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## Opening Welcome\*

**Constantin Oprean**

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Distinguished guests, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome the participants to the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Balkan Region Conference on Engineering Education* held at *Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu* in Sibiu, Romania.

On behalf of our community, I would like to extend a heartfelt welcome to our ancient, wonderful city, a Transylvanian medieval treasure of culture with remarkable traditions in education and research.

We are convening again very close to the place where, some centuries ago, the daring visionary Hermann Oberth dreamt of flying humankind to the stars by means of science, to the heavens from which our ancestors strongly believed that the light of knowledge had descended.

The spirit of the ancient, illuminated scholars, whose scientific breakthroughs opened new horizons of human knowledge, is still so present in this city, and it is not by accident that Europe has chosen Sibiu for a cultural capital in 2007. It was here that the first school, public library and printing house of Romania were opened, the first German theatre in Transylvania produced a Shakespeare play for the first time, but also the first hydroelectric power plant and the first electric street car in Romania were inaugurated.

In May this year, we celebrated 220 years of higher education in Sibiu, paying our homage to those who started the first Academy of Law and set up theological education in Romania, a dream of generations coming true.

*Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu*, with its spectacular evolution over the last 15 years since it was officially established, is a continuator of this tradition, but also the flag-bearer of modern higher education in the area. Figures speak for themselves, illustrating the dynamism and development of this institution over the years: in 1990, the first academic year, student enrolments numbered 3,245. In the academic year of

2004-2005, the University enrolled 24,570 students, who attend programmes in 10 different faculties. The qualitative evolution of Sibiu higher education is also spectacular. A wide range of academic programmes of studies is offered at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Currently, *Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu* grants Master degrees in 90 programmes and benefits from the experience and expertise of 49 PhD advisors in 13 different domains, enrolling over 1,790 Master's students and 1,110 doctoral candidates.

This remarkable growth has demanded a coherent, well balanced organisational structure that is consistent with both, students' demands and the requirements of the labour market. This academic year, 130 different programmes of studies are offered in 10 faculties and a University college, as compared to 27 programmes offered in six faculties in 1990. Education and research are carried out by 679 highly trained members of academia, almost three times more than the 271 on the LBUS payroll back in 1990.

In a dramatically changing world, higher education in Sibiu, in Romania and Europe is confronted with new challenges. In its continuous quest for excellence, this highly dynamic system aims at achieving standards that meet the requirements of a rapidly developing society.

European higher education institutions all over Europe have reaffirmed their support to the principles of the Bologna Declaration and their commitment to the creation of the European Higher Education Area by the end of the decade. Progress requires that European universities be empowered to act in line with the guiding principle of autonomy with accountability. Thus, universities must be able to shape their strategies, choose their priorities in teaching and research, allocate their resources, profile their curricula and set their criteria for the acceptance of professors and students.

European higher education institutions accept the challenges of operating in a competitive environment at home, in Europe and around the world. However, in order to do so, they need the necessary managerial

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\*An Opening Welcome presented at the Opening Ceremony of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Balkan Region Conference on Engineering Education*, held at *Lucian Blaga University of Technology, Sibiu, Romania*, from 12-15 September 2005.

freedom, supportive regulatory frameworks, as well as quality as a building stone.

The European Higher Education Area needs to build on academic core values while meeting stakeholders' expectations by demonstrating quality. Indeed, quality assessment must take into consideration the goals and mission of institutions and programmes. It requires a balance between innovation and tradition, academic excellence and socio-economic relevance, the coherence of curricula and students' freedom of choice. It encompasses teaching and research, as well as governance and administration, responsiveness to students' needs and the provision of non-educational services. Inherent quality does not suffice; it needs to be demonstrated and guaranteed in order to be acknowledged and trusted by students, partners and society at all levels.

Accordingly, *Lucian Blaga* University of Sibiu has elaborated quality standards in higher education that are consistent with European standards, becoming one of the most active promoters of quality in education in Romania. Together with a team of specialists of national and international recognition, we have elaborated the *Guide for Quality in Higher Education* and the *Manual for Quality*, instrumental documents for assessing and controlling quality at any modern university. Thus, this institution has become a pilot university and a precursor to implementing quality in Romania. These days, when the Law for Quality Assurance in Education is in the process of being passed by the Romanian Parliament, the LBUS emerges as one of the most advanced and flexible universities in the country, adapting its needs and regulations to European and global standards, as well as focusing on quality as the basic underlying condition for trust, relevance, mobility, compatibility and attractiveness in the European Higher Education Area.

