

Speech of Rear Admiral (LH) Prof. Dr. Vergil CHITAC
on the occasion of receiving the title of “Honorary Professor”
from the “Nikola Vaptsarov” Naval Academy
- Varna, 9 January 2015 –

Dear admirals, generals, officers, professors and students,

I am extremely honoured by this occasion of being appointed as a Honorary Professor of the most distinguished “Nikola Vaptsarov” Naval Academy. The initiative of your commandant and rector, Captain Prof. Dr. Boyan Mednikarov and his staff to nominate me during the events of your 134th anniversary made me not only proud, but especially very grateful to him and his staff.

With respect to the theme of my speech, as the ties linked between our academies are constantly growing, I was compelled by the need of assembling a brief summary of the mutual cooperation between us. That is why, with your permission, I will refer to the *“Cooperation between the “Mircea cel Batran” Naval Academy and the “Nikola Vaptsarov” Naval Academy - Common Projects for the Development of Maritime Education, Training and Research”*.

The “Nikola Vaptsarov” Naval Academy and the “Mircea cel Batran” Naval Academy are two institutions with long traditions regarding the education and training of countless generations of Romanian and Bulgarian seafarers. Both academies were born out of the defence necessities of two modern states that were pursuing their historical way towards independent development. In 1872 and 1881, the maritime and river education and training started in Romania, respectively Bulgaria, countries that shared for centuries economic, social and – most importantly - cultural values. So even from the beginning, the mariners’ schools of Bulgaria and Romania were meant to raise together and to develop in close connection.

Coming close to the present history again, both the Bulgarian and Romanian Naval Academies transformed themselves fundamentally 25 years ago once the democracy was re-established in our countries. They became in the last ten years providers of naval and merchant maritime officers for the new greater families we joined – NATO and the European Union. This fact imposed both of us to change the course of our development, from a national-oriented and quite isolated one, to a new increase of the MET quality to be achieved through cooperation and common development strategies based on common economic and defence interests, which are being shared now by Bulgaria and Romania.

This new approach of our academies directed towards internationalization has made his way eventually in 2009, when the first discussions regarding the formal cooperation took place in Constanta. Consequently, a Technical Agreement was signed in 2010 by the commandants of the two academies, which establishes the objectives and principles of cooperation in the field of MET and scientific research. I and Captain Professor Dr. Boyan Mednikarov had the privilege to contribute to this Technical Agreement and now, since we

have been credited with the command and control of our institutions, we can notice with great satisfaction the fruits of the seeds we both planted 5 years ago.

First of all, we started to cooperate by the means of the Erasmus programme. The grants offered by the European Commission allowed the teachers of our academies to exchange not only the knowledge taught in the classrooms, but also and more importantly to meet and discuss together, to share the common educational objectives and common difficulties, as well. The exchange of teachers carried out since 2011 increased the awareness of our common characteristics and helped us both to take the appropriate measures for a higher quality of our teaching programmes, for military cadets and civilian students alike.

Dear students,

Because you are the end users of all our efforts, during our common projects we didn't neglect the student exchanges. For the last 4 years now, during each summer, Bulgarian and Romanian cadets of the first year are invited in Constanta and Varna for a one-week seamanship training module. Just one month ago, I had the pleasure of seeing the sustainability of the student exchanges planned by the Bulgarian and Romanian academies' staff, during the more complex and very useful joint tactical exercise. This exercise organized by dedicated teachers from both schools and conducted with cadets of the fourth year proved to be a major means of developing the tactical knowledge and skills that started three years ago, during the common seamanship training. Due to the theoretical lectures and mostly to the modern simulators we have, the joint teams communicated very easily and acted like very strongly welded groups. They proved to be real partners, real *shipmates*, capable of working together with high efficiency for the common purpose. That is how your trust and belief in the own capacities grows, that is the only effective way you will interact as Navy officers of a great alliance such NATO or the EU's security and defence joint task groups.

Coming back to the student exchanges, I would also like to remind the participation of the Bulgarian cadets of the second year at the training cruises of our sail training ship "Mircea". I am still very grateful to Captain Mednikarov for allowing two of the "Nikola Vaptsarov" Naval Academy's cadets to sail for one month on board Mircea while she participated in the first big regatta held in the Black Sea for decades. As I was the senior officer on board during the regatta, I saw the professionalism of the Bulgarian cadets and their desire of discovering new facts and especially new friends. I only hope the adventures of the training on a sail ship will motivate other Bulgarian cadets to join us in the years to come.

