Full text of the video message on the occasion of the nationwide staff assembly of the universities over the cuts in university funding

(The passages in italics correspond to the short version of the video for the BV13 homepage.)

Dear members of staff, dear colleagues!

My name is Martin Tiefenthaler, and I am speaking to you as chair of the federal executive of Section 13 of the Public Services Union (GÖD), which represents our interests.

We have gathered today in simultaneous nationwide staff assemblies to continue our protest against the disproportionate austerity measures in the university budget. So far, the student unions (ÖH) and the rectorates have carried the protest into the public sphere; now the works councils at the various sites have convened staff assemblies and invited representatives of the rectorates and the ÖH. I extend a warm welcome to you all.

Over the past 20 years, successive federal governments resolved to raise the university budget from 1.2–1.4 percent of gross domestic product towards 2 percent. This was meant to bring Austria in line with the innovation leaders in Europe. This measure brought measurable success. The dropout rate has fallen, student–staff ratios have improved, and the timely completion of doctorates has improved as well.

Our union work for the universities has also achieved some considerable successes. Besides the often underestimated success of a balanced collective agreement, which has since been improved time and again, we have ensured that the universities' global budget only takes into account doctoral positions that are paid for at least 30 hours of work per week. A successful step against wage dumping and precarious employment!

We have also ensured that the unfair conditions for the B1 career track have been massively improved, and together with the works councils, numerous further improvements have been achieved. In this context, I would ask you to consider joining the union. As union members, you can help shape these conditions.

For the universities, all of this had positive effects. Besides the increased number of

graduations, there was also an unprecedented development in academic publications and in the acquisition of third-party funding. This has also been reflected in the university rankings.

Now, after years of fiscal policy under the motto “whatever it takes”, this government has to bear the consequences and consolidate the budget. University staff have already made a substantial contribution to this in recent years. With a pay settlement at less than half the rate of inflation, 75 million euros are saved every year. The union and the rectorates accepted this wage sacrifice on the assurance that it would be a one-off measure and that the funds would be used for the FWF (Austrian Science Fund).

This year, the federal government has even greater financial needs. And of course the universities will once again have to make their contribution. But a real-terms cut of 10% in funding over the next three years is unprecedented and unacceptable. All political pledges of a one-off measure and of a budget target of 2% of GDP for the universities now appear to be worthless.

This savings target amounts to abandoning intergenerational fairness. For who will be hit? Early-career researchers: those who have successfully completed their degree and are now waiting for a doctoral position financed from the global budget. Or those who have completed a doctorate and are waiting for a postdoc position financed from the global budget. And also the more advanced researchers who hope to apply successfully for a career-track position against the competition. They will be disappointed. These positions will no longer, or hardly ever, be advertised.

For the moment, project staff still appear to be safe. But the FWF, too, has changed its guidelines. As the peer-review processes became overstretched, waiting periods were introduced, along with cuts to third-party funding applications and measures that make resubmission more difficult.

We have seen something similar before. In 1996, the University Remuneration Act was introduced, a four-pillar model which signalled to everyone starting out here that there

would be no long-term future for them at the university. The transitions between the four pillars were regulated in such a way that continuous careers were no longer possible. The entry into force of the Universities Act (UG) did not yet improve this situation, because from 2004 to 2009 we had to wait until the collective agreement for universities was fully funded and could take effect. Only with the conclusion of the university collective agreement, which the GÖD helped to negotiate successfully, did continuous careers in the A and B schemes become possible again. But by then we had lost two generations of young researchers.

Has it come to that again? Do we want to go back there? Does our society not rely on the creativity and inventiveness of these generations to secure its future prosperity? Has the government forgotten that?

The Ministry of Science has already announced that in the coming years, too, the universities will have to make do with significantly less funding, as the ministries' hands are supposedly tied by the need to meet the Maastricht criteria and by the EU budgetary procedure.

For all our commitment to sensible savings: we are not prepared to accept this!

- *We call on this federal government to reverse the underfunding of the universities, including the real-terms 10% cuts!*
- *We demand a return to the 2% GDP target in allocating funds to the universities, and thus adequate funding for the universities!*
- *We demand that action not be put off for years, but that appropriate steps be taken as soon as possible, with the foreseeable end of the major geopolitical conflicts and the economic upturn that will follow!*
- *And: we demand binding commitments to this!*

Anything less would be too little and, ultimately, a betrayal of our country's future.

On behalf of the university union for academic and artistic staff, I ask you to pass resolutions to this effect here and today, so that we are able to act in the spring, when, under changed economic conditions, we will stand ready to remind our government of its responsibilities and to demand that it keep its promises.

And please also remember that any representation is only as strong as the legitimacy its members give it. I warmly invite those of you who are not yet members of the GÖD to join, so that our activities become even more visible and effective, and so that we can continue to achieve success and prevent worse from happening.

Glück auf!