

CLOSING SPEECH AT THE XXIII INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF HISTORICAL SCIENCES

Magnificence Rector of Adam Mickiewicz University
Dear President of the International Committee of Historical Sciences,
Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,
Magnificence Madame le Recteur de l'Université Adam Mickiewicz
Madame la Présidente du Comité International des Sciences Historiques,
Mesdames et Messieurs, chers Collègues

Seven days ago, I had the honour of speaking in this very same place at the opening ceremony of the 23rd International Congress of Historical Sciences. I hope that, at least in part, the wishes I made then to our guests have come true.

These days have passed quickly. They were intense, rich in many events that the Congress itself brought and that accompanied it. When it is now coming to an end, it provokes thoughts that both summarise it and are formulated without the temporal distance which also brings mental and emotional distance.

My present thoughts have to do with the fact that I have been interviewed several times in connection with the Congress. I think I was most often asked two questions. One was: “what will the Congress be about?”, and the other: “what are these congresses for?”. The first reflects the way the journalists think, which I by no means reproach them for. Having to deal with a wide variety of topics every day, they cannot be truly competent in them. It is up to their interlocutors to explicate things. As you can guess, in replying to them I said that it was impossible to give an answer covering around a hundred panels, not to mention the poster session and the Research Forum.

The second question was posed from the perspective of the common listener – the one who is not even particularly interested in it, but who simply comes across such information while listening to the radio or watching TV. But the question



“what are these congresses for?” is one we also ask ourselves and take very seriously. This was, for instance, the topic of the session *International Congresses of Historical Sciences: Chances and Challenges*, which took place during the visit of the IHCS Board to Poznań in June 2018.

We know that there are scholars who approach such large congresses with reserve and simply do not attend them. And this is not a new attitude – it was represented, for example, by Marc Bloch. But I was answering the questions on behalf of those who want to come to the congresses and do come – as I do myself. And along with other arguments, I emphasised two inherent features of such face-to-face meetings.

One is that, besides the sessions that you attend as an organiser or speaker, there are also those that you come to half by chance, having found that they are ‘within reach’. It is then that you can hear about unknown things that surprise and sometimes fascinate you. You can meet views that make you agree enthusiastically or protest vigorously. You can meet concepts that would never have come to your mind. This is also possible through reading or online contact. But direct contact is something else. Also because – and this brings me to my second argument – it is easily accompanied by an atmosphere of conviviality, even cordiality, which gives rise to international, sometimes intercontinental friendships and allows older ones to be maintained. As one of my friends said: when you are a community, you have to be together. World congresses undoubtedly offer the widest range of such opportunities.

The Poznań Congress was the first to be held in hybrid mode. It was not originally planned in this form. This happened in the context of the Covid pandemic, posing a new organisational and technical challenge. These issues have been reinforced since Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine. The state-imposed IT system security standards did not allow us to share IT networks as widely as we had originally planned. Among other things, it brought lessons for the future on how to prevent or limit several problems. Yes: for the future. I have heard more than once in the last days that we have entered a path from which there is no return. But I confess that personally I feel melancholic about this. I will not, however, call for participation in the XXIVth Congress to be possible only directly and for all online connections to be cut off. This is not a wish towards the organisers, but a dream: nostalgic and unrealisable.

However, I want to close the days that are coming to an end in a different mood: by thanking all those whose work and commitment we could benefit from. The authorities and staff of the Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań are here in first place. Next to them, it is impossible not to mention the local authorities of the Wielkopolska region and of the city of Poznań.

Turning to those whose direct dedication influenced the shape of the Congress, I turn first to the members of the Executive Department, foremost of whom are the unfailing three: its Chairman, Professor Krzysztof Makowski, and his closest aide Ms Karolina Filipowska, as well as its General Secretary, Professor Maciej Michalski. As it is not possible to mention everyone by name, I will now only list the institutions involved in the Congress, thanking their staff and collaborators:

Poznań International Fair for organising the Congress background, Poznań Supercomputing and Networking Center and ClickMeeting company for their IT support of the Congress, TRES Foundation for the artistic setting of the Congress, the authorities and employees of the Faculty of History of Adam Mickiewicz University for their support in all possible fields, Poznań Tourist Organisation and many other institutions that supported us and helped to organise the XXIII International Congress of Historical Sciences in Poznań for the last seven years. I am following Her Magnificence Rector in warmly thanking the more than 50 volunteers working at the Congress.

On behalf of all those who were committed to the preparation and execution of the Congress, I would like to address its participants – our guests. Thank you for coming to Poznań, for your presence and for the many kind words we have heard from you.

In closing, I would like to address the organisers of the XXIV International Congress of Historical Sciences Jerusalem 2026. We know the challenge you face. And we have no doubt that you will master it with excellence. We wish you this with all our hearts.

Tomasz Schramm
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