

Budapest, May 13, 2024

**Rector Béla Merkely,  
Respected Colleague Kiss,  
Dear Students,  
Dear Guests,**

I am delighted to have been awarded the title of Honorary Senator of Semmelweis University and feel deeply honored. My daughter must be very pleased, too, as she studied medicine here in Budapest for a year. I find it particularly special to have a robe sewn for me, as I now wear not only the golden yellow colors of the Heidelberg natural science departments but also the blue of Budapest medicine. Thank you very much for that.

The Faculty of Medicine was founded 245 years ago, in 1769 in Trnava, and was relocated by Maria Theresa as part of the university, first to Buda in 1777, and later to Pest. After the Second World War, in 1951, the Faculty of Medicine was demerged from the university, following the Soviet model. I believe that non-democratic governments always fear the power of internationally linked science and that the knowledge of a university community always exerts social influence, which the state administration may consider 'uncontrollable'. Hence their inclination to downsize universities, to split them up, as the old saying goes: "Divide et impera!" In the meantime, Semmelweis University has become great: rich in knowledge, competence, and charisma!

Heidelberg's links with Hungary date back to the 18th century. Budapest and other academic hubs of Austria-Hungary emerge repeatedly in Heidelberg University's scientific atlas, which we published for the 625th anniversary in 2011. Since 1969, Semmelweis University has left its mark on medicine far beyond Hungary. When Heidelberg University signed a partnership agreement with ELTE in 1982, it was a natural step to sign one with Semmelweis University the following year. By now there are not only well-structured programs between the two universities (Semmelweis and Heidelberg University) and their research medical faculties, but also diverse personal relationships that turn good institutional relations into a friendly liaison. This friendly relationship goes far beyond academic interests. Professors Sonntag and Schirmacher, two dedicated partnership officers at Heidelberg University, have been very committed over many years, and Professor Kiss at Semmelweis University is an equally reliable partner, for which I am truly grateful. But also, the two of us, Béla, I dare say, we have always got on well. We believe in the same values of a university. It needs autonomy, it needs to shape science in an atmosphere of academic freedom, and it needs entrepreneurial drive. To do this, it needs the trust of politicians and of the people, because only then will it have the means to implement all this. One must understand: It is already difficult for politicians and funders to provide money for science and then refrain from exerting influence and granting freedom of use. Making this possible for politicians and legitimizing it for the outside world is the high level of successful and responsible university management, not only, but also! And seen from the outside, Semmelweis University's successful development shows that it is doing this very well.

I am deeply honored to receive this award and will continue to be a dedicated ambassador of Semmelweis University as an Honorary Senator. Budapest is a very beautiful city and Semmelweis University is an excellent choice for future doctors. With this in mind, I hope that the cooperation will remain as intense as it has been. Academic connections are important, but if they are backed up by personal experience and local knowledge, they can be even more effective, sustainable, and forward-looking. This is how we can create a competitive and

people-centered Europe, based on our common past, our shared values, our institutional autonomy, and the academic freedom of the individual in both research and education; we move Europe forward because through freedom we foster creativity and can shape the future for the benefit of people and ultimately for society as a whole. Together, drawing on our different traditions and perspectives, united in friendship, and shaping the future with optimism, this is how we want to move forward together. This is what we have committed to, are committed to, and will continue to commit to in the future.

Thank you once again,

and to all of us, I call out a hearty “Semper prorsus”, “ever forward”!

**Bernhard Eitel**