



Dies academicus 2006 at the University of St.Gallen, 10 June 2006

"Bond for life instead of a stage in life"

Welcoming address of the President, Professor Ernst Mohr PhD

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you cordially to the 2006 *Dies*. The *Dies* as such is sufficient reason for celebration, but this year, we have reason to celebrate something very special besides: 33 years after the foundation of the HSG in 1898 as the then Commercial College, the Old Students' Association was set up in 1931. In 2006 the Alumni – as we have come to know them in the meantime – are celebrating their 75th anniversary as an association. The entire HSG is joining in the celebration, and so are we all today: today's *Dies* revolves around this anniversary.

With your presence, ladies and gentlemen, you honor the University of St.Gallen and show your attachment to it. It is this feeling of attachment that I would like to talk to you about, since we connect it with something that lasts over time, something that may have started at some juncture but is thought of as going on for ever. This is the nature of your feeling of attachment to the HSG. Let us first look at something that is not the opposite of this feeling of attachment, but still something distinctly different: a stage in life.

There are many and quite different stages in life:

- short and long ones,
- bearable and unbearable ones,
- voluntary and involuntary ones.

"We were on holiday" describes such a stage. "Day after day, day after day, We stuck, nor breath nor motion; As idle as a painted ship Upon a painted ocean" describes another. "I got my degree in such and such a subject and I'm now doing this, that and the other" refers to another stage, during which someone was at university for a time. Such a description is untypical of the HSG. I am referring less to holidays or the trials and tribulations of an ancient mariner – life for most HSG students is somewhere between the two of them, and that is quite right – but to the unemotional passage through university education: in, through, out, and off!

Studies at the HSG are not an unemotional matter for many students, nor were they a mere stage in life for many of our alumni. The 15,000 members that our Alumni Association has accumulated in the meantime provide impressive proof of this. Studies at the HSG create ties among students and between students and the University. In late 2005, we adopted a new mission statement, Vision 2006, which replaced our Vision 2005 of the year 2000. There, we laid down our strategic aims for the coming years. One of these postulates that the HSG should not be a mere stage in life, but a bond for life – which means the opposite of "in, through, out, and off". Let me explain why this aim is of great significance for the HSG.

Our aim is that an even larger number of each graduate year will retain a lasting connection with the HSG, and that those alumni who already have one will intensify it. In this way, the alumni network, which is sizeable even now, will become even bigger and more active. In this respect, the Alumni Association is already making considerable efforts under the headings it has chosen:

- Friends: "Do you remember when we were stuck in mid-ocean..."
- Brains: "Wasn't there a great guy who now knows how to..."
- Funds: "Shouldn't we help to keep the ship on course?"

However, there is more at stake for the HSG. Alumni and the HSG: they should work much less alongside each other, and much more together. The key word is "participation". We will only be able to put our alumni's knowledge, commitment and networks to full use for the HSG if we provide them with new and better possibilities of becoming actively involved with the HSG. One milestone of which we can be proud even now is the Mentoring Program, in which some 500 alumni support our students with practical advice. However, participation will have to mean far more in the future. The University and the alumni will unite in a strategic partnership. An advisory council consisting of alumni and further personalities will mobilize know-how and financial resources for important projects in the HSG's overall interest. Thus the alumni will be given an even greater opportunity for participation and involvement in the HSG. I would like to thank the Board of Governors of the University for their support in this endeavor. In this way, the HSG will become a big ship for the alumni, to whose construction they would like to contribute. Looking back as in "Do you remember when we were stuck in mid-ocean..." will be replaced by a joint look forward.

This year's keynote speech will also focus on the anniversary. Wolfgang Schürer, Regular Visiting Professor and Honorary Doctor of the University of St.Gallen, who like perhaps few others, represents an alumnus's genuine feeling of attachment to his alma mater, will deal with the future challenges and opportunities of an even closer alliance between the University and the world of practical working life. And for this alliance to be created, the alumni will be indispensable.

A bond for life instead of a stage in life has many facets, and naturally also facets beyond the alumni. It also involves the recruitment of good students from all over the world. For this purpose, we will reinforce our efforts to increase our students' international diversity within the limits of the existing quota for foreign nationals. In the short and medium term, we will thus be improving the HSG as a place where students are able to learn from each other. In the long term, however, we will also enhance our alumni's international diversification, no matter how far they are now spread throughout many countries.

The feeling of attachment to the HSG, however, should also be improved for companies and the public sector. The University's partnership with the alumni will also be able to provide valuable services here. Then again, the following will be applicable right across the board: the HSG will only be able to develop a bonding power to the extent to which it actively and lastingly engages with future-oriented issues of great social relevance. This will require focal research points to be created above and beyond individual research institutes' specialties. I am therefore extremely pleased that we have been able to set up the first two University-wide focal research points at the HSG on the issues of

- Work, Ageing and Welfare, and
- Wealth and Risk.

And there is yet another kind of attachment: students are rarely left to cope alone. Our students' families are also on tenterhooks for them to succeed. They, too, have expectations of the HSG and are interested in it. For this reason, we are in the process of vitalizing the interface between parents and the HSG. I am therefore pleased to be able to welcome numerous family members of our Assessment Year students among us.

Ladies and gentlemen, many among you attended last year's *Dies*, too, and may well remember how

I provided evidence that the HSG has very much in common with the five-franc coin, that special coin in the set. The five-franc coin has two sides, with an Alpine herdsman on one and the Swiss coat of arms on the other. Both sides are held together by the edge, whose inscription tells of support from up on high. The HSG, too, has two sides: the inner, which is academic and scientific, and the outer, which is practice-related. And like the five-franc coin, these sides are held together by a surrounding edge: by our alumni, whose 75th anniversary we are celebrating at this point in time.

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