One of the reasons that brought us here today is to share and meet the challenges of a knowledge-based society. I hereby remember the answer that a master gave to a question of one of his disciples. The latter asked: *Master, if each and every of us should try to find ultimate perfection on his own, why are we here together today?* His master answered: *Each of us is like a tree. The deeper its roots go into the earth, the stronger it becomes. Only together we are the forest, and the forest is the one which is strong. It is stronger than any tree, a perfect work of nature and Nature itself is the symbol of perfection.*

Well aware of the fact that the mission of our University has always been simple and complex at the same time, just like the master in my story, we aim

to convey experience and expertise acquired throughout years of hard work to our students; to generate new knowledge; to preserve and critically review existing knowledge; to make students, both old and young, learn for themselves in the classroom, laboratory, library and, nowadays, by digital networks. This also entails following ethical codes that transcend mere know-how and promoting the economic application of newly generated knowledge in those areas where our ethical responsibility as educators says *go*.

Moreover, in some cases and at some moments, students require access to scientific disciplines, while at other times, they need the techniques and knowledge implicit for work performance that will help them fit into the order of the labour market: most students want to be prepared for a job in trade and business, rather than be trained in liberal arts and traditional professions. In order to perform a job, they must learn how to behave in their professional life, how to innovate, how to deal with the problems that they face. In other words, they need competences as much as intellectual references.

Relevance to the labour market needs to be reflected in different ways in curricula, depending on whether the competences acquired are for employment after the first or second degree. Employability from a life-long learning perspective is best served through the inherent value of quality education, the diversity of approaches and course profiles, the flexibility of programmes with multiple entry and exit points, and the development of transversal skills and competences, such as communication and languages, the ability to mobilise knowledge, problem solving, teamwork and social processes.

Strongly committed to integrating Romanian higher education into the European Higher Education Area and the European Space Scientific Research, the Romanian Government has taken important steps towards facilitating and encouraging change and providing a framework for coordination and guidance towards convergence. The LBUS, in its turn, is involved in a process of redefining academic education and building on research dimension, elaborating and adopting mechanisms for the evaluation, assurance and certification of quality so as to ensure compatibility between diverse institutions, curricula and degrees at the European and global levels.

In this context, engineering education is of utmost importance as a component of the complex process of Romania's integration into the global academic concert. As such, the *3<sup>rd</sup> Balkan Region Conference on Engineering Education* will play a crucial role with a remarkable impact on social, economic and academic life in our countries and institutions.

This outstanding academic event benefits from the contribution of our guests from Australia, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Liechtenstein, Serbia and Montenegro, the USA, Taiwan, and Turkey, specialists of national and international reputation who guarantee the highest level of debates and achievements.

Welcome to Sibiu and *Lucian Blaga* University of Sibiu! It is my hope that you will find your stay here both pleasant and rewarding!

## BIOGRAPHY



Constantin Oprean was born in Spring, Alba County, Romania, in 1948. He graduated as an engineer in mechanical engineering in 1971, gained his doctorate in industrial engineering in 1985. He went on to become a professor in 1978 and a PhD adviser in 1985 at *Lucian Blaga* University of Sibiu (LBUS),

Sibiu, Romania, after accomplishing experience as an engineer in the industrial production field between 1971 and 1978.

In 1992, Prof. Oprean was promoted to Vice-Rector for Quality Management and Scientific Research at the LBUS. In this role, Prof. Oprean coordinated policies in the field of quality at the LBUS. He also supervises the evaluation procedures for the University and the implementation of the quality system. He coordinated the work for the first Quality Manual in Romanian education: the Quality Manual

for the Faculty of Engineering. In recognition of his noteworthy contributions to the field of quality and university management, Prof. Oprean was elected Vice-President of the National Council for Quality Management in Higher Education. In 2004, he was elected as Rector of the *Lucian Blaga* University of Sibiu.

Prof. Oprean became a member of the UNESCO International Centre for Engineering Education (UICEE) from 2001 and, on September 2002, he became the Director of the Balkan Region Centre for Engineering Education (BRCEE), a satellite centre of the UICEE established at the LBUS. He was awarded the UICEE Silver Badge of Honour for distinguished contributions to engineering education in 2002, and the UICEE Gold Badge of Honour was conferred upon him in 2004. Prof Constantin Oprean is a member of the editorial advisory boards of many international journals, including the UICEE's *Global Journal of Engineering Education* and *World Transactions on Engineering and Technology Education*.

Prof. Oprean is a recognised specialist in the fields of quality management, university management, strategic management and technological transfer. He has participated in numerous international conferences and congresses in the USA, France, the UK, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland and Australia.

He has written over 24 books/handbooks and published 276 scientific papers, 82 of them being presented at international conferences. He is the author of 24 inventions and has coordinated over 50 scientific research projects at the national and international levels.

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