

HONORARY SPEECH FOR PROF. PHD. VASILE VESE ON THE OCCASION OF GRANTING THE TITLE OF DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA ON NOVEMBER 26, 2009

LAUDATIO

To Professor Vasile Vese, on Awarding the University of Oradea Doctor Honoris Causa Degree

In the academic environment, we can often find ourselves in the situation of talking about a professor or senior colleague, on the occasion of different manifestations, which are more or less official in character. In such contexts, one is likely to become subjective in the sense of adopting either a critical approach in an argument that expresses “envy” in terms of the professor’s achievements, success and prestige, or exaggerate in eulogies and compliments based on the accumulations of a relationship founded on close cooperation, respect and, why not, friendship.

Today we are living an exceptional moment, when the criteria of subjectivity are diluted by the honoring presence of Professor Vasile Vese - and we should therefore assume a distinct role, that of acknowledging this personality’s participation, contribution, activity and results in the development of the Romanian school of contemporary history, international relations and European studies.

In more than forty years of academic career, Professor Vasile Vese has influenced the Romanian academic environment, given the outstanding results of his activities, the profound impact upon numerous generations of students and the decisive contribution to the development of the Romanian school of international relations and European studies.

Professor Vese’s personality is characterized by a complex level of relating the scientific research and the didactic activity, which jointly determined a continuous self-improvement, given the multi and interdisciplinary character of didactic approaches and scientific investigation that characterize the fields of history and humanities.

History lies at the basis of Professor Vese’s formation, a fundamental discipline that is not only formative, but also interrogative, demanding the specialist in this field to constantly re-evaluate historical sources and realities, interpreted in contexts that, given the case of contemporary history and international relations, are permanently changing. In 1962, having graduated from the “Babes-Bolyai” University of Cluj Napoca, Faculty of History, the historian Vasile Vese begins his academic career as assistant professor, being distinguished by the interest for and the openness towards the interpretation, in an international context, of the fundamental moments that stood at the basis of achieving the Romanian national unity.

The science of history, correlated with the specific methodologies of international relations analysis, allowed Professor Vese to explore the international echoes of the Romanian external politics, whether we refer to the international context at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Union of 1918, the participation of Romania to the League of Nations, or the reconfiguration of the external politics at the end of World War Two. These topics stood at the basis of the analysis and information that Professor Vese has approached and developed in university courses and scientific debates during his career. In this respect, our argument does not insist on the relevance of novel information, but rather on the hypotheses

and interrogations that encourage new analytical perspectives and a continuous search for historical truth.

Professor Vese's academic activity materializes in a series of fundamental and specialized courses that, in time, formed the basis for the formation of numerous generations of undergraduate, master or doctoral students. In this respect we should emphasize the continuity of Universal Contemporary History course, that professor Vese has taught, as full professor, at Cluj Napoca University, ever since 1975. The contents of the discipline, the methodology of teaching and the selected bibliography have contributed, through the effort of Professor Vese, to the diversification of investigation and analysis approaches, through the perspective of identifying sources of archive research and the correlation of data obtained to the international knowledge level.

We should highlight the fact that, even before 1989, when the conditions of scientific research of the Romanian academics, concerning the contemporary international environment, were constrained by ideological determinations, Professor Vese managed to grasp the invariables and the vulnerabilities of the bipolar system from a long history perspective that should inevitably confirm, sooner or later, the transcendence of the system towards a new dimension of international relations.

