

Dear Milena, dear rector, dear president, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity here today to not only be present at this festive occasion of the inauguration of Milena as professor of health economics at Corvinus university, but also to be given the opportunity to say a few words to you and to her.

This is an emotional and happy moment for me personally. Milena was one of the first people I met when I started to work at Maastricht University nearly twenty years ago. She was also my first PhD student at Maastricht University and now the first of my PhD students to become a full professor.

Milena and I have established a very fruitful and enjoyable collaboration. And a productive one too. I have not really counted it but I think that we together have successfully supervised about 15 PhD students and have authored more than a hundred scientific publications.

Your inauguration here today is to begin with a reward for all the hard work you have done over the past years and a recognition of the important contributions you have made to the health economics fields in general and the role and influence of formal and informal patient payments in central and Eastern Europe in particular. As is written in your biography your research interests are broad and cover a wide range of topics from health promotion for elderly to maternity care for young mothers and their offspring, and anything in between. It is a sign of your status and fame - if I may call it this way - that you are frequently approached by people from around the world who want to pursue a PhD under your - and my if I may add my - supervision. As a result we have built a large network of PhD students from all parts of the world.

For this achievement you have now been awarded this professorship. And for this recognition of your achievement I like to thank Corvinus university, and in particular dr. Petra Baji and professor Laszlo Gulasz who have made this possible. No doubt this great honor that has now been bestowed on you will deepen and extend the productive collaboration we have with the health economics unit at Corvinus university even further.

I think your inauguration has a wider relevance and importance as well. Over the past ten years we have established a network of researchers from different universities in central and Eastern Europe. This has led to fruitful collaboration and exchange of ideas. These contacts and open exchange of ideas are especially important as we nowadays sadly see a closing of minds and universities being sanctioned by people advocating illiberal ideas. The network of researchers we have developed is a small but important contribution to maintaining an open and cosmopolitan society in which critical thinking and an open mind prevail.

You personally also embody this cosmopolitan world of academia. You were born in Bulgaria, did your masters in Varna, went to the Netherlands to do your PhD at Maastricht University, have been an associate professor at that university and have now become a professor at Corvinus university in Budapest in Hungary. As the American beat poet Allan Ginsburg once wrote about the benefits of such a cosmopolitan life: others can measure their vision by what we see / candour ends paranoia. I believe that holds for the illiberal thoughts we see emerging in Europe and elsewhere in the world as well.

Again I want to congratulate you with your inauguration here today, and I do so saying that I hope we will be able to continue our fruitful collaboration for many many years to come.

Thank you for your attention