In a nutshell, both the Romanian and Bulgarian parties recognized the advantages of the students' exchanges in terms of formation of future competences for a naval officer.

On the other hand, there was a sum of common research, development and innovation activities, undertaken together by our academies. Attendance to each other's scientific conferences, articles published in the scientific bulletins of the 2 academies and the applications to common research projects funded from national sources or from the Horizon 2020 programme are real examples of what the teachers, researchers and students of our naval academies are committed to do in the future. Concepts like *smart*

defence, connected forces or pooling and sharing are long understood and applied in our academies.

Nonetheless, we didn't forget the need for the development of new skills and competences of the merchant maritime officers. As Romania and Bulgaria provide together a significant part of the maritime manpower of Europe and the world, the "Nikola Vaptsarov" Naval Academy and the "Mircea cel Batran" Naval Academy are both focused on keeping up with the latest requirements of the international sea trade. The strategies of these two higher education institutions include the on-going need for small changes and adjustments that will empower our graduates with the necessary competences. The technological and managerial evolution of the shipping and crewing is a constant pressure on the study programmes we deliver. And it's quite interesting that we need to cope with this pressure at least 4 years before it actually happens. We need to design the present study programmes for the officers of the future so we are taking into account future trends and future characteristics of the maritime industry and defence we address to.

Dear friends,

To conclude, I can say that our main challenge is *to train students who will sail on ships that do not yet exist, using technologies that were not yet invented and solving problems we do not know yet.*

Obviously, internationalization and joint cooperation of the related academies is crucial for delivering high quality MET. As a concrete example I will mention now the joint educational project we both started last fall. Under the auspices of the new Erasmus+ programme, Key Action 2 – Strategic Partnerships, our academy was granted the lead of a partnership of European naval academies and universities. Within the consortium made together with your academy, the Polish Naval Academy and the "Piri Reis" University of Istanbul, we will try during the next 2 years to develop two *one-semester common modules* for the merchant maritime deck officers and engineers. During the project, the cooperation between the teachers and the assessment of the modules done through student exchanges will raise the cooperation among us to a higher level of compatibility. For the sake of the future civilian student exchanges we will intend to apply in each of these 4 schools these two common modules later on. Thus, the learning objectives will be done in the same period of time and the studies will have complete recognition in the home academy, making much feasible the share of the students for one semester. In addition, the post-Manila STCW Convention's requirements will be closely followed, so that the modules of this project will be also a modern tool for refreshing our internal study programmes.

As you can notice, I started to present you the past and the present of the cooperation between our academies, but now I am thinking of the future. Of course, we can ask ourselves "Quo vadis?" addressed to the maritime industry and defense of maritime communications.

We all know that about 90% of world trade is carried by sea. The volume of maritime trade is therefore expected to increase significantly, as the world economy and population continue to expand. Without a cost efficient maritime transport, the movement of raw materials and energy in bulk to wherever they are needed and the transport of

manufactured goods and products between the continents – which is a condition for growth and development – would simply not be possible.

Sustainable development as understood by the UN is made up of three components or ‘pillars’: *environmental*, *social* and *economic* which are all linked very closely. Between now and 2025, the shipping industry expects to invest *hundreds of billions* of dollars in delivering further environmental improvements. This is to comply with a range of new environmental standards recently adopted by IMO. That is why, the new technologies dedicated for the reduction of shipping sulphur and CO₂ emissions and environment protection will need to be first approached in the maritime education and training institutions. As I said previously, we all need to be prepared for the future changes of the industry if we want to continue to exist as viable and efficient maritime institutions.

In my opinion, another fundamental issue of education and training of our future officers is the study of maritime English. The use of English language is increasingly becoming a mandatory requirement for many categories of seafarers. In addition to the revised STCW Convention’s highlights on English language training, there are various other IMO requirements which stipulate the need for seafarers to communicate in a common language. Therefore, in practice most officers now require a strong ability to communicate in English.

Speaking of English language, we can also use it as the common basis for a more developed e-learning system, as dedicated portals of both our academies can be linked.

Dear hosts,

In conclusion, I would like you to agree with me that we need permanent innovation and cooperation. Our future depends, among other things, on our availability and capacity to work together. Our academies need to go further on spreading the light of knowledge for the benefit of our graduates, the future leaders of our societies!

VIVAT CRESCAT FLOREAT! “Nikola Vaptsarov” Naval Academy

Thanks for your attention!