

## Dear Esteemed Guests and Co-workers! Dear Friends!

We are tremendously pleased and honoured that you have responded to our invitation to join us in celebrating the 54th anniversary of the National Institute of Biology. We have marked this occasion by presenting awards for scientific work in biology and related fields. The awards are in honour of Miroslav Zei, an important, internationally renowned biologist and professor who laid the foundations for this Institute. Together with his co-workers, he pursued the goal of outlining a research institute that would be active not only in the field of marine biology, but also in the study of other living organisms, from bacteria to man. On his journey, professor Zei faced and overcame a number of social, financial, professional and personal hurdles. But he achieved his goal. And here we are: his successors and what today is a working, state-of-the-art scientific institution. It is these same goals - to acquire knowledge of the unusual nature of the living, intertwining forms of life, of the millions of living beings fighting for their existence... defiantly, persistently, stubbornly - that we will follow to the end, or rather from the beginning, in the spiral in which evolution and its laws are taking us. We would like to believe that *Homo sapiens* is the finest form to which this spiral has led, but lately, as this species purposefully destroys nature, knocking the planet off its axis, so to speak, I am no longer convinced that that is the case. The question What has led man to such a course of action? is the subject of the debates of evolutionary psychology. Robert Wright, author of the book *The Moral Animal*, asks the following: Can an understanding of the principles through which nature has shaped our fundamental moral impulses also help us determine which of these impulses are correct and prudent? An analysis of different types of studies from this field leads to the conclusion that the human race and man's fate are one in the same... that our nature shapes our morals. I would like to put forward the optimistic hypothesis that all those traits that hold human society together and that underline the very high opinion our species has of itself - altruism, compassion and a sense of justice - are nonetheless part of our concrete genetic makeup. And I feel that science presents us with a field of activity where these traits reveal themselves, and that researchers are those who, by their very definition, adhere to the principles of honesty in their work and, ideally, also in their lives. All of these things should also be valid for the morality underlying social or, if you will, political relations. It is no secret that in our society, these relations are in a state of crisis. That is why I believe that we are also charged with the task of contributing and helping through our actions and efforts, and doing our part in pulling society - in pulling ourselves! - out of this crisis.

Fifty-four is an ideal age for a successful researcher: at this age, they begin to reap what they sowed in their youth, as their opus becomes recognized and applied. They have created their own research family, and disseminated capable young researchers. The same is true of this institution - The National Institute of Biology. Yet in recent years, this has become more difficult in the Slovenian environment. Scientific creativity is increasingly being stifled by a lack of necessary funding, and

the accumulation - instead of the simplification - of bureaucratic hurdles is considerably weakening our competitive edge internationally.

To make matters worse, I have noticed that despite the tempestuous nature of social and political life in Slovenia, and despite recent changes that inspire new hope, the word “science” has recently disappeared from the political vocabulary! We must therefore ask ourselves: Where is this path taking us? and Will we pass this “stress test”? If science in Slovenia fails the test, it won't be replaced by foreign science, the way that bankrupt banks and even companies are being replaced by foreign capital. Scientists from abroad will not be drawn to an environment that is hostile towards science, and science in Slovenia will cease to exist. And there will be fewer and fewer successful Slovenian scientists - with them, a developmental path based on an innovative economy will move outside our borders. The notion that there's no such thing as Slovenian science, that there's just a world wide web of knowledge, is a smoke screen. Only that knowledge which takes shape in our country can bear the fruit of prosperity - for our people, on our soil.

But I would like to end on an optimistic note, with the optimism handed down to us by our predecessors. As they list their achievements, today's award recipients will convince you that this optimism is justified. Lastly, in symbolically honouring our international involvement, we have the task of nominating an honorary foreign member of the National Institute of Biology and acknowledging the work he has done.

It is therefore my wish that this afternoon, you will learn something new, catch up with old acquaintances and get to know new faces... and of course that you will have a good time, as the Slovenian custom of *Martinovanje* or the Feast of St. Martin dictates.

Tamara Lah Turnšek