



HHL Press Contact
Eva Echterhoff
T +49 341 9851-614
C+49 170 2973 880
media@hhl.de
www.hhl.de

HHL's Obituary for Its Honorary Senator and Honorary Doctor

Kurt Biedenkopf

Exceptional Politician, Gifted Scholar and Impresario of HHL



“We resurrected HHL from a state of atrophy. And the result is amazing. It was a good decision to bring HHL back to life and give it a chance to reinvent itself.”

Kurt Biedenkopf in an interview with HHL in 2012. Photo: Daniel Reiche/Rights: HHL

Without Kurt Biedenkopf, there would be no HHL. The first Prime Minister of the recently re-established federal state of Saxony had decided in the early 1990s to breathe life into the HHL Graduate School of Management in its current form.



Biedenkopf, a politician extraordinaire, had come from academia and his path always led him back to academia.

From academia into politics, from politics into academia and back

Even at a young age, Prof. Dr. jur. Biedenkopf already had a stellar academic career. After studying law at Georgetown University, where he earned his doctorate and qualified as a professor, Kurt Biedenkopf became Germany's youngest university rector at Ruhr University in Bochum at the age of 37. In the 1970s, he rapidly conquered the political stage, becoming the Secretary General of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The Chancellor then, Helmut Kohl, had recognized Biedenkopf's brilliance and the visionary scope of his ideas. However, in the 1980s, Kurt Biedenkopf stepped away from politics.

The first German visiting professor after the fall of the Berlin Wall

It was not politics, but academia that brought Kurt Biedenkopf to Saxony. The Wall in Germany had just fallen when he came to Leipzig as the first German visiting professor to give an inaugural lecture. In 1990, he accepted a professorship in economics at the University of Leipzig, and shortly thereafter, he ended up governing the Free State of Saxony.

From 1990 to 2002, Kurt Biedenkopf served as Prime Minister of Saxony. Although he came from the west of Germany, which had been divided for over 40 years, he managed to win the hearts of the people in the Free State. As the top candidate, the CDU had obtained an absolute majority in Saxony, where the locals called him King Kurt. Biedenkopf was a stroke of luck for science in Saxony – and especially for HHL.

An entry from Biedenkopf's diaries about a meeting with economics professor Günter Nötzold from December 1992 reads:

“Günter is working on re-establishing the Handelshochschule [Commercial College] in Leipzig. Like myself, he wants this private institution not to degenerate into a school for business administrators, but to offer an elite education.”

(K. Biedenkopf. *Ringgen um die innere Einheit*. Page 98)

Speaking to friends and supporters of the business school in June 1993, Biedenkopf emphasized “(...) that a university's importance for the quality and performance of the state as a whole can hardly be overestimated.” He advocated reforming Saxony's higher education landscape without repeating the mistakes of the old Federal Republic.

“We want to have the opportunity to establish the universities in such a way that they do not carry within them all the causes of the problems that have



now become apparent in West Germany. That means we want the rebuilding to be understood as an opportunity for the development of alternatives at the same time.”

Biedenkopf, June 1993, addressing friends and supporters of HHL at the Old Stock Exchange

In this regard, he said he was sure “that with the new Handelshochschule, we will find not only many good scholars and excellent students, but also women and men and institutions that share with us the conviction that this school is indispensable.”

“As the first Prime Minister after the reestablishment of the Free State of Saxony, Kurt Biedenkopf laid the foundation for the reorientation of Saxony’s universities. His vision was to lead Saxony back to the top in the field of science as well. He recognized early on the importance of research and development for successful state development, economic upswing, prosperity and jobs.”

Saxony’s Prime Minister Michael Kretschmer at the conferral of an honorary doctorate from the University of Leipzig to Biedenkopf in April 2021

Impresario of HHL

Prime Minister Biedenkopf was genuinely dedicated to preserving and reorganizing Germany’s most venerable business school. In a 2012 interview, he spoke about his connection to HHL:

“First of all, I think of HHL’s great past. It can be traced back to an initiative of the merchants and the Chamber of Industry and Commerce at the end of the 19th century. We resurrected HHL from a state of atrophy and the result is amazing. Just look at the high number of students, the faculty and the new dean of this school. And considering the wide recognition of the university in numerous rankings – it was a good decision to bring HHL back to life and give it a chance to reinvent itself.”

Biedenkopf wanted the newly established HHL to train generalists. This was the result of a brainstorming session on the content of the HHL concept at his Dresden apartment. In a letter to the Managing Director of the Leipzig Chamber of Industry and Commerce written in February 1993, the Prime Minister emphasized that the re-establishment of HHL was a matter close to his heart since the school, being a private institution, could most effectively contribute to the training of leadership elites.



Photo: Daniel Reiche/Rights: HHL

From left to right: Thessen von Heydebreck, Stephan Stubner, Kurt Biedenkopf at HHL Dean's Dinner in 2019

Throughout its new existence, HHL has received Biedenkopf's support in a variety of ways: Biedenkopf not only gave speeches at HHL events, he also appeared as a lecturer before HHL students, for example on the topic of *Leadership, Business, Ethics and Technology*, and actively participated in student initiatives such as the World Championship in Negotiation. In 2008, Prof. Biedenkopf was awarded an honorary doctorate from HHL for his great services to science and culture in general and to HHL Leipzig Graduate School of Management in particular. Biedenkopf said at the time, "The Free State of Saxony can consider itself very fortunate to be the home of HHL." Later, HHL also awarded him its highest academic honor as an honorary senator of HHL.

Says HHL Dean Prof. Dr. Stephan Stubner,
"Prof. Biedenkopf was a pioneer in the reestablishment of our university in 1992 in the tradition of the Handelshochschule Leipzig, which was founded in 1898. He was an inspiring lecturer and mentor, speaker and supporter of our students. He played a major role in shaping the development of HHL."