Memo: On the Retirement of Professor Hiltraud Casper-Hehne. Celebrating Strategic Foresight and Replies at the Speed of Light

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This memo informs the community of the upcoming retirement of Professor Hiltraud Casper-Hehne, which will measurably affect several core institutional and alliance parameters: networking, strategic foresight, and the average response time to complex inquiries.

Over the course of her leadership in internationalization, Hiltraud Casper-Hehne has not only shaped higher education policy discourse but also mastered the art of linking top-down visions with bottom-up engagement. Her unique combination of intellect, empathy, and decisive action will be sorely missed – even by those of us who secretly feared receiving her e-mails, because they always arrived faster than expected and usually contained a (very polite) request.

1 Background

Well before "virtual mobility" and "COIL" entered our shared vocabulary, Hiltraud Casper-Hehne was already working to strategically link internationalization and digitization in what we referred to as the "Göttingen Model of Internationalization of Curricula". Her efforts and experiences transferred from pilot cases into projects such as "IVAC – Perspektivenwechsel, Perspektivenvielfalt und Globales Lernen" and "liveSciences³" and then into the context of the ENLIGHT European

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University Alliance are the groundwork for the modalities of virtual internationalization that aim to make international experiences attainable for all students, not just the often cited lucky 30% who can afford or arrange a semester abroad.

Behind all of this was a deep awareness of the privilege of mobility and a commitment to make education responsive to a rapidly changing, globalized world. For Hiltraud Casper-Hehne, internationalization was never only about raising mobility statistics. It was about reaching those students who stay on campus and ensuring that global perspectives were embedded. It was about meaningfully connecting "education at home and abroad" to prepare graduates for living and working in an interconnected world. This philosophy has come to life most vividly in the recent Erasmus+ strategic partnership project ROCKET, where the connections between internationalization, digitization and DEI were not tick-box themes, but interwoven design pillars.

Though often operating in project frameworks, structures were created not just to serve a grant period, but to last, guided by a strategic mindset and informed by change management theory. She did not just initiate change; she often also focused on "refreezing" it.

2 Patterns of Impact

Colleagues working with Professor Casper-Hehne likely noticed a few recurring dynamics: She had a way of bringing clarity into complexity by framing issues in a way that made action feel possible. Many times, a strategic vision was co-developed with her, not only in official mission statements, but also through hallway conversations, two-minute phone calls, and the occasional memo edits. Her responses were often astonishingly fast. Most of us have, at some point, received an email from her containing full clarity in under 50 words.

Above all, her work was marked by intentionality: projects had purpose and collaborations had direction. She moved things forward, and helped others see where they were going, and why it mattered.

3 Observations

Throughout her time as vice president and later as academic lead of ENLIGHT, Hiltraud Casper-Hehne combined strategic planning with a truly holistic perspective: it was not just about the initiative at hand, but its potential ripple effects across institutional boundaries and national landscapes. In this manner, we worked together in an HRK working group on the internationalization of the curriculum (IoC) in German higher education, hosted events together with the HRK and DAAD, co-wrote papers and co-edited both a volume on IoC in Germany and a special issue of the Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung. Hiltraud Casper-Hehne balanced

vision with pragmatism and thought several steps ahead while still being fully open to new ideas or unexpected connections.

Throughout this time, she always gave us space to act while staying just one phone call away. Whether navigating a call for applications, a policy consultation, or a quick idea pitched over coffee, she had an instinct for recognizing when something mattered – and a remarkable talent for making others recognize it too.

Her success in securing third-party funding was as consistent as it was strategic, tied to institutional transformation or policy shifts. And she knew how to use her vast network not as a contact list, but as a living ecosystem of partnerships. Her influence resonates in our ENLIGHT structures, its partnerships, and its deeper sense of purpose.

4 Risk Assessment and Mitigation (aka: What We will Miss Most)

- The sense that someone always had the bigger picture in view (and would remind you of it gently).
- Constructive feedback delivered in record time.
- Conversations at eye-level.
- Strategic leadership that gave us the space to act independently and contribute our expertise.
- And last but not least, the feeling that, no matter how messy the process may have been, we were all building something that mattered.

5 Actions Recommended

In light of these considerations, the following actions are strongly recommended:

- That we all raise a toast to her career.
- That we commit ourselves not only to keeping the networks she helped to establish active, but also keeping them alive in a spirit of openness and trust.
- That we all remember her example: strategy is important, but how we treat each other while implementing it is even more so.

And finally, that we honor her legacy by picking up the phone a little more often, because sometimes a quick call really is the best way to clear things up and move on.