

**Professor Günter Stock: The Role of Academies in the European
Research and Education Area**

Lecture delivered on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the All European
Academies at the ALLEA General Assembly 2014

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Dear Secretary of State,

Dear President Stenseth,

Dear delegates of the ALLEA Academies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we talk about modern Academies we should do so with modesty and should first ask the question: what were the first principles of the idea of an academy? Thus following one of Kant's leading questions: "Where do we come from?"

And we should also be reminded of Newton's words, that "we all stand on shoulders of giants".

For me, that also means reading papers written by my predecessors in the role of ALLEA president, and here I start with Pieter Drenth's paper written in 2005, in which he makes the case that in Plato's famous Academy in the 4th century BC the value and the contribution of the Academy came from an independent and undistorted search for the truth.

When we look at the rejuvenation of the idea of Academies in the Renaissance, when we look at today's Academies, this principle is just as important as it was then.

Pieter Drenth also stated two conditions: freedom and independence, which are, have been and will be essential characteristics of an Academy. This is where you find unity in all the diversity we have.

And whilst the EASAC was created - the European Academies Science Advisory Council - to provide scientific advice to European policy makers focusing on bio-medical sciences, energy and environment in 2001, as documented by Jüri Engelbrecht and Nicholas Mann, the idea at the outset of the creation of ALLEA in 1994, and here I quote Jüri Engelbrecht and Nicholas Mann again, was that “ALLEA by contrast reflects on and offers advice on the improvement of the framework conditions under which the best possible and most relevant research can be conducted in Europe and beyond.” - A clear statement and mission which prevails.

Another feature of ALLEA that I would like to mention briefly, and that I touched upon in my welcome remarks this morning, is the geographical inclusiveness that enables all European countries, not only those from the political European Union, to be part of ALLEA. And it is a disciplinary inclusiveness, which makes us special and future oriented.

I would now like to concentrate on what I consider “future oriented” to mean, and why it is so necessary.

In and after the Renaissance, where, to use modern language, human dignity evolved as a concept with the emerging concept of individualism and individual rights together with opportunities in the sciences, there was a need to offer science - and I use the word science in the sense of the German word “Wissenschaft” which goes beyond natural sciences, of course – a physical and intellectual space where researchers could work independently of laboratories sponsored by various courts.

So the beginning of the Academies in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century was this desire for the autonomy and freedom of research, but it was Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz who in 1700 created his Academy in Berlin with a clear understanding that science has a great responsibility to help to improve the *conditio humana*, which he felt would only be feasible by combining theoretical knowledge with practical needs and capabilities - *theoria cum praxi* was his mission, and this has defined his academy and many of our academies since.

Today we would call this: “We have to stand up for the challenges ahead of us.” And since these challenges are multi-factorial and multi-faceted a linear technocratic approach only will not make it.

We need all disciplines to work together, or, in the words of Mittelstrass: “Whilst interdisciplinarity means that every scientist resides in his discipline, cooperates with the partner in the next discipline, transdisciplinarity means that they really cross the frontiers of individual disciplines.”

Now when we look at Leibniz’s time and the challenges society faced in those days, there were conflicts and wars, there were existential needs, there was a wide gap between rich and poor, health was a major issue, nutrition and bondage.

If we list the major challenges of today,, we can similarly start with conflict and wars. After seventy years of peace in Europe for the first time, military conflicts are fortunately still a theoretical but nevertheless an imminent threat to countries with ALLEA member academies.

If we look at the southern border of Italy and Spain, we have an immediate understanding of what existential needs means today, and the fact that we know

almost everything in our global village gives us an enormous appreciation of what health and nutrition mean for our societies.

So we have challenges that are comparable to those in the 17th and 18th centuries, but on top of that we have the issue of climate, energy, cyber war and – once again – a threat to personal integrity; challenges and issues that necessitate a combined effort by all disciplines. But we also need a deep and very thorough understanding of what we could call disciplinary excellence.

We do not need either disciplinary excellence or careful transdisciplinary work: we need both! Neither of them can feasibly exist without the other.

