

Dear Vice-President of the Magna Charta Observatory,
Dear Rectors, Presidents and colleagues,
Distinguished guests,

On behalf of the entire Mykolas Romeris university community, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Vilnius, Lithuania!

It is a privilege for our university and for our country to host this Annual Meeting of the Magna Charta Observatory.

We are honored to welcome you to Vilnius for this anniversary celebration of the *Magna Charta Universitatum*. By bringing together academic leaders committed to the next generation and the future of our world, this conference offers an opportunity to strengthen the role of universities in society.

Let me begin with a simple question: why does a document signed in Bologna in 1988 — and renewed in 2020 — matter so much in 2026?

It matters because its core principles are not decorative. The *Magna Charta Universitatum* affirms institutional autonomy, the inseparability of teaching and research, and freedom of inquiry. These are not privileges claimed by academics for their own comfort. They are essential conditions for the pursuit of reliable knowledge and for the university's service to society.

Autonomy gives universities the freedom to ask difficult questions.

Integrity gives society reason to trust their answers.

Here, in this part of Europe, we know what happens when those conditions are removed.

Vilnius University, founded in 1579, was closed in 1832 by Russian imperial decree following the uprising against Russian rule. It remained closed for almost ninety years. From 1864 to 1904, Lithuanian publications in the Latin alphabet were banned, and books were carried across the border by people who risked imprisonment.

Later, under Soviet occupation, the social sciences and humanities — including sociology, political science, law, economics and history — were subjected to ideological control. Scholars were often expected to confirm prescribed conclusions rather than pursue open inquiry.

This is a profound lesson our region offers the academic world: authoritarian systems seek to control not only information, but also its interpretation. They fear the freedom to question official narratives — and the disciplines that help a society understand itself.

But there is another half to this story.

In the thirty-six years since Lithuania restored its independence in 1990, our universities have rebuilt institutional autonomy and reconnected with European and global research networks. In a single generation, Lithuania has moved from a closed system towards an open, digitally connected society.

Our universities have contributed to that transformation through research, education and public engagement — across the social sciences and humanities, life sciences, technology and other fields.

This meeting therefore takes place in a country that knows, from first-hand experience, what is lost when academic freedom is taken away — and what becomes possible when it is restored.

Dear colleagues,

The mission of a university today is evolving, and we should acknowledge that honestly. Students rightly expect preparation for their professional lives. But a professional toolbox, however sophisticated, is no longer enough: the tools themselves are changing faster than curricula can keep pace.

Some principles, however, have stood the test of time. One is that knowledge must be pursued honestly. Its roots reach back to antiquity and to enduring questions about truth, evidence and moral responsibility.

Today, these questions have acquired a new urgency. We live in an age of geopolitical upheaval and rapid technological change. Artificial intelligence is transforming how knowledge is produced, analysed and communicated. It can support discovery and expand access to knowledge. It can also generate convincing claims without reliable evidence, making verification all the more important.

We can delegate tasks to technology. We cannot delegate responsibility for the results.

So the question is no longer simply: *can we produce knowledge?* It is also: can we trust the knowledge being produced? And behind it stands a harder question: *can we trust the people who produce, interpret and use that knowledge?*

This is why academic integrity cannot be reduced to procedures, committees and sanctions. Rules are essential, and institutions need clear standards. But integrity also depends on the boundaries people set for themselves.

A researcher should understand not only what is prohibited, but also what is right — and should refrain from misconduct not merely out of fear of being caught, but because conscience says: this line must not be crossed.

That is our educational task: to help students become responsible people who can distinguish evidence from manipulation, knowledge from illusion, and responsible innovation from reckless experimentation. We must nurture their creativity, critical thinking and independent judgement — capacities they must continue to exercise for themselves.

Students are partners in the university's mission today, as well as the leaders of tomorrow. Their questions, perspectives and participation help shape our academic communities. We should give them meaningful opportunities to contribute to research, university governance and public debate — and to practise the responsibility that accompanies academic freedom.

Knowledge without responsibility can be dangerous. Physics has transformed our lives, but it has also enabled weapons of unimaginable destruction. Mathematics, logic and computer science have opened extraordinary opportunities, including artificial intelligence. The benefits of these advances depend on how responsibly we develop and use them.

Maintaining our standards requires courage. As Churchill observed, courage sustains the other human virtues. In academic life, courage means refusing misconduct, defending evidence, protecting academic freedom and maintaining high standards when lowering them would be easier.

Integrity begins precisely where convenience ends.

Finally, allow me one concrete appeal.

While we gather here in safety, our Ukrainian colleagues continue to teach, study and conduct research under the threat of war. Russia's aggression has damaged or destroyed thousands of educational institutions and caused extensive damage to research infrastructure. Academic life continues amid air-raid alerts, displacement and disruption.

I therefore invite every institution represented here to join and strengthen the Global coalition in support of Ukrainian higher education and research — through partnerships, joint projects, hosted researchers, shared infrastructure, and the protection of Ukrainian scholarship as part of the European academic space. Resilience is not a statement. It is a set of commitments, signed and kept.

Dear colleagues,

Our conference theme — *“Beyond Resilience: Universities as Active Value-Driven Agents in a Changing World”* — invites us to look beyond our capacity to endure. Universities must be able to withstand external

pressure, but our mission also calls us to act: to defend free inquiry, earn public trust and help shape a more just and peaceful future.

Let us use these days in Vilnius to consider what we can do together — and what each of us can do within our own institution — to turn our shared values into everyday practice. Through our teaching, research and partnerships, we can contribute to sustainable social progress, human well-being and peace.

I wish you open, courageous and fruitful discussions. May we uphold academic freedom and integrity — in our institutions, in our decisions and in ourselves.

Thank you. Ačiū.