

Dear Secretary General David Lock,
Dear Minister, alumnus of Mykolas Romeris university Edvinas Grikšas,
Distinguished leaders of the global academic community,
our guests, colleagues and friends,

It is a great honour on behalf of the entire Lithuanian academic community to welcome you all to Mykolas Romeris University and to Vilnius - a city whose history gives particular resonance to the values that bring us together today.

Here, the principles of the Magna Charta Universitatum are more than abstract ideals. They are freedoms, whose worth we know, and whose future we share a responsibility to protect.

Let me begin with a distinctive feature of Lithuania's national life - one that reveals much about our history and our enduring commitment to freedom: we celebrate our statehood three times a year.

On 6 July, we commemorate the coronation of King Mindaugas in 1253 – a defining milestone in Lithuanian statehood and in our recognition within medieval Christian Europe.

On 16 February, we mark the restoration of an independent Lithuanian state in 1918, after more than a century of Russian imperial rule.

On 11 March, we mark the restoration of our independence in 1990. Lithuania was the first of the Soviet Union's constituent republics to take this step. Not negotiated. Not permitted. Declared and through fierce determination, effectively realized on the ground, defended it through civic courage and determination.

These three dates tell one story: of statehood established, independence lost, and freedom reclaimed. We know from experience that freedom must be upheld by every generation. And the same, colleagues, is true of academic freedom.

Thirty-six years have passed since 1990. In that time, Lithuania has joined the European Union and NATO, adopted the euro, and become a member of the OECD. Our economy has narrowed the gap with the European Union average considerably. We have built internationally recognised sectors in financial technology, laser technology and life sciences. Lithuanian lasers support scientific research around the world.

For a small country, talent is one of our greatest resources – and education is how we develop it.

According to the OECD's latest figures, more than 60 per cent of Lithuania's 25-34-year-olds hold a tertiary qualification – one of the highest proportions among the countries covered by its data. That is a strength, and it is also a responsibility: to ensure that education develops independent judgement as well as professional expertise.

Our academic traditions span centuries – from Vilnius University, founded in 1579, to institutions that grew alongside restored independence. Our own institution was established in 1990 and took the name of Mykolas Romeris in 2004.

We are the same age as Lithuania's restored independence. Mykolas Romeris university is, in that sense, a child of freedom.

You are in a city with more than seven hundred years of recorded history, whose historic centre has been on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1994.

Yet the story of Vilnius is also a story of openness. In 1323, Grand Duke Gediminas wrote to the cities of Europe, inviting merchants, craftspeople and monks to settle here according to their own faith and their own customs. It was a declaration of openness - seven centuries before we learned to call it internationalisation.

Those letters contain the earliest known written mention of Vilnius. It is fitting that an invitation should stand at the beginning of our city's recorded history.

Over the centuries, Vilnius became a crossroads of cultures. Its history also bears witness to the terrible consequences of persecution and the destruction of communities. Here, history is both a heritage and a warning.

Let me say a few words about the scholar whose name our university bears.

Professor Mykolas Romeris – Michał Pius Paschalis von Römer – was born in a small Lithuanian village and became the noble figure in interwar period. He was a founder of Lithuanian constitutional law, elected rector three times at the university in Kaunas, known first as the University of Lithuania and later as Vytautas Magnus University. He also served as an ad hoc judge at the Permanent Court of International Justice in The Hague.

His legacy speaks directly to our gathering: the conviction that public power must be constrained by law, and that universities must have the freedom to fulfil their academic mission.

Ideas outlive the people who formulate them. Sometimes, they find a new home in places their authors could never have imagined.

On 11 March this year, a space at the top of a tower of the Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg was named in honour of Mykolas Romeris. His name now has a place in an institution entrusted with interpreting EU law and ensuring that it is applied consistently.

There is a fitting symbolism in that: a Lithuanian scholar who reflected on European cooperation long before the European Union existed is now honoured within its judicial institutions.

Here at home, his portrait on our university wall offers a daily reminder of the responsibility that comes with bearing his name: to serve the individual, society and the state, while safeguarding academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

Those commitments belong together. The Magna Charta Universitatum affirms both the freedom of universities and their responsibility to the communities they serve. Academic freedom enables us to question assumptions, pursue knowledge and contribute honestly to public life.

Today, universities face political, ideological, financial and technological pressures. This meeting is an opportunity to renew our commitment and to consider how this commitment should guide our decisions.

The theme of this year conference, “Beyond Resilience”, asks us to look further. Universities must help shape the future: through independent research, open debate, and the education of people who can exercise judgement and act responsibly.

In a country that celebrates its statehood three times a year, you will understand why we believe in returning to what matters. Some things must be said again and again - so that they stay alive. This not only helps us remain resilient in the face of external pressure, but also enables us to look further ahead

and build a future in which the fundamental values of humanity, values of Magna Charta Universitatum passed from one generation to the next, remain strong and resilient.

May this gathering strengthen our shared commitment to protect academic freedom, safeguard institutional autonomy, uphold human dignity and pass these values to the generations, who will follow us.

I wish you an inspiring and meaningful Magna Charta Anniversary event.

Once again, welcome to Vilnius and to Mykolas Romeris University.

Thank you.