Science has managed to penetrate all sectors of our lives and it is and only ever will be science which helps us to to direct and control future developments. The responsibility of science and scientists is to accept these challenges, to try to find solutions, to try to convince our fellow citizens and take responsibility in the broadest sense.

Responsibility includes seriousness and honesty in our scientific work, especially when we present the results, e.g. in scientific papers, and probably even more important when we give advice within our society, when we give advice in societal and political arenas.

Extrapolation of our scientific data into the future or into other areas must be done with extreme care and we must avoid simple, populist comparisons and examples.

In order to address and secure these fundamental principles and responsibilities in science and research ALLEA runs – and has done from the very beginning – a

dedicated expert Working Group on Science & Ethics which covers these issues in its activities and deliberations.

Above all, Ladies and Gentlemen, Academies have to provide our societies with all the possible knowledge which has been accumulated in different fields of research for the challenges ahead of us and prepare scientific bases for the public dialogue and for political decisions:

“We must not trivialize complexity but we also must not increase the existing complexity by our language which hinders understanding”, as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once put it. “Make it simpler”, Einstein once wrote, “but never simple”.

The interdisciplinarity of Academies, the excellency of their members and their experience make Academies an ideal place to reflect on scientific data from different fields, consider their development and put forward hypotheses about future developments and, if needed, solutions.

And, Ladies and Gentlemen, Academies have another role to play. The diversity, the complexity within our scientific system, within our scientific institutions, make it mandatory to try to find common grounds for corporation and integration which cannot otherwise be easily done.

Last but not least, we have to actively take part in the development of our science system. Be it regional, be it national, be it European.

ALLEA has been fighting at the European level in order to make humanities and social sciences a relevant part of the new framework programme Horizon 2020. Today, supported and guided by the expertise and the continued efforts of our Working Group on Social Sciences and Humanities, for which I am very thankful,

ALLEA has been able to establish a constant dialogue with the decision-makers in the European Commission and our advice is being heard and appreciated.

Together with EASAC and the Academia Europaea we have also supported and advocated a substantial budget for science and research in Europe, particularly for Horizon 2020.

ALLEA has to fight and is fighting to ensure that funds within the EU are allocated and spent appropriately. And more and more of the research money spent within Horizon 2020 is being spent according to scientific rules, scientific needs and hence scientific advice.

The European Research Area is an emerging reality. It is our duty to ensure that this area is constructed along scientific criteria and not primarily along a political agenda. As much as I believe that we need structural help for the science system in many countries, I do believe in excellence and high quality and therefore it is highly appreciated that the ERC, the European Research Council, is receiving more funding than ever – as a body which guarantees for scientific excellence.

The autonomy of academic institutions in many European countries is by no means guaranteed, and in countries where autonomy was installed only recently there is a risk a rollback. But also in countries where we thought that autonomy of science has been secured for decades we feel that governments are trying to regain some of what they believe to be their lost influence. Independent Academies and ALLEA as a federation of many European Academies thus have a very special responsibility. Policy for science is the mission that was created at the outset of founding ALLEA and which continues to be, and increasingly so, the mission we have to follow.

And, Ladies and Gentlemen, how can we build a European Research Area if we do not, at the same time, think of a European education area? An education area where we try to offer the best possible opportunities for children and young people to be educated and trained according to their individual potential, needs and opportunities. Our responsibility is to offer fora and possibilities where we show our young people how exciting it is to acquire new knowledge, to apply new knowledge and to communicate about new knowledge. Here each individual academy has an obligation and with our Working Group on Science Education we have to engage in national and Europe-wide activities to support the education of our young people, especially in those fields where the societal need is currently not fulfilled – I am talking about MINT, mathematics, informatics, natural sciences and engineering. The issue is not to plant curiosity and scientific interest in those young people. The point is, as I feel, to maintain and preserve what is there in young childhood from the beginning.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the fact that all our knowledge and also most of our communication today is based on the internet makes it mandatory that we as Academies carefully follow this development. First, we have to be very conscious that every scientist with a need for new technology has access to it. And we have to be very careful how to handle large amounts of data. We have to secure those data but we have also to be very conscious to make them available for coming generations – and not just available to read, but available in the sense of making and keeping them accessible for interactive engagement. The question of what intellectual property is in this new world has a dimension which is by no means fully appreciated by most of the people using new technology and digital means. Hence our Working Group on Intellectual Property Rights and our Working Group on E-Humanities are not only