From the historical, and especially from the international relations perspective, the 1989 moment has represented an opportunity for both Romanian society and the Romanian higher education system. Professor Vese was among the few specialists that demonstrated an ability to correlate the experience of the past with the opportunities of the moment and the expectations concerning the future of the Romanians. This idea is supported and demonstrated by the open, flexible and especially critical approach to contemporary history, which can be observed in the contents of courses and discourses held by Professor Vesa during the last twenty years. The advantages professor Vesa has benefited from are the didactic and the research experience at an international level, which provided him with the opportunity to surpass the ideological limitation of historical knowledge, to have access to an open level of debate, where history and international relations confirm the fact that the objectivity of specialists remains a reference point for society. Despite the limitations imposed by the communist regime, the personality of Professor Vesa has been internationally acknowledged, an element that opened possibilities for the distinguished professor to take part to different international exchanges, as either visiting professor, or lecturer at scientific sessions. This situation presented Professor Vesa with the opportunity to have access to sources of information and to the open presentation of the main themes, specific to relationships in the bipolar international environment. The chief accumulation, which could be later identified in university courses and papers, is the level of knowledge and the critical approach to the international system, which opened, after 1989, possibilities for the development of new investigation directions concerning contemporary international relations.

From the perspective of contemporary universal history, as subject consecrated since the formation period of the Romanian academic system, we should emphasize the fact that Professor Vese was among the pioneers who managed to detach himself from the historical positivism approach and adopt analytical investigations that are specific to international relations as a separate subject among humanities. After 1989, the opening, the context and the favorable working environment allowed Professor Vese to explore and thoroughly study some dimensions of international relations, yet unexplored at that moment.

We can observe that, besides the adjustment to normality of historical discourse concerning the role played by Romania in the context of international relations, Professor Vese's activity raises issues and encourages debates on European themes, related to the common space and Romania's belonging to Europe. We can mention in this respect the contribution of Professor Vese to one of the first works aiming at the rediscovery of Europe

by Romanians. The volume entitled *European Convergences*, published in 1993 under the coordination of Professor Vese, represents one of the reference points to which Romanian intellectuals relate when approaching European studies and the opportunity of this subject field, before the Romanian political elites managed to gain a coherent vision upon the European integration. Ever since 1993, following this trend towards openness, Professor Vese delivers lectures of *European integration history* and gathers around him young specialists in European studies and international relations, recognized as belonging to the school of international relations in Cluj.

In the last two decades, Professor Vese has developed and promoted special courses related to the *Contemporary international system* and *International relations sociology*, delivered in several national and international universities.

Between 1990 and 2004, as head of the Contemporary History and International Relationships department, Professor Vese brought a special contribution to the promotion and the development of study programs for undergraduate, master and doctoral students, in the field of international relations and European studies. In this respect, Professor Vese can be considered among the first Romanian academics to coordinate doctoral programs in the field of international relations. Nowadays, the specialists formed by Professor Vese activate nationally and internationally in universities, or within governmental or international organizations.

An important dimension of Professor Vese's contribution to the knowledge of history and international relations can be identified in his publicistic and research activity, which reunites numerous volumes, articles and studies, considered reference points for those interested in contemporary history and international relations. With regards to the historical dimension we can observe that the works published by Professor Vese approach Romania's role in the history of Europe, either from the perspective of bilateral relations, or from the perspective of Romania's participation to the international system. We can mention here, *Romania and France at the beginning of the 20th century (1900-1916)* 1975; *Contemporary Universal History (1918-1929)*, 1978; Vasile Vese (co-author), *The Encyclopedia of Romanian Historiography*, 1978; *Fundamental Problems of Modern and Contemporary World History*. Textbook for the 12th grade, 1988; *1918 for Romanians. Unification Documents*, 7th volume, 1997; *The Great Unification of 1918 in the European Context*, 2003.

In terms of international relations and European studies, Professor Vese has published, either as author or co-author, several volumes, studies and articles, which represent fundamental works for the understanding of the international environment at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. We mention here only *The Lesson of Yalta*, 1988; *The History of European Integration*, 1997; *International Relations Paradigms*, 2001; *The Treaty of Nice. Translation and Commentaries*, 2002; *Tolerance and Intolerance in Historical Perspective*, 2003.

Another dimension of Professor Vese's contribution to the development of the international relation field is represented by his activity within the National Council for Academic Assessment and Accreditation (1994-2005), position that allowed him to support, by means of critical recommendations, the development of the international relations and European studies specialization at the University of Oradea.

