

DISCURS
HONORIS CAUSA. JOSEF HAVEL
Girona, 26 d'octubre 2012
Església de La Mercè

Thank you.

Honourable Rector,
President of the Board of Trustees of the University of Girona,
Esteemed authorities,
Professors,
Members of the University staff,
Students,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am greatly honoured that the UdG, a prestigious Catalan university, is granting me a *Doctorate honoris causa* and I would like to thank you for such a precious honour.

First of all, I would like to ask you a favour. Although I have spent a rather long time in your country, I cannot speak your native languages properly and correctly. So, I would like to ask you to excuse me for not being able to give this address in languages as beautiful as Spanish and Catalan. I am very sorry and thank you very much for your understanding.

My thanks are first of all addressed to the University as such, but even more so to those who nominated me for the honour and have introduced me so nicely here: Dr Victòria Salvadó and Dr Juan Manuel Sánchez. Thank you.

My thanks are given equally to all the other Catalan, Spanish and foreign universities that have agreed and supported this proposal. And thanks should not only be given to the universities and institutions I was collaborating with, but also to their professors, staff members and scientists. I am honoured that many of these people have come here to this ceremony. Thank you all very much. I am greatly impressed.

I would like to thank them personally as well as collectively for what they have done to give me this honour. And my sincere thanks are given to the University of Girona for organising this ceremony and for making it possible for me to travel to this beautiful and historic city of Girona.

I am not a newcomer to your university. My first visit to Girona was before the university was founded in 1991, some 25 years ago, and my first lecture here in Girona was given in support of analytical chemistry at a University of Girona still in formation. I will always remember how the late Professor Amalia MASANA and some young staff members accompanied me on a walk along the city wall, looking at Girona's beautiful architecture. I

always repeat this exciting walk when I visit Girona and I hope to do it again tonight or during these days, if possible.

So, my thanks are given to numerous academics from Catalonia and Spain, but also to individuals from other Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, namely Argentina, Colombia, Chile and Mexico, whose students I have had or am collaborating with.

In addition to giving thanks, allow me also to make some minor reminiscences.

I am grateful also to Spain as a country. To tell the truth, I have dreamt about Spain since my youth, especially in my pre-university studies thanks to an excellent professor of literature and art, a professor who motivated me deeply to study Spanish culture, literature and the great names of Spanish and Catalan culture. They were and still are beloved to me. I memorised some poems (translated to Czech) but visiting your beautiful country was just a dream for a long time. Remember that that during my youth your country was for political reasons prohibited for people from Eastern Europe, including Czechoslovakia.

By the way, I am from Moravia – now part of the Czech Republic. I was born in Brno, the city of Masaryk University. Moravia was a great empire in the past. Now it is just a part of the Czech Republic (Bohemia and Moravia) and is again fighting for independence or for better recognition.

Besides literature, my contacts with Spanish culture were almost non-existent. When, as a student, I visited Pernstein castle (a defensive castle near Brno) we were told that the local noble King Vratislav married the Spanish noblewoman Maria Manrique de Lara y Mendoza (1538-1608), and that near Brno the Spanish language was the official language for almost half a century. For me that was like a fairy tale. She, the princess, was like a dream, the “Princesa de los cuentos”. Many years later, but only a few years ago, it was an honour for me to accompany a noble Catalan person from the University of Girona on an excursion to this castle. She was the dean of the Faculty of Science. It was wonderful.

But let me come back to the history of my relationship with Girona and Catalonia.

Surprisingly, my first real contacts with Spanish/Catalan culture started some 40 years ago, in the 1970s, during my post doctoral studies at The Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden, at the hands of the famous professor Lars Gunnar Sillén. Among the other students at that time was Manuel Aguilar, later a professor at *Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya*. He was the first Spanish person I ever met. Some 15 years later I have had the occasion to visit as an invited professor at several universities, first the University of Salamanca, later the Autonomous University of Barcelona and also the *Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya*, and the University of Barcelona. During my stay at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, I visited Girona.

I am proud that, step by step, I have established direct scientific collaboration with almost ten Spanish and Catalan universities, including the University of La Laguna, the University of Santiago de Compostela, the URV in Tarragona, and have signed European ERASMUS programme agreements with them.

The ERASMUS programme between the University of Girona and Masaryk University in Brno was one of the first ERASMUS agreements signed. It is one of the most active programmes. Almost 20 students and a large number of professors have completed exchanges either in Brno or in Girona.

The collaboration has mainly concerned analytical chemistry and chemometrics, and now includes nano-materials. Together with professors Salvadó and Sánchez we were pioneers in the use of MALDI mass spectrometry in speciation analysis.

The other valuable activity concerned the organisation and participation in international SIMEC or ISMEC symposia.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my family. Without their help and understanding I could hardly do what I have done: publishing over 100 papers, lectures, posters and various communications with co-workers from Girona and other Catalan and Spanish universities, establishing cooperation, including ERASMUS projects, between Girona and Brno and also with several other universities and my home Masaryk University. In total I have spent more than two years in Spain and there is no doubt that it affected my family.

So my thanks are due to my late wife Pavla, to my sons David, Gunnar and my daughter Michaela, and to my nine grandchildren for their great patience, help, support and understanding. Many thanks.

I am very happy that some family members, including Professor Jaromir VANHARA, are here. And that my sons have returned to Girona after almost 25 years.

So, David, Gunnar, Sarka, Veronika and Mirek, thank you for coming.

Honourable Rector, professors, students, ladies and gentleman, dear colleagues and friends, I am not sure if I really deserve this honour from your university. I feel that whatever I have done has only been in fulfilment of my duties.

It is a great pleasure to receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Girona.

I am really impressed and accept this honour with humility and deep respect for the University of Girona in Catalonia.

I thank you.