has affected us in many ways. I would like to stress that, when combating the crises, it's important not to lose the long-term perspective. Investments in knowledge – education and research – are absolutely vital in building a European economy that will be able to combat both these crises – and crises to come.

So, dear friends. I hope you'll enjoy this conference. Let's shape the future of Europe.