

## HERBERT KRONKE

Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg  
Institut für Ausländisches und Internationales Privat- und Wirtschaftsrecht

*Spectabiles,  
Members of the Senate,  
Professor Mádl,  
Professor Harmathy,  
Your Excellencies,  
Dear Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am deeply moved. Most of us, if not all, had an imaginary ‘promised land’ when we were young. For some it was the South Sea. For many, not only in Europe, it was North America. For an aunt of mine who lived in North America, in Canada, it was Hungary: She had been born here as the eldest daughter of my grandmother who was from Pécs. At the time, my grandfather served as a minister of a parish in the south of the country. Later the family moved to Germany. But the memories were strong and ubiquitous. One of the roots was and remained here. By the time my aunt had an opportunity to return to her native land – I believe it was in 1969 or 1970 –, memories of and emotional attachment to the promised land had trickled down to the next generation. The images and associations were surprisingly detailed and colourful.

In 1978, I was appointed one of the German national reporters to the X. International Congress of Comparative Law, held here in Budapest. Not only did the legal sciences permit me to finally see my mother’s family’s promised land with my own eyes. It also was an occasion to speak to a number of colleagues and to fathom the depth and measure the width of what distinguished this country and its academic landscape, its vision of the role of universities, from the German Democratic Republic which I knew quite well because parts of my family lived there and I regularly visited them. The other source of knowledge and constant incentive to enquire further into the situation of legal research and learning on this side of the iron curtain were the *Acta Juridica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*. With my closest friends among the young assistants and research fellows at the *Max-Planck-Institut* in Hamburg and myself it was one of the most popular legal periodicals because it was unique. Situated at the crossroads of all the great conflicts and contradictions of the time, it was by no means just sitting on the fence, as the English say. It was a window for the west

that opened to the east and from the east that opened to the west, a vehicle for the transfer of knowledge, a channel of communication, and a reliable pillar of serious and meaningful scientific debate and dialogue.

At the invitation of President Mádl, the UNIDROIT Secretariat visited Budapest in 2002, on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Institute. That was the first time – under my hat of Secretary-General of that Organisation – that I had the pleasure of engaging in lively discussions with colleagues of the Faculty of Law of ELTE and other academic institutions, Parliament, business organisations, as well as the legal professions. And without much ado it happened that this was to be the first of a series of visits, some of which were official and governmental, some pure academic curiosity and delight. The two days in Budapest are the only ones of sometimes close to two-hundred days of duty travel in the course of a year which I thoroughly enjoy. What I learn and what I take home from my meetings with your doctoral students and the distinguished colleagues guiding their endeavours has become a source of significant inspiration, not least because it is a reminder that there was a life before I became an international civil servant and that there will be a life thereafter – *vita universitatis*, the life of studying and teaching and writing.

The Law Faculty's quest for excellence, not least in its post-graduate programme, is encouraging and a benchmark for legal education today. Before returning to academic life in Heidelberg in a little more than two years' time, I shall be happy to make whatever humble contribution reports on current developments in transnational commercial law are considered valuable by my colleagues here, at my – second – academic home.

Please accept the expression of my heartfelt gratitude for having conferred upon me the degree of *doctor et professor honoris causa*. I shall try to be, to use the terminology of transnational stock exchanges – one of the objects of my current attention for legislative purposes in one of the projects conducted at UNIDROIT –, a 'remote member' of the Faculty of Law worthy of that title. Thank you very much.