

Dear colleagues, guests, and friends!

I warmly greet you on the occasion of the new academic year, the Festival of Science and Knowledge!

Welcome to the Riomerian community!

I am delighted to see your smiles, the youthful energy of our first-year students, the members of the Senate and the Council of Mykolas Romeris University, our professors, scholars, lecturers, administrative staff, alumni, social partners, and all our esteemed guests!

I congratulate you all gathered here at Mykolas Romeris University, which is celebrating its 35th anniversary!

It is a joy to begin this new stage of our academic journey together, into the boundless world of knowledge. On this path, new impressions and experiences await us, new trials and challenges. And, of course, new discoveries!

As we walk this path, we almost fail to notice how our university, born during the years of Lithuania's independence restoration, has now reached its 35th year. For a person, that is the age of maturity – but for a university?

I believe it is the very bloom of youth!

We are the first new state university established in Lithuania after regaining freedom, and perhaps that is why our community members are marked by youthful idealism and enthusiasm—whether they are professors or colleagues just beginning their academic careers.

It is precisely this idealism, openness to innovation, that keen sense of justice (sometimes seen by many as uncomfortable), devotion to one's profession, and sincere desire to contribute to the building of a democratic, modern, safe, economically strong, and culturally attractive Lithuania and European family, that allowed us to move forward in giant strides.

As an alumna and now Rector of Mykolas Romeris University, I know well the path we have walked—with all its twists, valleys, and hills. We overcame it together, and we certainly do not intend to stop.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank the founders and builders of the University, members of the Council and the Senate, rectors, professors, lecturers and scholars, administrative staff, and of course, our students—you have not only established and continue to nurture the University's home, but you live the University every day through its values and community agreements, preserving the undying, though fragile, spirit of academic freedom.

Together, we have achieved a miracle—in a historically short time, we grew from a narrowly specialized academy training law enforcement officers into the largest International University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Lithuania.

We have joined global and regional academic networks, learning from the best universities in the world. We were among the first in Lithuania to create an ecosystem of cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary social innovation laboratories, we implement international and national projects, commissioned research for business and the public sector, as well as training and consultations for diverse social groups.

Today, we not only learn from others but also share our experience with foreign partners on integrating new technologies into the social sciences, improving study processes and teaching methodologies, creating innovative programs, and combining theory with practice.

By ensuring study and research quality in line with European standards—constantly audited by international expert teams and driven by global competition—we have long crossed national borders, developing partnerships with 465 universities in 77 countries.

We now run 26 bachelor's and master's programs in English, mostly in partnership with advanced universities in Europe, Asia, and beyond. Over 6% of our programs are joint or double- and even triple-degree programs—the highest rate among Lithuanian universities. We are ranked among the top 250 universities worldwide in the field of law, and we are working actively toward similar results in economics, psychology, management, communication, education, politics, and other disciplines.

Internationally, our University is highly valued for its contribution to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals—sustainability, gender equality, responsible consumption and production, peace, justice, and strong institutions. Last year, UNESCO entrusted our School of Law with the leadership of the UNESCO Artificial Intelligence Group, developing responsible and sustainable AI and other new technologies.

Together with the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology's Cybersecurity Research and Innovation Centre in Australia, our Faculty of Public Governance and Business founded the Australian–Lithuanian Cyber Research Network (ALCRN).

We also became members of the European Reform Universities Alliance (ERUA), and now, together with eight European universities, we are creating a new model of a European university, opening broad spaces of creativity and experimentation for students, lecturers, scholars, and administration alike.

To save your time, I have only mentioned a few facts reflecting how our University continues to grow.

Alongside the University, a young generation of free Lithuania has grown up—today holding the destiny of Lithuania in their hands. We have graduated more than 51,000 alumni, so it is no surprise that you will meet them across all levels of government and municipalities—from mayors to prime ministers, members and speakers of parliament, judges and lawyers, leaders and officers, as well as leaders in business, culture, education, and sports.

But the most important thing is not numbers, but people—our scholars, lecturers, members of the academic community, who have contributed so much to making Lithuania a legal, democratic state, economically strong and competitive within the European Union.

