Opening address
Ledergerber, Mayor, City of Zurich

Dear Professor Wunderli-Allensbach (designated rector; first female rector in the history of the ETH Zurich)
Dear Professor Osterwalder (rector and interim president of ETH Zurich, and from September 2007 new rector of the United Nations University in Tokyo (UNU)).
Dear Professor Horvat (conference coordinator since 1981)

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you here to Zurich for the "Conference of Rectors and Presidents of European Universities of Technology".
Collaboration between universities of technology and industry is the subject that you will be dealing with over the next two days, and it is a subject that is highly relevant, both for Switzerland and for the city of Zurich.

Today, we live in a knowledge society. Education and knowledge are the principal raw materials of the Knowledge Economy. They are the fuel that keeps the national economy running. We need to look after these raw materials, and we must do this with sustainability in mind. This is something that we are very aware of here in Switzerland, which explains why the discussions this year in the Federal Parliament regarding spending on education, research and innovation for the 2008–2011 period were very intensive.

In the city of Zurich, it is the elementary schools, which establish the basis, and the Federal Institute for Technology, or ETH, and the universities as well as the universities of applied sciences which are responsible for education and knowledge. The University of Zurich and the ETH enjoy an unparalleled reputation internationally – something of which we are very proud, since they provide us with a locational advantage. This advantage is what has been bringing more and more globally renowned firms to Zurich over recent years, such as Google.

This brings us to the theme of your conference. On the one hand, we have the technical universities and their research; while on the other hand, we have industry, which develops new products and hopes to market them. When industry and universities work together, the result is more innovation and more patents which find their way onto the market in the form of products or services. Therefore, cooperation between technical universities and industry is also one of the main competitive factors of a "Knowledge Economy".

Researchers at technical universities need to work in conjunction with businesses – as this is the only way that the raw material known as knowledge can be effectively marketed as innovation.

Allow me at this juncture to insert a small parenthesis. Knowledge and money should, in fact must, develop also in separate directions. The freedom and independence which research enjoys are elements which we need to protect. Switzerland is working very closely with the EU on the development of research. Last week, the country signed a bilateral research agreement with the EU, which governs all of Switzerland's participation in the 7th EU Framework Programme for research for 2007–2013. This will mean that there will also be support for projects which are not aimed at having an immediate implementation in society.

When research and the economy come together, then previously unimagined synergies can also develop – synergies which benefit both sides and which sometimes can also bring about changes which can affect us all.

Let me explain in more detail by using a historical example with which I am sure you are all familiar. Two weeks ago, it was also my pleasure to welcome here to Zurich the participants at the "Jazoon 2007" java developers' conference. I took great pride in explaining to them that one of the first large calculating machines – the Z4 – was established here at the ETH and had received global recognition in 1950. Later in the 1950s, it was superseded by the first home-made mainframe computer at the ETH, the ERMETH. At the end of the 1970s, Professor Niklaus Wirth developed Lilith – the forerunner of the modern PC.

I am a little less proud now to add that we then proceeded to stand by and watch the computer industry develop elsewhere around the world. What use did we make of the

ETH's knowledge? Certainly not all we possibly could have done. Today, we want to do things better, which is why technology transfer is taking on incredible importance to enable our economy to develop in the best possible way.

The ETH is already taking steps in this direction. The "ETH Transfer" gives the ETH an institution which provides consulting advice for any questions regarding industry collaboration, patent applications and licensing opportunities as well as for creating an ETH spin-off company.

You may already have heard of the company "arktis radiation detectors", for example. Since 2006, this new firm has won three young enterprise awards in Switzerland thanks to its newly developed actinometer technology, to test large freight for radioactive substances at transit monitoring posts.

"arktis radiaton detectors" is a spin-off of the ETH Zurich's Institute of Particle Physics, founded by two young PhD physicists from the ETH and their colleague who is a business economist.
The ETH is therefore also highly successful when it comes to spin-offs, which is another reason to be pleased!

With Inspire AG, which is a center of competence for the Swiss machine industry run in close collaboration with ETH, is breaking new ground in this country in terms of industry collaboration. Inspire's aim is to bring together the best possible partners from industry as well as from universities as well as other key personnel to collaborate on projects.

How will we earn our daily bread in the future? This is something we are already thinking about today. It is today's fundamental research which tomorrow will provide us with economic value creation and thus prosperity, but only upon completion of a long process of research and development. We are very aware of this fact. This is why the development of Zurich as a pole for knowledge and research is at the top of the political agenda of the city's administration.

This is why we are supporting the further structural development of our universities and making sure that we can provide sufficient affordable housing for students and

postgraduates from at home and abroad. The city is also open to increased support for the technology transfers between universities and the economy.

In conclusion, I would like to welcome you to our city. May I wish you two days of intensive and fruitful discussions at the conference – but please also take a little time to get to know the rest of Zurich outside of the ETH campus! I'm sure you'll find it worth your while!

Thank you very much for your attention.