

Dear colleagues,
students,

the time of the most beautiful holidays of the year is approaching, a time when there is room for families to meet at the Christmas tree and Christmas table. We also automatically associate Christmas with the New Year's Eve. This period also has its charm, because almost every one of our communications starts with a New Year's Wish. The period of Christmas and New Year is also characteristic for the employees of our university in that they are usually preceded by a hectic period of completing scientific projects, fulfilling pedagogical duties, but also the eagerly awaited slowdown in work pace.

Years 2020 and 2021 will remain indelibly written in the history of mankind as pandemic years. I am proud that we were able to overcome this hectic period with honor, especially by building on the experience from 2020. Each semester takes place like on a swing, we alternate the phase of full-time teaching with the distance phase. When we said goodbye to our graduates in the summer, I believed that the worst was over. We began the winter semester in person, but with the threat of the third wave. It happened that after a few weeks we switched to distance education again, but thanks to a responsible approach to vaccination and collective security, we kept social contacts in a minimal regime, but still. We are at work, our campuses without students are sad and we are all aware of the importance of face-to-face teaching, daily dialogue between student and teacher, crowd and laughter of young people in the alma mater.

Despite the threats from the pandemic, I think that we can also assign the year 2021 to those that have stabilized our leading position in the Slovak and European higher education area. Once again, the university has withstood international rankings, and we have developed measures to promote interdisciplinarity in education and research. I consider it a great success that we have become the holder of the HR Excellence in Research certificate, as one of the few scientific institutions in the Slovak Republic.

We have moved by leaps and bounds in the project of building the Košice new industry cluster "CNIC". Together, the universities of Košice, SAV, the city of Košice, KSK, UNLP and Cassovia Discovery Park established a legal entity on August 4, 2021, in which we join forces and potential for the development of innovations. We have at our disposal the implementation of the improvement of the environment of universities in Košice so that our young people do not leave, but on the contrary, so that we attract talents from the surrounding regions and countries. Realization of a dream to revitalize our campus on Medická st. with the construction of a technological pavilion with a conference center, the revitalization of sports grounds and the construction of a swimming pool, it is becoming a reality.

I consider it an important fact from the point of view of access to education that we have started to apply the provisions of the Act on the Quality of Higher Education. We have a year of intensive work to implement our internal system for monitoring the quality of education and creative activity. At the beginning of 2021, the basic documents of IQS were approved by our UPJŠ Board, the IQS Council has been appointed and is working since April, I set up the IQS office and so the process of harmonizing study programmes with SAAVŠ standards could start intensively at the faculties. From the point of view of the stability of our department, we had expectations from the amendment to ZVŠ. Unfortunately, the discussions on university reform were not, in my view, well understood by politicians, so we had to join forces in an academic protest. I am glad that the universities in Košice again prepared and jointly submitted comments to the MPK, most of which were accepted by the ministry. There is a chance for a qualitative change in the university sector, but without a sufficient financial background we will not approach the competition in the attractiveness of leading Slovak universities, especially in the Czech Republic.

I am very pleased to be able to state again that despite the already mentioned problems in the financing of Slovak universities, we have again improved the material conditions for increasing the quality and attractiveness of education at our university. In addition to smaller investment events at faculties and workplaces, I would like to point out that thanks to the resources of the Faculty of Medicine, we have launched a unique simulation center in Tr. SNP. Thanks to projects from the resources of the Ministry of the Environment, we have made significant progress with the reconstruction of the central building of the Botanical Garden, and the extensive reconstruction of the campus of the Faculty of Science on Jesenná st. is coming to an end these days. We continued with the reconstruction of selected auditoriums on the premises of the Faculty of Law, and we also aestheticized some of our other buildings. We want to continue this trend so that you feel comfortable at work or school.

Dear colleagues,

I use the space of a Christmas and New Year's Wish to thank you for your dedicated work for the benefit of our alma mater in the really difficult conditions of the pandemic. Teachers and researchers for their scientific and pedagogical performance, non-teachers for their high professionalism in administration, maintenance, operation and all necessary services. My thanks also go to our students, who represent us at various competitions of a scientific, sports and social nature.

On my own behalf and on behalf of all members of the university management, I wish you a wonderful Christmas. May the light of Christmas candles shine a light of peace and happiness in your families. Until 2022, I wish you good health, a lot of success in scientific and pedagogical work. I wish the students a lot of success in overcoming the pitfalls of demanding study, I also wish them to feel good at the university and study with the feeling that they will receive an education that will prepare them for the needs of the labor market and open the door to real professional life.



Happy and Merry Christmas and a successful year 2022

*Yours
Pavol Sovák*