The most difficult part of this presentation, limited by the available time, is that of drawing some conclusions related to the influence of Professor Vese's academic and scientific activity, since there remain, inevitably, some aspects equally important to the ones mentioned above, upon which we should have insisted more thoroughly.

In the context of the ideas presented above, we believe that the proposal of the Faculty of History, Geography and International Relations, to confer the Doctor Honoris Causa title to one of the most distinguished Romanian professors comes to strengthen our belief that a

veritable school of international relations and European studies becomes more and more clearly configured in Romania, and it cannot be conceived without taking into account the major influence of Professor Vese in this field.

Following the decision of Oradea University Sennate, Professor Vese becomes part of the gallery of academics in Oradea and we are greatly honored to confer him the Doctor Honoris Causa title of our University. We would like to assure Professor Vese of our consideration, admiration and gratitude, which we hope are reciprocal. It is the consideration and admiration that distinguished people deserve.

Oradea, 26th of November 2009

Prof.PhD Ioan Horga

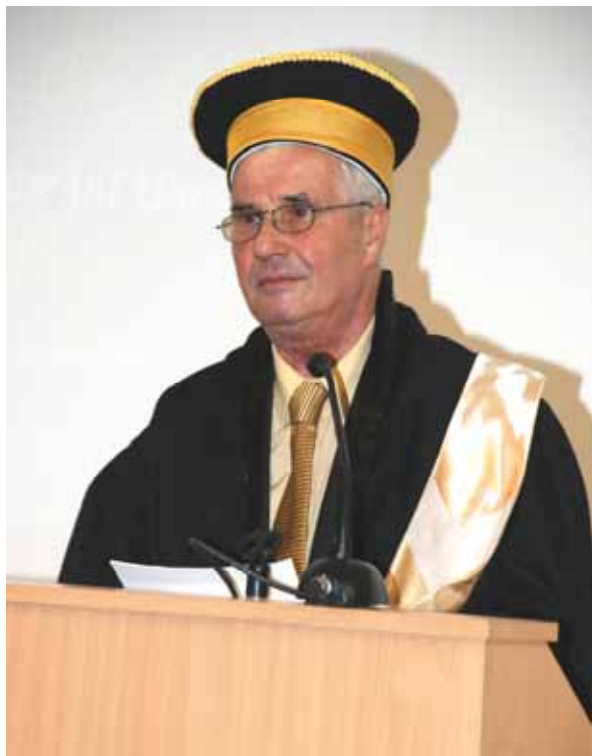
WELCOME SPEECH OF PROF. PhD. VASILE VESE UTTERED AT AWARDING THE TITLE OF DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA IN AULA MAGNA OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA

Dear Professor Cornel Antal, rector of the University of Oradea, dear Professor Ioan Horga, dean of the Faculty of History – Geography and International Relations, dear members of the University Senate, distinguished ladies and gentlemen

I cannot hide the emotions I felt when I learned about the honoring intent of the University of Oradea Senate to award me the *Doctor Honoris Causa* title. Beside the honor of such a distinguished award, it is an honor to receive it from an institution more and more present, more and more representative in the life and the structure of the superior education in Romania, an institution that I respect not solely because of my close personal ties due to my origins, but also because of my recognition of its contribution to the development of the higher education in Oradea, the University that I served with devotion for over five decades. This happy event of my life is coincident with the celebration of 90 years of higher learning in Oradea, a fact that confers even deeper dimensions to this moment.

That is why I feel an intimate need to express the deepest and distinguished gratitude towards the University of Oradea, towards its academic environment, towards its leading board, towards the whole staff of the Faculty of History – Geography and International Relations for an honor that I haven't expected, nor did I think about. Trying to establish a relationship, I can only find an explanation in the perception that many generations of students may have had about me during the time I served for their professional development, as well as for their ascent, with all my devotion and my knowledge. Many of them are now members of the professional staff of History and International Relations departments.

