Eric Stein honored by Charles University and a former student

European Union visionary and international law scholar Eric Stein, '42, has been given a special honor by Charles University in Prague, where he earned his first law degree in 1934, shortly before fleeing his homeland in the face of Nazism.

Stein, the Hessel E. Yntema Professor Emeritus of Law, also recently has garnered a teacher's great honor—a former student has dedicated his new book to him.

Stein traveled to Prague last fall to receive Charles University's Golden Medal Award for Excellence in Humanities and Law in ceremonies at the university’s historic Karolinum, which dates to the 14th century.

The Golden Medal Award is reserved for Charles University graduates to recognize singular achievement and sometimes is compared to an honorary degree. Among previous award winners are the president of Estonia, an American Nobel prize physicist, the Prince of Orange of The Netherlands, a Czech presidential candidate, and leading Czech and foreign scholars.

In his acceptance remarks, Stein expressed his “profound appreciation for the honor bestowed on me today,” calling it “a crowning jewel” to receive recognition "from my own distinguished alma mater.”

Continuing, he recalled that as a staffer of the U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Organizations in the 1950s he began to see dispatches from Luxembourg about the new European Community. “I was intrigued: My old Europe taking a new, exciting direction, which turned out to be perhaps the most important event of the century. As Doctor Freud tells us, we are bound to keep returning to the location and dreams of our childhood. This may explain why I have made European Community law a center of my scholarship interest.”

The “cruel paradox” at the time was that his native Czechoslovakia was not part of the emerging EC, Stein recalled. But that was remedied in 2004 when “both the Czech and Slovak Republics became members of the European Union.”

“I realize that some questions were raised both here and in the West—but one does not have to be a Hegelian to see clearly that the Czech Republic membership in the European Union was historically mandated, unavoidable, and necessary,” he explained. “In a sense, I understand the concern of those feeling finally liberated from one despised master, to accept what was represented as ‘a submission’ to another. But the idea of the European Union as a federation in the image of a centralized body such as the United States, if it ever was a realistic goal, today—not least because of the recent enlargement—is clearly a chimera.

“The European Union is, and, I would assume, shall remain, a multi-level-governance system which must take into account the rich pattern of cultural and historical differences of its component states and in which these states continue to play a determining role. It will be for the government and parliament of this Republic to organize themselves not only to defend the Republic’s interest but to employ its novel status for influencing, in alliance with other members, the policies of the Union.”

The award ceremony was presided over by the Prorektor of Charles University in ceremonies in Prague last fall. (Photo by Jaz Horal)
University and the dean of the Law Faculty in the presence of invited guests that included Czech Republic Constitutional Court President Pavel Rychetsky, Czech Parliament member Zdenek Jicinsky, and members of the Law Faculty. Several of Stein's second cousins also attended.

The award is the fourth honor that Stein has received from the Czech Republic. The others include a First Degree Medal from Czech Republic President Vaclav Havel, an honorary doctor of law degree from the West Bohemian University in Pilsen, and an honorary citizenship of the Czech town of his birth. In addition, Stein earlier this year received the Lifetime Contribution Award from the European Union Studies Association.

In a different kind of recognition, one that is especially satisfying for a teacher like Stein, his former student Yves Quintin, LL.M. '81, has dedicated his book Les Fusions Acquisitions aux USA (Mergers and Acquisitions in the United States) to Stein. The book, in French, is published by Editions Bruylant in Brussels and Editions Yvon Blais in Montreal.

Stein "was my professor of International and EU [European Union] Law at the Law School in 1980-81," Quintin explained. "I was also his research assistant during the summer of 1981.

"Eric was instrumental in helping me find my first job at Squire Sanders & Dempsey in Cleveland, where his recommendation was highly prized. He and I have stayed in touch over the years and I am very pleased to have been able to dedicate the book to him. He is one of the legends of the Law School."

Quintin, now a partner with Duane Morris LLP in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, explained in an e-mail that his book is "intended for a French-speaking public of lawyers and executives who are interested in making acquisitions of companies in the United States. It grew out of my own practice (I am a member of the New York and Paris Bars), representing investors from French-speaking countries and the realization that there was no book, in French, that explained not only the technical aspects of M&A [mergers and acquisitions] in the United States, but also the legal/sociological context in which acquisitions take place and the risks that arise from that context."

Fluent in French and German as well as English, Quintin served as a legal/economic advisor in the cabinet of the governor of French Guiana. He lectures on business law at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, and is the former chair of both the International Law Committee of the Philadelphia Bar Association and the International Law Committee of the Young Lawyers Division of the American Bar Association. He specializes in corporate law, mergers and acquisitions, contracts, project finance, and international transactions.