

*Prof. Željko Tanjić, Ph.D.
Rector of the Catholic University of Croatia*

Welcome Address at the FUCE General Assembly

*Catholic University of Croatia, Aula Magna,
Wednesday, May 20, 2026, at 5:00 PM*

Your Eminence Cardinal Tolentino de Mendonça,
Your Eminence Cardinal Bozanić,
Your Excellency Archbishop and Grand Chancellor Mons. Kutleša,
Your Excellencies bishops,
Dear President of FUCE, Prof. Beccalli,
Esteemed Minister of Science, Education and Youth Prof. Fuchs,
Esteemed Minister of Culture and Media Mrs Obuljen Koržinek,
Your Excellencies Ambassadors,
Dear rectors, vice-rectors, deans, professors, and distinguished delegates
of the European Federation of Catholic Universities,
Esteemed representatives of scientific and cultural institutions, dear
professors, students, colleagues and guests, dear friends,

With great honour and sincere joy I welcome you to the Catholic University of Croatia which is hosting this year's General Assembly of the European Federation of Catholic Universities.

We are deeply privileged to see representatives from so many countries and academic communities from Austria, Belgium, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine, and of course Croatia, united by a shared commitment to Catholic higher education and to the future of Europe. I am particularly grateful that our colleagues and friends from Lebanon and Ukraine could be with us. They are always in our prayers and they have our sincere support in all they are doing during these difficult times of war, marked with so much devastation, which is especially visible in Ukraine.

Allow me first to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Presidency of FUCE and the President Prof. Elena Beccalli, Rector of the Catholic University of Sacred Heart for entrusting our University with the responsibility and

honour of hosting this important General Assembly in the first year of their presidency of our Federation. Congratulations, dear Elena and Board members, on your mandate and thank you for your commitment and efforts for the good of all of us.

For our academic community, this is truly an exceptional and historic day. Our University is young, dynamic, and growing – this year, we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of its founding. During these years, we have undertaken an ambitious process of development and renewal. We have renovated and expanded our campus, launched new study programmes, established numerous international partnerships and strengthened our international orientation. Every year we welcome a growing number of international students, while simultaneously increasing our participation in international projects and becoming part of important academic networks across Europe and beyond.

But our path has not been easy. As a young university, we have faced many challenges in our growth and development since we live in a country that carries the burdens of a difficult history – decades of communism, the devastation suffered in the Homeland War in the 1990s, long-standing social and economic struggles. At the same time, Croatia has accomplished many things in many fields, which also enabled us an unhindered development. Croatia went through democratic transition, it is the youngest member of the European Union, as well as a member of NATO, Schengen, and the Eurozone. Precisely because of all this, society and the Church rightfully have great expectations of institutions such as ours. We must be a symbol of hope – a place where young people can discover not only knowledge and professional skills, but also meaning, responsibility, solidarity, and confidence in the future, serving common good.

Precisely because of that, the mission of Catholic universities in Europe becomes even more important. The theme of this General Assembly - *“Inspiring Catholic Universities in Challenging Times”* - therefore could not be timelier.

Within this vision, small and developing universities, such as ours, also have a very important place. Their strength often lies in their closeness to students, their openness to innovation, and their strong connection with local communities and social realities. Through networks such as FUCE,

smaller universities are able not only to strengthen their international presence, but also to contribute with their flexibility, personal approach, and clear sense of mission to the future of European higher education. In a time when many institutions seek only competitiveness, Catholic universities must continue to offer meaning. We have an important role to play in this process – not only as participants, but as institutions capable of giving these policies a deeper human and ethical dimension rooted in the Catholic intellectual and educational tradition.

Your presence here today is therefore much more than a formal gathering. It is a visible sign that Catholic universities across Europe and beyond remain connected by a shared vision and a shared responsibility for future generations. We believe that encounters such as this create not only institutional partnerships, but also lasting friendships and renewed inspiration.

May FUCE continue to grow as a strong voice of cooperation, wisdom, and renewal for Catholic universities throughout Europe and the world. And may our common work continue to inspire young generations to build a more humane, just, and hopeful future. Finally, I would like to thank all my associates for organising the General Assembly, especially Vice-Rector Prof. Jasna Ćurković Nimac and her team.

I wish all of us a fruitful and successful General Assembly. Once again, thank you, and welcome.