

Ladies and Gentleman!

Dear Friends!

Everyone, who sits in this room loves (or supposed to love) science. Everyone, who loves science – is responsible for the future of research. Research has no future without new and new generations of young and bright scientists. Let me go one step further. Europe has no future without new and new generations of young and bright scientists. We need to have half a million more scientists by 2010. These five hundred thousand women (and men) are sitting in their high schools *right now*. We need to motivate them, recruit them by letting them experience the unprecedented joy of scientific discovery. This is what I did with the thousands of my colleagues in Hungary and around the world. I am happy that the Descartes Award of Science Communication gave us a great opportunity to convince you that high school students *can do* top level science, and our trust gives them strength and courage to build a new Europe. I hope that by the end of my short talk you will become a friend of high school science talents – as I am.

Dear Friends!

When I started to ask my colleagues in Hungary to accept high school students as scientists in their team in 1996 I was anxious – I had a difficult time. Will they help them? Will they treat them as their equal peers? And then – one of the few great moments of my life came: I was overwhelmed by positive responses. 118 members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences became mentors of high school students. Hundreds of professors joined. Hundreds of high school teachers sacrificed their nights to think about novel research topics in their schools. The movement grew, and we have more than 5,000 students today. We receive emails each week: “It was turning point when I met you guys, you changed my life completely.” The ratio of participating and award winning girls was and is exactly 50% throughout all the eight years. Girls enter science. We just have to keep them there. The movement become international: we established a Network of Youth Excellence involving similar actions from 32 countries, 23 from Europe. I am happy that my small country, Hungary could give a successful example, which is copied now in Romania, Slovakia and even in Malawi. Dear Friends! It is a great feeling for us *not* to arrive to the EU empty-handed.

Why is this movement successful? Because it approaches the future scientists in their most susceptible age. Science is an open-ended endeavour. The tremendous challenge of discovery brings a great power of motivation for teenagers. Being in science – they become free. They can discover their talent – and the limits of this talent, too. Our movement is creative, flexible and playful – like research itself. This movement is based on volunteer work; there is no benefit for getting involved but the joy of help, but the joy of science. This movement is self-organizing: it is led by the high school students themselves. They learn not only research, but research ethics, science communication, co-operation, management-, and leadership roles. These are all much-needed values in our disorganized, segregated societies. Moreover, half of the students come from small towns and villages. This movement gives an unparalleled opportunity to break social barriers. At home – these research students are deviants, a kind of high school E.T.-s. Here – they discover friendship and find a new home. Science – becomes their home. And this bond is strong. Our first students got their PhD and became mentors, or went back to their schools as teachers and started to organize research teams. But those may be the best treasures, who will not pursue science. Wherever they go, be it business, politics or raising their children: they will remember – science *was* their home. The long-range links these research students build in their most susceptible age have an unparalleled value. These links promote public understanding, help to stabilize our societies and keep our best talents to return to Europe – wherever they go.

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Dear Friends!

My last eight years were the happiest years in my life. I could start a movement, which gives plenty of opportunities to show goodwill. I had the honour that several dozens of brilliant young scientists became my friends. Today, we had received another honour: the Descartes Prize of Science Communication. I will bring it home, and show to those, whom I share this Prize: our mentors, teachers, and all the students we had and have. However, if I convinced you that to be a friend of high school student researchers helps us to build a better and innovative Europe – that will be the greatest honour of all.

Dear Friends!

Thank you very much for *your* goodwill – and attention.