

Excellencies, dear rectors, distinguish guests, ladies and gentlemen,

At the beginning of my laudatory speech I must confess I am experiencing a sort of strange feelings. I was intended to start with ordinary acknowledgment of the opportunity to deliver the oral tribute to professor Miroslav Veskovič. However, I know he is an extraordinary person. Therefore I felt to be trapped in the gap between ordinariness and extraordinariness. Miroslav Veskovič is an extraordinary man because he can implement many ordinary activities. He is like the river Danube. The Danube river ordinary flows throughout the landscape but everybody who sees the river from the spring to the estuary must acknowledge its extraordinariness – it is not just a river, it is the whole region. It is something extraordinary what we consider as ordinary.

I questioned myself how is it possible that Miroslav Veskovič combines ordinary practices with extraordinary activities. Although he is an extraordinary person, he is free of manners and behaviour of the stars. In his extraordinariness he acts ordinary. And it is what makes him really outstanding person. When I started to search for the answer on this question, I recognized it is excellent niche for the laudatory speech. Professor Veskovič will be awarded with Danubius Award in the field of life sciences. This award holding the name of extraordinary and in the same time ordinary river, is intended to honour persons with extraordinary achievements in scientific activities and to recognize their outputs in relation to Danube region. I think it is very important that this extraordinary award is intended for extraordinary scientists who are doing the things which should be ordinary in the scientific community in our region: to increase the visibility of the region, to appreciate multidisciplinary challenges and to encourage people to deal with these challenges on a scientific level.

I know that social scientists work with biographical method to demonstrate the links between an individual and the society. They use this method to analyze how an ordinary man or woman can be extraordinary in the terms of society. When studying the biography of professor Veskovič, and when I had the possibility of close cooperation with him, I found he is the right person to be awarded by Danubius award because his ordinary activities make him extraordinary and his extraordinariness is something ordinary for those who know him. He is a sort of renaissance person in his multidisciplinary scientific activities through which he reflects the contemporary challenges related to nature and society.

So, what his life and achievements tell about him? Miroslav Veskovič was born in Ruma a town not far from Novi Sad – a city with which he is joined for his life, although he spent some time as a scientist in United Kingdom, United States or Switzerland. I can only guess the reasons why Miroslav is so tied to Novi Sad but maybe it is because of the Danube river. Nevertheless, whatever the reasons were it was very good decision for Novi Sad, for Serbia and for the whole Danube region as documents today's award. He got his university degrees in physics, namely in nuclear physics. His scientific activities are documented in 35 papers in the journals which are listed in the database of Web of Knowledge. He is an author or co-author of one book and eleven chapters in the books. His papers were published in the 30 international conference or congress proceedings, many of them are also listed in the databases of the Web of Knowledge. Altogether he has 53 records in Web of Knowledge and his h-index is 8. Miroslav participated in 4 projects of sixth and seventh European Union Framework programmes. Professor Veskovič is now a rector of the university Novi Sad, he is a president of Conference of Universities of Serbia and a permanent member of the European Physics Education Network. These are excellent activities. But is it enough to be extraordinary scientist to be awarded with Danubius Award? I think that his extraordinariness is in what the society expects from the scientists. It is to go beyond the borders of the specific field of sciences. It is to be socially engaged scientist. They are the facts which I recognized when I worked together with Miroslav and when I studied his curriculum vitae. Looking into Miroslav's papers it is obvious that although graduated as nuclear physicist, he contributes to the field of life sciences. Just to name some of the papers: Removal of radioactive contamination from water by blue green algae; Contamination of soil and food with radionuclides from Chernobyl; Distribution of radionuclides in the Danube ecosystem after sudden contaminations; Radiocativity of soil used for vegetable breeding around Novi Sad. Those titles

document that extraordinarity necessitates to break free from the narrow frames of one single scientific discipline and to see the world a new. It makes the scientist to be extraordinary.

As I have said, the publications and scientific achievements meeting the challenges of the contemporary world are a partial answer to the question I have raised. The other part documenting how to transform extraordinarity to ordinariness and vice versa is in the Miroslav's work for Danube region. It is what I have in mind when speaking about socially engaged scientists. As I have already indicated, maybe because he was able to get off the narrow frames of nuclear physics and to use the knowledge from this discipline in life sciences it explains his commitment for the EU Strategy for Danube region. He sees the region anew. His activities and involvement in the priority area seven: "To develop the knowledge society (research, education and ICT)" are tremendous. No wonder that this area is considered as being one of the most developed. Miroslav showed what means multidisciplinary approach in practice. In coordinating this priority area he cooperates with a sociologist – professor Falt'an from Slovakia. It is a nice example what the sciences needs: ordinary cooperation of extraordinary scientists from different disciplines and different nationalities. The results of such cooperation should be for the benefit of the whole region. It is very good to know that Danube Strategy serves as a pilot to demonstrate such power of joining ordinariness with extraordinarity of scientists.

There is one more issue which I think is worth to be mentioned in laudatory speech. And not only is to be mentioned but it is important to be mentioned. I have already pointed out several times the Danube river. Prague is not located on Danube and our Vltava river is far from Danube. But what these rivers have in common, and not only these rivers have in common, they are the bridges. The river without the bridge is like a cup without saucer or the Czechs would say a beer without foam. Moreover, although being far from each other, the Vltava and the Danube rivers are physically connected through the Schrazenbergs channel. The idea to join Vltava and Danube is traced back to fourteenth century when it was the idea of the Roman emperor and the king of Bohemia Charles the fourth. But only at the end of 18th century the Schawerzenbers channel was built. This channel accelerated the development of the region because the wood was supplied in eight days from Šumava mountains – or in German from Böhmerwald – to Vienna. The channels are the tools to accelerate the development in many areas. Today we speak about information channels and are fascinated by their extraordinarity but we almost forged about extraordinarity of the rivers-channels. They were built by our forebears and demonstrate in many ways their extraordinary skills and knowledge. And I think Miroslav Veskovič is in a symbolic form a sort of the bridge in the region – he connects through his activities the countries and people, and he is also a sort of the channel for the region because he accelerates the development of the region. As a coordinator of EU Strategy for Danube Region he joins this strategy with Danube Rectors Conference. Together with the rector of BOKU in Vienna professor Gerzabek they acted as the engine of already mentioned priority area seven and they joined it with the activities of the Danube Rectors Conference to such an extent that now Danube Academies Conferences also would like to join the Danube Rectors Conference. Thanks to Miroslav Veskovič and others the strategy was joined with universities and academies of sciences. These organizations have enormous potential in the terms of developing knowledge society. I am glad that now Danube Rectors Conference is one of the key actors in the development of EU Strategy for Danube Region. It will be also demonstrated in two days in Bratislava during the high level event concerning the scientific support to this strategy. And I am also glad that the work of extraordinary man who always though he is an ordinary man – professor Miroslav Veskovič contributed to this success. I know the Danube award will be in the right hands.