

## **SEPTEMBER WELCOME by Prof. Dr. Tivadar Tulassay**

It is a pleasure to teach and a pleasure to learn. It is with such pleasure that I welcome all students and staff, especially freshmen today, at the beginning of the 237<sup>th</sup> academic year of Semmelweis University. What is this university like?

Since the founding of its legal predecessor, the Faculty of Medicine at Péter Pázmány Science University, Semmelweis University has evolved in step with European medical schools and university faculties of medicine. A succession of pioneering and internationally-recognised professors of medicine in the front lines of science and curative care were the hallmark of the University's high ranking in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Due to our cultural bonds, it was natural for our predecessors to establish a predominantly German-oriented, continental framework for education and healthcare. There is no question that this structure successfully rose to the ever-changing challenges of the time in the field of medical and healthcare training, as well as that of curative care for more than 150 years.

Semmelweis University, a specialist university, plays a unique role in Hungarian higher education, and it has a prominent place in and impact on the entire system of Hungarian public healthcare. In fact, it is well-regarded internationally as well! The first thing that comes to mind in the European Community whenever Hungarian medical education is mentioned is the name of our University. Our University provides education in three languages: out of its almost 9,000 students, nearly 1,300 are international students studying in foreign languages. 42 percent of the doctors, 70 percent of the dentists, 50 percent of the pharmacists, 80 percent of the physical education teachers and coaches, and 27 percent of the graduate healthcare workers in Hungary were trained at our University over the past years. The Doctoral School of the University is active in training subsequent generations of scientists, and it has significant responsibilities in the fields of specialist training and specialist further training as well. Semmelweis University occupies a pre-eminent position in science both within the country and internationally. We organise major international congresses in Budapest each year, we have representatives in numerous international scientific organisations, a great number of our medical professors are members of the Hungarian Academy of Science, and we channel dozens of Hungarian and international tenders to the University; all this suggests that Semmelweis University will continue to play a significant long-term role in the in the world of science, both in Hungary and internationally.

However, we must realise that the profession has suffered a significant loss of prestige. It is unfortunate society has little regard for health-related professions. Though the substantial loss of prestige affecting healthcare jobs may be connected to a general self-destructive lifestyle, the responsibility of our leaders must not be forgotten. We must acknowledge the fact that the public's good health is one of the basic pillars upon which the production of national income rests.

### **What does it mean to be a citizen of the University?**

It is the future! The future of our country, our nation, and of Europe is in the hands of university students. The status of being a citizen of the University therefore is both a rank and an obligation. It is a rank because of students' chances of becoming responsible intellectuals who not only possess professional knowledge, but make use of it to form their own independent opinions about the world that surrounds us. Furthermore, it means that their environment will pay attention to their opinion and attach importance to their words, giving

these intellectuals the ability to shape said environment. Beyond entertaining an independent opinion, learned persons are capable of making decisions and they shoulder responsibility for their decisions.

The citizen of the University has obligations as well. Obligations mean more than simply having to obtain a degree. Of course their foremost task is mastering the basics of their chosen profession as fully as possible. However, this alone is not sufficient. The citizens of the University are responsible for themselves, their families, their countries, and the future. Responsibility means service, as the famous Hungarian writer Márai puts it: **“Only service can make life valuable, serving the cause of the people.”**

Responsibility is linked with striving for perfection. Besides studying, we should feel an urge to practise science. This is expected from professors, primarily. Rector Loránd Eötvös said the following in his inaugural address in 1891: **“A school is scientific and education is scientific where and only where scientists are teaching.”** He considered creative users of science to be true scientists, rather than those who merely possess extensive lexical knowledge. However, uncovering the secrets of the world is not only the privilege of scientists. Curiosity, which lurks in everybody, is there in the student as well. Studying and acquiring knowledge in fact means getting to know the world through knowledge that has already been accumulated. Research, the next phase of curiosity, is merely one step forward from here. Be committed to research and science! Allow me to quote Loránd Eötvös once again: **“Real science is the science which has the world in mind; therefore, if we want to be real scientists and, as we ought to be, good Hungarians, we have to raise the flag of science high enough for it to be visible and duly respected beyond our borders.”** (Loránd Eötvös, 1903)