mandatory but also highly appreciated and I am very grateful to our colleagues who take part in these discussions – on the national level and even more so at the European level. The European Commissioner Neelie Kroes, responsible for the Digital Agenda in Europe, is very open to suggestions brought forward by ALLEA; a dialogue which started at our General Assembly in Rome in 2012.

There is – and I would like to close my address with this remark – one more task which I consider key for the Academies in Europe to pursue: *The understanding of Europe as an intellectual and cultural entity.*

Europe is a reality, Europe is a geographic entity. It is a network of ideas and concepts, of cultures and values, of friends and partners.

Europe is an economic – and even if some people will not fully appreciate this – a political power, but above all, Europe is also a dream: a dream of and a dream for freedom, justice, and welfare.

Historically, Europe has always been a place for diversity, for change, for ingenuity.

Geographically, Europe has been defined and centered over the centuries in different ways. But the idea and the dream of Europe have remained constant: individualism, intensity, pluralism and diversity.

My deep belief is that Europe is most of all an intellectual, yes emotional, entity based on common convictions.

We, the academies in Europe, have a responsibility to rejuvenate the basic ideas of Europe.

We have therefore created the All European Academies Madame de Staël Prize for Cultural Values which is awarded to scholars in order to underline the importance

and contribution of scholarly work towards creating and building, maintaining and preserving, but also achieving and completing a better Europe, or, more modestly: to come closer to our dream of Europe.

Two weeks ago, we had the pleasure of celebrating the first award ceremony in Brussels where the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, handed over our prize to the laureate, Professor Luisa Passerini.

I am very grateful that with Professor Passerini we have honoured a personality who is so strongly engaged in investigating Europe's cultures and values. At the same time she follows a critical and professional – truly scientific – approach when it comes to Eurocentrism and also what we call European bureaucracy, that which makes Europe and European institutions so difficult to be loved by the people – a goal that is probably no longer truly appreciated. Nevertheless she never hides her sympathy and deep understanding of the intellectual roots of Europe.

Luisa Passerini is professor emeritus of Cultural History at the University of Turin. She has taught and conducted research in many different Universities in various European countries and also beyond (Africa, Australia, USA). She is also part-time Professor of History at the European University Institute in Florence.

Currently Professor Passerini lectures at the Columbia University in New York and – as you will understand – it would have been asking too much from her to come to Europe twice within a few weeks. Thus I am even more grateful that she has agreed to address us in a video conference now.

Before that, allow me to briefly introduce to you to Professor Etienne Francois who held an exceptional laudatory speech in Brussels two weeks ago, and who was kind enough to accept our invitation to also give the festive lecture today.

Etienne François is Professor emeritus at the “Frankreich Zentrum” which is now part of the Free University of Berlin. Alumnus of the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, he studied history in Paris. From 1979 until 1986 he was the director of the "Mission Historique Française en Allemagne" (Göttingen) and from 1989 until his retirement, he was a professor of history at the University of Paris-I (Panthéon-Sorbonne). Etienne François is an expert in French, German, and European history since the end of the Middle Ages with a strong focus on comparative social and cultural history as well as on history and memory.

Professor François is an ordinary member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are living in exciting times; science has become the dominant factor in our modern world and we as scientists, especially we as scientists in Academies, have a responsibility to secure, further develop and keep science as a force which not only helps to understand the world but improves the *conditio humana* and hence increases the standards of living in possibly all aspects. The tasks ahead of us, Ladies and Gentlemen, could not be greater and our responsibility not less. But it requires of us both modesty and courage – and definitely energy and a strong will to participate.

Thank you very much and a warm welcome to Luisa Passerini on the screen.