Bearing all this determinations in our minds, please allow me to emphasize the need for pleading in favor of the teaching vocation, in particular, and in favor of education, in general, as the main tools for progress of communities and nations. As a convinced supporter of the strong relationship between History and International Relations, during my career, I got closer and closer to the international phenomenon research. After lecturing Paul Kennedy's work "*The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*", published in 1988, I kept in mind his ascertainment regarding the decreasing economical trend of the United States of America between the Fifties and the Eighties. He stated that if during the '50s of the Twentieth century, USA held 35% of the world economy, at the end of the '80s, the balance fell to 20%.



Picturing this reality, the author concluded that this power will maintain its pre-eminence in International Relations because of its huge amounts of capital invested in research and education.

The value and efficiency of education and learning depends on the two-term relationship student – professor in which the former represents the “dough” that the last has to shape. Seven months ago, in front of an academic meeting gathered on the occasion of my seventieth birthday celebration, forced to an introspective and retrospective meditation, I stated that I served, as a professor, the University unsparingly and with self-devotion. All these years, teaching wasn’t for me a just an occupation, but a profession, often identified as a mission. This reality was illustrated through spoken and unspoken appreciations of my students, facts that today are embodied in this distinguished award that the University of Oradea honors me with. There is one thing that I can assure you of: if today I was to choose a profession once again, teaching would be, undoubtedly the one.

For my professional development, I owe a lot to my teachers that had educated me and had directed my options towards school and learning. I ask for your consent to take the liberty of evoking generations of professors from whom not only I received knowledge, but also behavioral manners in academic and society relationships.

During the fifties I benefitted in Beius (where I followed gymnasium and high school) of a generation of outstanding teachers, many of them returned from the battle field, recruited as elementary classes teachers that succeeded in those troublous times to become teachers. They gave strong proofs of self-devotion, self-abandonment and huge generosity for their pupils, most of them coming from rural areas. Their abnegation remained deeply embedded in my memory and in my feelings. Having to live with poor material means, their only reward, that was acknowledged openly, was represented by their pupils’ performances. The cases in which they helped, even materially, their best, but often poorest of their pupils to pursue academic studies, are not few.

In 1957, after a series of events, I was admitted, together with the well known and appreciated archaeologist, at the same time professor of the University of Oradea, Sever Dumitrascu, at the Faculty of History and Philosophy of “Babes” University of Cluj. At the time, the faculty was among the elites of research and teaching in Romania and the professional staff was an honor for the Romanian historiography. In “Samuil Vulcan” high school, the University of Cluj was somehow worshipped and considered as a kind of scientific and cultural Mecca for the Romanians from Transylvania, as well as for all Romanians.

I have to recall here, in front of you, the names of outstanding professors and historians that I met as a student and as a young teacher. I start with Constantin Daicoviciu, specialized in classical studies and archaeology, rector between 1956 and 1968, the creator of an archaeology school of outmost importance in Romania. I will mention David Prodan who thoroughly investigated the national and social processes of the Romanian population of Transylvania during the XVIIIth Century; Stefan Pascu, who realized the first monographic work on the Unification of Transylvania and Romania, being constantly preoccupied of medieval studies and the emancipation movement of the Romanians in Transylvania; Virgil Vatasianu, a highly appreciated researcher in medieval art and

the creator of the first school of Art History in our country. I would then mention Mihai Macrea, specialist in the history of Roman Dacia, Francisc Pall – in universal history, Mihail Dan – in the history and language of Slavonian people; Camil Muresan, outstanding personality specialized in modern universal history. I cannot end this list without evoking a personality that shaped us (even though he was only assistant professor at the time) and became a model for generations of students, Hadrian Daicoviciu, the one that left us too early and the one that left a part of himself not only at the University of Cluj, but also at the Faculty of History and Geography in Oradea.

