

Honoured rector,  
esteemed academic family of the Estonian University of Life Sciences,  
ladies and gentlemen,

Five years ago, when I was fulfilling the same honorary duty – to decorate the elected rector with his medal of office – I expressed hope that rector Mait Klaassen would dedicate all his efforts solely to achieving the aim that was set at the time: building the university into a credible and modern educational and scientific centre with many co-operation partners in Estonia as well as abroad.

Five years ago, the perils threatening the growth of the welfare of western societies had not become apparent yet. Estonian society was also bolder and quicker in hoping more than the later reality made possible.

The demographic and financial statistics of our country are not moving upwards as boldly as we had hoped and wished. And no university is an island untouched by the outside world.

Compared to the time rector Klaassen last took office, our situation and lives are different. Our primary task is no longer coping and adapting to continuous growth; rather, we must cope with inevitable decline.

The birth rates of the 1990s were half the birth rates of the previous decade; that is to say – we may not be able to maintain the number of students at the same level, even if we taught everyone twice.

The demographic facts encourage us to give up something, obviously something that is more hidden and leaves no stains on the façade. However, that would be a short-sighted and dangerous road.

Having to make do with less should not only be seen as a misfortune; every situation has its benefits. Limited resources put the spotlight on basic values, the meaning of the individual and common existence.

Excuse my frankness, but I would assert that the existence of the Estonian University of Life Sciences or lack thereof would not noticeably alter the intellectual temperature of the whole wide world.

The constitutional aim of Estonian-speaking universities is nothing less than to be Estonian-speaking.

That does not mean giving up under conditions of competition. On the contrary, it means a special mission, of which we can never lose sight.

There is no credible alternative whatsoever to an Estonian-speaking university of life sciences. Because even if you happen to taunt the field, it only knows how to taunt you back in Estonian; if you call out in the forest, only the Estonian language can echo back from an Estonian forest.

The Estonian University of Life Sciences is essential to Estonia itself. And only after that, if we have some extra strength, to the rest of the world. I also hope the new rector and the university will bear that in mind during his new term in office.