During this time, our campus has also transformed—not only has our Friends' Garden flourished with spring cherry blossoms, but we ourselves have grown into a harmonious, creative, and vibrant university community, nurturing our values and responsibly carrying out our mission to serve the individual, society, and the state.

For fostering the health and well-being of students and the entire community, we are the only university in Lithuania awarded the International University Sports Federation's "Healthy Campus" certificate.

We stand in solidarity with Ukraine's heroic struggle for freedom and generously share our university spaces with the school *Gravitas Schola*, which welcomes children displaced by war from Ukraine and other countries.

We want to be a university not only for the capital but for all the people of Lithuania. This year, for the first time, students will begin their studies not only in Vilnius and Kaunas but also at the Sūduva Academy in Marijampolė. Thus, after a long break, a new university town is emerging on Lithuania's academic map. We aim for the reconstructed MRU Sūduva Academy to become a driver of social, economic, and cultural progress in the entire region—though this will take time and our shared efforts.

This year also marked the launch of a large-scale infrastructure investment project, which will create modern study, research, experimental development, and innovation spaces in our Vilnius and Kaunas campuses, based on the highest international sustainable development principles and meeting modern architecture and design standards.

Just as 35 years ago, today we continue to grow with our state, coming to assist where we are most needed. Considering current geopolitical realities and new security challenges, we recently renewed our cooperation agreement with the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, the Police Department, and the State Border Guard Service on strengthening bachelor's study programs, developing scientific research, and creating innovations.

Next year, following the expected successful accreditation this autumn, a new National Security bachelor's program in public security—created together with seven Lithuanian law enforcement institutions and MRU colleagues—will be launched.

New study programs and research, designed in response to the needs of law enforcement institutions, are our contribution to strengthening the state's resilience to corruption, hybrid, and other emerging threats.

We are very proud that this year, together with Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuanian Sports University, and Vilnius College, we established the third consolidated Teacher Training Centre in Lithuania—our contribution to addressing the acute shortage of qualified teachers.

We believe that MRU students will be ready to navigate bravely and wisely through the waves of global politics, economics, law, and social challenges—just as did the eminent interwar Lithuanian statesman, lawyer, intellectual, and pedagogue, Professor Mykolas Romeris.

I am certain that our graduates will not fear competition with robots, artificial intelligence, and other technological marvels—because these cannot replace the kind of human being Lithuania needs: responsible, just, honest, resilient, and active citizens, critically thinking creators and visionaries. Technology will not replace society, nor solve all of humanity's problems—only collective intelligence, only we humans, can. That is why the social sciences and humanities are, and will remain, important and attractive at all times.

I am delighted that today more than 1,800 new students are joining our university in bachelor's, master's, additional, and teacher training programs. Despite unfavorable demographics, this year 20% more applicants sought admission to bachelor's programs compared to last year. The number of admitted students grew by more than 6%. At the master's level, we admitted nearly 20% more students than last year.

We are also closely observing the growth and diversity of international students at MRU. This year, international applicants made up about 19%—350 bachelor's and master's students from 64 countries, most from Ukraine, Morocco, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and France. Another 400 exchange students will study here under Erasmus+ and inter-institutional agreements, with most participants coming (or soon to come) from Spain, Turkey, Italy, Japan, and Portugal.

Dear first-year students,

I truly believe you did not make a mistake in choosing to study at Mykolas Romeris University. Today, we open not only the doors of our classrooms but also opportunities for you to spread your wings and fly after your dreams. We sincerely look forward to having you here!

We will do our best not to disappoint your trust, for we wish not only to help you better understand how the world works but also to find your place in it.

We want Ateities Street, where our University is located, to be *your* street to the future. We want you to build your future not as passive users of technology, but as true professionals, as active, critically thinking, empathetic individuals who care about the future of their country and the world.

Alas, I do not have Harry Potter's magic wand to help you fly. But you yourselves, even without magic, have already crossed the threshold that allows you to become part of the University community and full members of it. Thus, you have already gained the power to change not only your own life but also the life of our entire community—to make it richer, more interesting, and more colorful.

Use this right responsibly, and boldly open the doors of your Alma Mater, colleagues!

I wish you all a successful academic year and joyful celebrations of our 35th anniversary!