Between the two World Wars, the University of Cluj, at that time named “King Ferdinand the First” developed the so known “university extension”, consisting of series of conferences intended to disseminate scientific and cultural knowledge in under-privileged areas, one of the targets being the areas of Apuseni mountains. At the end of the ‘60s and during the ‘70s of the last century, the University of Cluj featured this extension through establishing independent universities in cities with vocation and possibilities for developing an efficient higher education. Therefore it was the University that contributed to the progress of historic, geographic and foreign languages higher learning in cities like Oradea and Sibiu. Why Oradea? Because in museums, archives and other cultural institutions, well appreciated graduates of the University of Cluj developed relevant research work in history and geography fields, proving real aptitudes in fostering a high quality superior education. As a consequence, in Oradea, the faculty of history and geography began to function, coming in prominence through high performance.

This constellation of professors taught generations of students during the ‘60s and the ‘70s training and educating them in the spirit of reading, in the spirit of attending libraries and bookshops, in the spirit of attending cultural institutions. The measure of behavior norms and assessment was solely the value and performance, a criterion that lasted in the University until the end of the ‘70s, when the development of the higher education in Romania entered a total immobilism. No matter of the performances, no matter of needs, promotion in a higher professional university degree was blocked and the open appointments as university professor were abolished. At the University of Cluj, in 1989, there were 53 university professors left from an initial figure of 100. The ninth decade of the last century was the most critical period due to the intrusion of the Communist Party in the activity of the higher education in Romania, comparable to the first part of the obsessive decade of the ‘50s.

Between 1960 and 1980, the ideological pressure was somehow amputated and diminished in many higher education institutions through a spirit of solidarity of the professional staff, with a real positive influence on the students, so that, within possible limits, the Communist ideology was left at the gates of the University. The consequence was the competitiveness of Romanian graduates, if they managed to leave the country, as compared with foreign universities graduates.

After 1989, the liberty acquired through so many sacrifices, reverberated upon students and professors, as well. First of all, I would mention a positive outcome: the University managed to bring back the valuable students that graduated after 1980, promoting them in teaching positions. On the other hand, the access to higher education became unlimited, a fact that led to the development of mass superior education in Romania, due to the exponential increase in the number of students, as showed by the discrepancy between the number of students in our country as compared to other developed states.

The superior education expanding, as well as the increase in the number of students, has developed on an impoverished scientific support, consequence, as I stated above, of the educational strategy of the ‘80s. This proved to be very detrimental on the professor – student relationship. The teaching staff, and I am speaking of the very appreciated professors, overstressed in the new university environment, were lacking, objectively, the necessary time space to relate with the students. The new means of communication partially make up to the direct contact that a teacher needs to develop with his student, but they can’t substitute it. This is a reality felt by many students, but not often expressed, out of various reasons. We consider that, given the actual facts, the teaching staff must and has to find a solution to this problem, which, experienced by the French superior education in the ‘60s of the last century drove to profound social convulsions, one of the claims raised by French students being a new approach of the professor – student – pupil paradigm.

The contemporary Romanian education has to face yet another real and important challenge: relationship with politics. Evidently, this relationship exists and has to exist, the progress of education being possible only in the context of national education policies. But the intrusion of politics in the field of education, that has to remain faithful to the principle of value in recruiting and promoting professors, can sometimes prove to be prejudicial.

As an observer, not involved in politics, I seized the temptation of those elected in the Romanian Parliament, of those selected in power structures to obtain teaching degrees, most often professor titles, a fact that harms the position and the quality of the university professors. Unfortunately, this temptation tends to become the rule and not the exception.

Nowadays the higher education in Romania is facing a lot of problems and phenomena, but I stressed only the above mentioned two aspects that regard the role and the position of the professor in contemporary society.

I am ending now, inviting you all, teaching staff and scholars, to restoring the solidarity spirit in order to recompose what University should represent at present: community and communion between professor and student.

Still, I need to express again my warm and sincere thanks for the honor you are awarding me and to assure the University of Oradea of my deepest feelings of solidarity and support for the difficult, yet human and absolutely necessary mission assumed.

Since New Year and the great celebration of the birth of our Lord is close, allow me to wish you all, professors and students, the whole staff of the University of Oradea success in your noble mission of teaching and training!

Oradea, 26th of November 2009

Prof.Ph D Vasile VESE