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Dear Members of the CESAER General Assembly,

I am writing to express my strong interest in serving on the CESAER Board of Directors for the 2026–2029 term.

As a committed advocate for the transformative power of science and technology, I am very motivated to contribute to CESAER's important work in supporting Universities of Science and Technology in succeeding in their important mission. We need science and technology in Europe more than ever, e.g., to tackle pressing sustainability issues, strengthening Europe's long term competitiveness, enhancing resilience, and strengthening democratic societies.

I'm an experienced academic leader having served in versatile academic leadership roles at Aalto University including Head of Department, Dean, Vice President for Research, and Provost and since 2017, President. At Aalto University I have been in the leadership team planning and steering the Aalto transformation process since 2011 and from 2017 leading the process as the President. The transformation has brought together three Finnish universities in the areas of Science and Technology, Business, and Art and Design, respectively, into a societally embedded and innovative research university with the national mission to strengthen Finland's innovative capacity through first-class research and education. We have successfully brought all our academic activities on the same campus with a significant campus development program. The campus has grown into a world-class collaboration hub combining science and technology, business and art and design with a very vibrant entrepreneurial eco-system. And Aalto university has become one of Europe's most international universities.

My international experience includes visiting positions in the USA, Germany and Australia, as well as active engagement in global networks. I have had several positions of trust internationally (e.g., Board member of Nordic University Association, Vice President of Unite! university alliance, member of the International Academic Advisory Panel of Singapore Ministry of Education) and also nationally (for example, I currently serve as the Chair of the Finnish Council of University Rectors).

I'm very impressed of CESAER's impactful work over the past 35 years in advancing the cause of science and technology and providing a platform for the members to learn

from each other. I feel that CESAER with its 50+ members forms a powerful network for advocating science and technology but also to develop strongly together.

I would be honoured to contribute my experience, insights, and commitment as a member of the Board of Directors.

Vision for the Short Term

The Draft Strategy 2030 to be presented in Brno resonates strongly with my understanding of the evolving context in which Universities of Science and Technology operate as well as the future challenges. To me also the Vision for 2030 is very inspiring.

I also find the draft work plan 2026-2027 well structured and compelling. For example, the core themes for 2026-2027 (Advancing scientific excellence and innovation; Driving sustainability and competitiveness through science and technology; Ensuring security, diversity, and resilience in a global context) address well the current pressing issues.

However, in the short term, I feel that more attention should be paid to the transformative **impact of AI on education and research in science and technology.**

Vision for the Long Term

Looking further ahead I would bring two key topics for discussion and strategic development:

- **Lifelong learning and continuous education:** As technology evolves in an increasing pace and work careers lengthen, the demand for upskilling and reskilling—even among those with higher degrees—is growing. Furthermore, learner expectations are changing and universities must consider how to offer more personalized, flexible learning pathways for diverse learner needs.
- **Following and communicating societal impact:** Universities of Science and Technology play a vital role in societal development. However, we need to more effectively measure, demonstrate, and communicate our broader societal contributions to meet increasing expectations for relevance, accountability, and tangible value.

Thank you for considering my candidacy. I look forward to the possibility of working together to advance CESAER's mission and objectives.

Sincerely,

Ilkka Niemelä