

**Address by Prof. Jon Atli Benediktsson, former President of Aurora,
on the occasion of being named Honorary Senator of the Leopold-
Franzens-University of Innsbruck**

University of Innsbruck, Oct. 19, 2024

Dear Rector, former Rector, members of the University Senate,
esteemed faculty, staff, students, and honored guests,

It is with profound gratitude and deep humility that I stand before you today, honored to be appointed Honorary Senator of the Leopold-Franzens-University of Innsbruck. This prestigious recognition from an institution renowned for its centuries-long legacy of academic excellence, innovation, and global impact is a moment I will cherish forever. To be honored in this way here is a privilege that fills me with both pride and responsibility.

I take this opportunity to sincerely thank the University of Innsbruck for its steadfast dedication to the Aurora University Network and for its outstanding leadership within it. As the former Rector of the University of Iceland, I had the privilege of being part of Aurora since its start in 2016, serving as a board member for nine years and as President for four. The network's goal—to combine academic excellence with societal impact through research, education, and community involvement—perfectly aligns with the University of Iceland's strategy to boost international collaborations and increase the global influence of higher education.

Aurora's mission was bold from the start but our ambitions were pursued through collaborative projects, student exchanges, and a shared commitment to addressing global challenges, with students at the heart of our efforts.

The University of Innsbruck's role in Aurora has been transformative. Its strong commitment and outstanding leadership were crucial when Aurora became one of the European Universities Alliances in 2020,

which was a milestone that marked a new era of collaboration. I vividly recall the energy and dedication **you** brought to the network, helping to shape its success. I extend my deepest gratitude to Rector Veronika Sexl, former Rector Tilmann Märk, Aurora Institutional Coordinator Thomas Baumgartner, and the entire Aurora team here at the University of Innsbruck for their tireless effort, which has been a cornerstone of Aurora's achievements, fostering a spirit of unity and innovation across our network of universities.

Aurora's journey as an Alliance has been ambitious, and although our goals weren't always easy to reach, we achieved results that received high praise from the European Commission. In our first years as an Alliance, we learned valuable lessons that have shaped the current Aurora 2030 program, which kicked off at the end of 2022. I am especially excited about Aurora's recent increased focus on research collaboration, along with our continued emphasis on innovative teaching and learning. By developing joint courses and study programs aligned with global goals, and by working to eliminate administrative barriers, Aurora is positioned to tackle pressing societal challenges with even greater impact.

Aurora thrives because of the outstanding universities and colleagues within it, and I am confident in its future under the excellent leadership of Rector Veronika Sexl. Leading a transnational and transcultural alliance is no small task—it requires vision, resilience, and a commitment to shared goals despite changes in leadership or institutional priorities. University of Innsbruck's steady dedication ensures that Aurora remains a symbol of collaboration and progress.

Thank you again for this tremendous honor. I am deeply grateful and will strive to honor the trust you have placed in me.