

A LETTER FROM RECTOR MARTIN BAREŠ TO THE ENTIRE MASARYK UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

Dear students,

I would like to take the opportunity now at the beginning of summer break to recapitulate the main events of the past few months at our university.

The 2019/20 academic year was my first year as rector, and I must say that when I was inaugurated in September 2019 it never would have occurred to me that we would be facing anything like the coronavirus epidemic. The **coronavirus crisis** was a major test for our university, and today I can proudly say, with gratefulness for all who got involved, that we, as a university, handled it with flying colours. Already in February university administrators began discussing what to do about students who were on exchange programmes abroad. On 2 March I established the MU Crisis Board, which immediately began adopting essential measures. On 13 March I then established the MU Crisis Committee, which met daily and adopted measures related to the university's overall operations. All decisions made by the Crisis Board and the Crisis Committee were in keeping with government measures (and often went above and beyond them). At the same time, we sought to ensure that these measures would be sustainable over the long term and keep the university functioning. I also endeavoured to regularly and clearly inform MU students and employees about the adopted measures and to make sure that our decisions would not come as a surprise. To help me do this, I made regular weekend video updates. And I am sure that my occasional media appearances, and those of other university representatives, helped meet these goals as well. I am convinced that the rapid response of MU management in the early days of the coronavirus crisis helped us react flexibly yet intelligently to the quickly developing situation. I consider it a success that MU did not become an epicentre of infection; in fact, the novel coronavirus did not spread at MU at all. I would like to thank all deans, all heads of MU's units, all other administrators, all academic and non-academic employees, and all students that came together to overcome the

coronavirus crisis. Thanks to all of you, our university pulled through and weathered this unprecedented crisis.

As the rector, one thing that fills me with particular pride is our university's involvement in volunteer activities, especially through the Crisis Operation Centre / MU Volunteer Centre, whose creation I initiated in the first days of the crisis. In short order we managed to put together a network of 4,600 volunteers who helped handle a total of 2,448 requests for help, of which 227 came from institutions (we allocated about 1,000 volunteers to these tasks, which generally involved hospitals – including helping deal with the impact of the cyberattack on the University Hospital Brno – children's homes, nursing homes, crisis hotlines, local governments, charities, and other organisations) and 2,221 came from individuals (primarily involving babysitting and tutoring children, shopping, picking up medicine, delivering face masks, and other things). We launched a public fundraising campaign that quickly made nearly 2.5 million crowns, which allowed us to finance many volunteer activities. And I think that thanks to the MU Volunteer Centre, which helped not only in Brno and the South Moravia Region, our university has improved its visibility among the general public – and at the same time, showed others what role a university should play in society and what social responsibilities it should have. For this, my thanks go out to everyone at the Rector's Office of Masaryk University and MU's faculties and above all to the volunteers who contributed to our volunteer activities.

Another critical event that occurred in the 2019/20 academic year was the **creation of the MU Faculty of Pharmacy**. There is no question that this was and is a historic event; the last time a new faculty was added to MU was in 2002, when the Faculty of Sports Studies was founded. Shortly after I took office as rector, I initiated talks about moving the Faculty of Pharmacy from the University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences to MU; the coronavirus crisis did not stop or even slow down this strategic move. A Faculty of Pharmacy was a part of MU from 1952 until 1960 (when by decision of the Communist Party it was eliminated, and the pharmacy study programme was combined with the one that existed in Bratislava). The faculty was restored in 1991 as part of what was then the Veterinary University, today's University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences Brno. I consider the establishment of the Faculty of Pharmacy at MU to be a fundamental strategic move that will contribute to the university's development because today pharmaceutical education goes hand in hand with medical and natural science education. Our university will offer the Faculty

of Pharmacy the excellent facilities of several university hospitals, close contact with patients, and an existing network of outstanding researchers and scientists, which the new faculty should contribute to improving. Of course, I cannot leave out here the importance of the social sciences and humanities, and the faculties where they are taught. These fields play a significant role in the ethics of drug development, pharmacoeconomics, and so forth. Here I would like to thank everyone who contributed to moving the Faculty of Pharmacy from the University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences Brno to MU.

Another key milestone in this academic year came with the approval of the budget by the Academic Senate of MU, whose members voted predominately in favour of it. In 2020 the university's total budget is 8.897 billion crowns, which is a 2.2% increase (188 million crowns) against last year's budget. This is certainly the largest budget in the university's history. The senate also approved a medium-term budget projection until 2022. In my opinion, it is not the overall size of the budget that is important but rather the fact that it is a pro-growth budget. In terms of the operating budget, the university is experiencing above-average growth in areas critical for its development, specifically in the budget categories of institutional support and educational subsidies. I also appreciate the fact that despite the coronavirus crisis we were able to complete the budgeting process with only minimal delay.

Another important event in the 2019/20 academic year was in my opinion the introduction of a **new system for evaluating research** and especially its linking to the university's budget. In coming years, a university's classification (i.e. whether it is a research university or not) will decide about how much institutional support it receives. It is essential that the new system replaces the old one, which encouraged quantity over quality when it came to research outputs. I consider it highly significant that in the future quality should play a central role. Researchers, scientists, and scholars will be motivated to focus on conducting high-quality research at both the domestic and international level. The indicators used to internally evaluate MU's research outputs should lead to improvement at the individual level, which should in turn contribute to improving MU's reputation as a research university.

Turning to the outlook for the next several months, I should emphasise in particular the importance of the **MU Strategic Plan for 2021–2027**. This crucial document sets out the university's main

priorities in education, research, its role in society, and the development of its infrastructure. MU administrators are currently creating a first draft of the plan, which will include points brought up at meetings of working groups and academic bodies. During the summer we will take into consideration points raised at other meetings. In September I will then present the plan to the leadership of each faculty, and in October we will finalise it together.

I would also like to briefly mention the **MU strategic development project** that is currently being worked out. We put together and discussed the basic contours of this project in the spring. This project highlights current social challenges and reflects current events in the world. Its official title is 'Innovation for a healthy and safe society', and it presents a development plan focused on pharmaceuticals, health, biomedicine, IT, and digitalisation. On a general level, it aims to meet long-term infrastructure goals and create conditions for the university's further development.

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

Dear students,

I would like to thank every one of you for all the work and effort you put into Masaryk University in the 2019/20 academic year, and for how, with your help, we were able to overcome the unprecedented coronavirus crisis.

Institutions are made up of people, their know-how, their creativity, the relationships and cooperation between them, and their willingness to live up to a shared vision. It is my great wish for the upcoming academic year that we at Masaryk University will work together to move MU forward and improve it.

I wish you all a pleasant summer holiday and well-deserved rest with your family and friends. I look forward to working with you again in September.

With appreciation and wishes for a wonderful summer,

Martin Bareš, rector

Brno, 9 July 2020