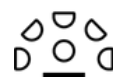


RECTOR TRNAVA WELCOME 2026



European
Character
and Virtue
Association



Trnava

24-26

JUNE



Distinguished guests, Dear colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and an honour to welcome you to Trnava University and to the historic city of Trnava for the ECVA Conference 2026.

As Trnava University approaches four centuries of academic tradition, it is particularly meaningful to host a conference dedicated to one of the most enduring questions of education: how we form not only knowledgeable minds, but also good and responsible persons.

Trnava, often called the “Little Rome” or the “Slovak Rome,” has long been a meeting place of learning, culture, and public life. The first university on the territory of present-day Slovakia was founded here in 1635, and the pursuit of knowledge has remained central to the city’s identity ever since. We are therefore especially pleased that a conference on character education takes place in a city whose history reminds us that learning and human formation belong together.

We meet at a time of extraordinary technological change. Artificial intelligence, digital transformation, and rapid innovation offer remarkable opportunities, but they also raise important questions. Technology can expand our knowledge, but it cannot provide wisdom.

Artificial intelligence can process information, but it cannot replace human judgement, responsibility, conscience, or virtue. The more powerful our technologies become, the more important it is to ask what kind of people we are becoming and what values guide our decisions.

For this reason, I am grateful that scholars, educators, school leaders, policymakers, and practitioners from many countries have gathered here to reflect on one of the most important questions facing education today: not only what our students know, but who they become.

The European university tradition has always understood education as more than the transmission of knowledge. It is also the formation of character. Knowledge without wisdom can become dangerous, power without responsibility can become destructive, and freedom without virtue can lose its direction. Character education is therefore not an addition to education; it is one of its oldest and most fundamental purposes.

This conviction is especially relevant today. Growing social fragmentation, declining trust, increasing polarisation, concerns about mental wellbeing, and new ethical challenges remind us that education must prepare young people not only for employment, but also for citizenship, leadership, service, and meaningful participation in society.

One of the strengths of this conference is its strong foundation in research. The findings of the TEPACE project and related initiatives, involving more than twelve thousand teachers and parents across Europe, demonstrate that character education is widely regarded as an essential component of high-quality education. This provides an important basis for both educational practice and public policy.

I would also like to acknowledge the significance of the Trnava Declaration on Character Education. While it will be formally discussed and signed at the conclusion of the conference, it already reflects a shared commitment to strengthening character education in schools, teacher preparation, educational leadership, and educational policy across Europe. I hope it will become not merely a document, but a catalyst for future cooperation and meaningful action.

At the heart of this endeavour lies a simple belief: every human person possesses dignity and potential. Education serves that dignity when it helps individuals develop intellectual excellence, moral integrity, civic responsibility, resilience, empathy, and practical wisdom. In doing so, it contributes not only to personal flourishing, but also to stronger communities and healthier democratic societies.

As Rector of Trnava University, I am proud that our institution can host this important gathering. At a time when educational success is often measured by rankings and performance indicators, this conference reminds us of a deeper truth: education is ultimately about forming human beings capable of living well, acting justly, and serving others.

I hope that the coming days will be intellectually stimulating, professionally enriching, and personally inspiring. May new friendships be formed, new collaborations emerge, and new ideas take shape.

For the future of Europe will depend not only on what its citizens know, but also on the character with which they use that knowledge.

Thank you for being here and for your commitment to education. I wish you a successful conference and a pleasant stay in Trnava. Welcome to Trnava University.

Prof. Miloš Lichner SJ
Rector



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