### **What is a university?**

A university is a place for the select and the invited. Professors and students, trainers and trainees, the master and the disciple together make a university what it is. It is upon universities that the future of the nation is built. The destiny of Hungary and Europe depends on the quality of the universities and colleges that educate future generations. In 1911, the Minister of Culture said the following in a speech in Parliament: **“...besides its educational and research objectives, every university usually has an educational influence on a larger sphere, as well as, quite often, a national political mission.”**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the European Community is also re-evaluating the situation and role of universities. In a release entitled “Mobilising the brainpower of Europe”, the European Commission states the following: “Europe must strengthen the three points of its knowledge triangle: education, research, and innovation. Universities are essential in all three. Investing more in the modernisation and improved quality of universities is a direct investment in the future of Europe and Europeans.”

And we do need this, since Europe is being left behind in the global knowledge race. If Europe wants to catch up with the United States, it should spend a further 150 billion Euros on higher education annually. And Europe’s only chance is through developing education, since Europe’s economic paradigm will change fundamentally within the next 20 years. Its manufacturing base will continue to shrink, and future growth and social welfare will rely increasingly on knowledge-intensive industries and services, and even more jobs will require higher education qualifications. Yet universities, the motors of the new knowledge-based paradigm, are not in a position to deliver their full potential contribution to the re-launched

Lisbon Strategy. It is no accident that a series of reforms are attempting to restructure higher education across Europe. However, the reforms can only achieve the expected success if they are accompanied with appropriate financing. EU countries spend 1.1 % of GDP on higher education, which is far below the finances allocated by Canada (2.5%), the USA (2.7%), and South Korea (2.7%). Good reforms, therefore, are not expressed as cost reductions and staff layoffs, but in the provision of competitive financing in return for which it is reasonable to expect a wide range of institutional modernisation strategies. Since higher education is a “public good”, and it fulfils an expected national and social role, universities are calling for a fundamentally new type of arrangement, or “contract”, with society, whereby they are responsible and accountable for their programmes, staff, and resources, while public authorities focus on the strategic orientation of the system as a whole.

The call from universities for more autonomy is not a call for the withdrawal of the state: there is, on the contrary, a near-consensus in Europe that the state should retain or even strengthen its responsibility for higher education.

### **Invitation for creative intellectual life.**

I invite everybody, both teachers and students, to participate in joint creative intellectual work now, at the beginning of the University's 2005/2006 academic year. What do we need to succeed?

Faith and trust. We have to believe in something and someone. First of all, we have to believe in our chosen vocation. We have to believe in ourselves and in our abilities, we have to believe that others need us, and that the colourful dreams of our youth will not be shattered by reality and greed. We have to believe in our teachers and friends. We have to believe in the future, and we have to believe in truth. And we must never lose heart.

**“My master taught me never to be satisfied with negatives. I should keep looking for the positive meaning. If I do not find it, I should continue my search. The real sense of all darkness is that it is light. The sense of all suffering is that it is pleasure”** Béla Hamvas: *Silentium*).

The other token of success is trust. Our chosen vocation is built on trust. If the relationship between the teacher and the student, the master and the disciple, the doctor and the patient is not sincere, if it is poisoned by distrust, if I do not say what I think, and if I look for hidden meanings behind spoken words, if our words lose their meanings, if our behaviour is a performance, then success will never come.

Mari Jászai wrote about this in 1905 as follows: **“...the world is a mirror. It reflects the expression you are wearing on your face when you look into it. You get back as much as you have given.”** What this metaphor describes, the relationship of the individual to the community, has not lost force for thousands of years and it must be reconsidered by everybody in every age. This kind of consideration is especially relevant today. In our world organised around one-sided values, it would appear that only material profit and enrichment are respected. And it seems that few hold intellectual and moral values as any sort of measure. An individual or a community is deemed successful if it gains as much as it can with the least investment. However, the mirror of today's public opinion reflects a distorted picture of the success of this one-sided relationship. Values that stand the test of time require an honest and clear approach, straight talk, and the acknowledgement of the possibility of making a mistake.

**Dear University citizens!**

September is the time to restart. We can create something lasting only if we preserve our values, if we dare to dream, if we have a vision, and if we join together. If we are capable of this, we will achieve success.

Welcome to Semmelweis University!

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Tivadar Tulassay