



Jesper Petersens tale ved Rumkonferencen

Taler

Jesper Petersen
Uddannelses- og
forskningsminister

Dato

24. marts 2022

Sted

Glassalen, Danmarks Tekniske
Universitet, Kgs. Lyngby

Director General Josef Aschbacher

Andreas Mogensen – I will get back to you in a short moment!

Principal Anders Bjarklev

Excellences and everybody from the Danish space sector

Herr Generaldirektor – schön Sie wieder zu sehen. Ich danke Ihnen für die guten Besprechungen über die europäische Zukunft im Weltall, die wir zuletzt in Toulouse hatten. Ich freue mich auch Sie in Dänemark zu sehen – dazu auch noch mit groben Neuigkeiten. Ich freue mich einfach. Danke und willkommen.

Congratulations, Andreas!

Andreas, hvor er det fantastisk. Tillykke!

This is a great moment. A Danish astronaut is going back to the International Space Station. For the second time. For 6 months! It's hard to describe what an achievement this is. And this has been your merit, Andreas.

Earlier this week I had the pleasure of meeting you in the ministry. We had a pleasant talk about space, your experience from the trip last time, all the great perspectives of space research and how it improves our life here at Earth.

And my impression of you confirmed what I've already been told. I was in Toulouse one month ago at the "Space Summit" – along with General Director Aschbacher. And I had the chance to talk to Luca Parmitano, who is an Italian

ESA astronaut.

Without having to ask for it Luca was full of praise for our Danish “Andy”, as I understand your nickname is. And another astronaut is probably the best reference you can get when it comes to your job qualifications: You are a respected colleague – an accomplished and distinguished astronaut. And the fact that you’ve been selected for mission no 2 confirms this. A deepfelt congratulations to you, Andreas!

We need curiosity

As a Minister for Higher Education and Science: I see this as an extraordinary opportunity to nurture interest in science and to show the difference that our researchers – at universities and in the industry – make.

I see this as an opportunity to highlight that science moves society forward. In all imaginable aspects. Through knowledge, inventions and breakthroughs - creates new insights, progress and basis for increased prosperity.

That’s what our universities and enterprises do every single day – and the green agenda is one of the best examples I can think of.

As Dr Aschbacher has said:

“We want to inspire people. Create inspiration. To put space into the service of citizens”.

And that is exactly why you are an invaluable ambassador, Andreas.

As a minister I try to promote a virtue of curiosity – in general and in particular for students. I tell them to be curious. If we’re to come up with something new – curiosity is the key. It takes critical thinking and the ability to challenge what you hear. The ability to reflect and not just copy.

I get to tell it again today. And you’re really not only telling but also showing it, Andreas, very much. You’re showing, what excellence and curiosity means. What science and research is all about.

Times show us the importance of a free and open society that encourages us to be inquisitive. Ask unexpected questions! That is what our universities do every day: It strengthens society. It elevates us as humans. Qualifies the democratic conversation. And the space sector is a brilliant example of these things.

This leads me to two things of great importance that I would like to address today: The green agenda and the current geopolitical situation.

An enormous green potential

One area where we really need all the best ideas from our universities and industry is the green transition.

Climate change is a challenging threat. It has become very clear that our future relies on political actions – from ministers and politicians – and on your work as researchers, scientists, educators and entrepreneurs.

I think it would be a big surprise to most people, if they were told to what extent European space technology is monitoring planet Earth right now: That we're able to monitor pollution, temperatures and sea levels, just to mention a few. But actually – we haven't seen nothing yet.

“We need to move from understanding to acting”,

as you said Dr Aschbacher at the Space Summit in Toulouse.

There is still an enormous potential. A potential for transforming space data to actionable information.

Imagine a high-resolution monitoring system of all natural resources and ecosystems. A system that provide almost real-time data.

Imagine a Copernicus satellite that is able to identify the sources of anthropogenic emissions of CO₂ – with electronic components developed also in Denmark.

These ideas won't become reality tomorrow. But the Copernicus satellite is set

to be executed in 2025 with technology from the Danish company Terma aboard.

And the goals we have are still the same – but ambitions have increased: The new Danish government and the Danish Parliament in 2019 after the last election made the decision that our greenhouse gas emissions are to be reduced by 70 percent by 2030. To get there, we need your ideas! We need research, innovation and development, to allow space to unfold its green potential.

That is why we did a “maintenance check” of our national space strategy last year – and updated the objectives with a strong green profile. This gives us an even better opportunity to accelerate our journey towards a greener planet.

The geopolitical situation

We face plenty of opportunities, but also big challenges. And for the past month – challenges of an unforeseen and unprecedented scale.

The geopolitical situation in the world is changing – also affecting the scientific community. A few years back, science was a tool to ease diplomatic relations. We know it as the concept of “science diplomacy”.

The approach to science diplomacy has gradually changed, and science has become more linked to geopolitics. We have become aware that Europe needs a new approach to international cooperation with a stronger focus on strategic autonomy.

Since February, the international system has been disrupted. The Danish government is clear in our message to Russia: The aggressions will result in isolation from the international society – also within science and education.

As many of you know, I have called on all Danish research institutions to suspend cooperation with Russian institutions. My overall approach is that we should isolate Russia as much as possible.

At the same time, I am aware that some areas of collaboration are very complex, and that nuances must be kept in mind. Not least in the area of space where we have engaged in a long-term and mutually dependent collaboration on the

International Space Station. Any changes in these relations should be very carefully thought through.

I fully support the statement made by ESA on this matter, and I share the intention that we can continue safe operations of the ISS. President Putin's aggression and invasion of Ukraine is horrible in so many ways. Hopefully it won't also significantly set back the progress space research gives humanity.

"Accept these terms, and the cosmos is yours"

As previously stated: Science – and this very much includes space science – is completely essential to progress and improvement of our society. Of our civilization. I would like to end with a quote.

Neil deGrasse Tyson is head of the world-renowned Hayden Planetarium in New York City. In the American TV Show "Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey", he expresses what the adventure of science is all about. The quote is:

"This adventure is made possible by generations of searchers strictly adhering to a simple set of rules: Test ideas by experiment and observation. Build on those ideas that pass the test. Reject the ones that fail. Follow the evidence, wherever it leads. And question everything. Accept these terms, and the cosmos is yours".

These are imposing words. But they remind me what the purpose of science is and why we educate people based on the ethos of science.

Enjoy the rest of the program. It's impressive how the organizers have packed almost every thinkable perspective into one single day.

And congratulations again, Andreas. We are looking forward to following you in the near future. And I'm sure I speak behalf of thousands of Danes saying: We are very proud of you!

Have a great conference.

Thank you.

Kilde

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