

Dear students, ladies and gentlemen,

We are standing on the threshold of the new academic year that was expected with certain optimism regarding the recession of the Covid pandemic several weeks ago. However, the current reality indicates we will have to cope with it.

When summarizing the previous academic year, we can state it was a turbulent one for STU from external and internal points of view. We exerted a lot of effort to solving unprecedented problems unknown for this University before. I am convinced that the Academic Senate has put up with its role in the University management system in compliance with the jurisdiction and regulations, even though it had to face the attacks and intrigues that do not belong to the academic environment. I am very glad that the Senate has managed the election of the new Rector absolutely correctly. I had no doubt that the President would appoint the STU Rector before the start of the new academic year; which happened in fact on 7 September. Let me congratulate Professor Moravčík once again. I do believe that former pointless confrontations are over, and we all are now ready to fully devote ourselves to the development of this Alma Mater. We are entering an unpredictable period, yet the good news is that possible complications will no longer be completely new to us, as many solutions have already been verified and can be further improved even in difficult conditions.

It will not be easy, however, to improve our education, attract more new students, make working conditions more attractive especially for young colleagues and so increase their interest in working for STU. All actors in this process, starting from the University Boards up to the colleagues in the service positions, should maximally contribute to achieve the success.

After initial optimism about distance learning, we understand today that without direct personal student/teacher contact, as well as teacher/teacher and student/student contacts, it is far from ideal; yet I believe we will find a mode of teaching and researching without limiting the impact of full-time work, though there are certain laboratories and seminars where distance method is simply inapplicable. However, I must add that health is the most valuable thing a person has, it must be therefore protected, and work must not endanger it. The experience of the previous waves of the pandemic is a sufficient memento: we cannot ease up and must protect ourselves as much as possible.

In terms of legislation that directly affects us all, two processes are currently underway. One of them is accreditation. After the approval of all the necessary documents in STU AS, we believed that this accreditation will be much simpler and less bureaucratized; unfortunately our expectations have been completely ruined. We keep re-extracting from databases huge amounts of data which had been long before recorded in the Ministry and University systems, and copying them into the new forms. We all participate in a number of

commissions and committees, which steals our time that should be rather devoted to the core activities of the University.

Another process is preparation of the new higher education law and other related laws and decrees. We experienced hard times after the publication of the first ideas of the Minister. There, too, STU has played an irreplaceable role in defending academic freedoms. I believe that the new law will not trample on what is considered in the civilized world to be academic self-government and a free academic space. Instead, I would welcome a discussion on what would be needed to ensure the quality of conditions and functioning, so that the Slovak Universities achieve a level comparable with that of the European and global scale. There have been a lot of analyses without any following modifications especially in the conclusions on undersized funding. We are apparently moving in a vicious circle, which should be broken once and for ever, instead of indefinitely and misleadingly maintain that our universities are not good enough. It is a luxury to waste time and energy for solving similar problems in this difficult period when we strive for a modern and technologically advanced economy in Slovakia.

Let me therefore wish everyone a good start to the new academic year and a lot of enthusiasm, success and wellbeing in overcoming everyday problems.