

## University Senate President's Reflection, September 2021 Meeting

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This month marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sept 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 attacks, *when almost 3,000 people died; a day that will live in infamy. The same as the day of the attack on Pearl Harbor, of which probably none of us can remember for the simple reason that we were not born yet. But more people died on 9/11/2001 than on 12/07/1941.*

This year on Sept 12<sup>th</sup>, a good friend of mine, born and raised in this country, and current member of the University Senate sent me an email about the anniversary of 9/11. The email says:

'We rarely get a chance to see another country's editorial about the USA. I read this excerpt from a Romanian newspaper (*thank you, my friend, you read more Romanian articles than I do and it's my country of origin – kudos!*). The article was written by Mr. Cornel Nistorescu and published under the title 'Cintarea Americii' (meaning 'An Ode To America') in the Romanian newspaper Evenimentul zilei ('News of the Day')." Excuse the approximate translation of these excerpts:

#### *An Ode to America*

'Why are Americans so united? They would not resemble one another even if you painted them all in one color! They speak all the languages of the world and form an astonishing mix of ethnicities, civilizations and religious beliefs.

On 9/11, the American tragedy turned three hundred million people into a hand put on the heart. Nobody rushed to accuse the White House, the military, or the intelligence services that they were incompetent. Nobody rushed to empty their bank accounts. Nobody rushed out into the streets to demonstrate against the government.

Instead, the Americans volunteered to donate blood and to give a helping hand. After the first moments of panic, they raised their flag over the smoking ruins, putting on T-shirts, caps and ties in the colors of their national flag. They placed flags on buildings and cars, as if in every place and on every car a government official or the President was present. On every possible occasion, they sang: 'God Bless America!'

*(He continues)* 'I watched the live broadcast, rerun after rerun for hours, listening about the story of the individual who went down the stairs one hundred floors, rolling a woman in her

wheelchair without even knowing who she was, or the story of the Californian hockey player who gave his life fighting with the terrorists and thus prevented the plane from hitting a target that could have killed other hundreds or thousands of people.

How on earth were they able to respond so united, as one human being? Imperceptibly, with every word and musical note, the memory of some turned into a modern myth of tragic heroes. And with every phone call, millions and millions of dollars were put into collections aimed at rewarding not a person or a family, but a spirit, which no money can buy. What on earth unites the Americans in such a way? Their land? Their history? Their economic power? Money? I tried for hours to find an answer, humming songs and murmuring phrases, with the risk of sounding commonplace; I thought things over, and I reached but only one conclusion - only freedom can work such miracles.' (Cornel Nistorescu)

The reason I am telling you this story and quoting from this (perhaps obscure) article is to remind ourselves with humility that we live in an extraordinary country, in which freedom is such a fundamental right. I know that unity of a nation looks much better from the distance, and as someone who lived on both sides of the Atlantic, I can say that things are much more nuanced and more granular from close-up. But democracy is likely the best vehicle for the expression of different views, *which at close up could look more like dissent or counter-point, and from a larger distance more like protest or demonstration of imperative need for change than plurality of opinions* (which in fact makes us so much stronger). I also lived it in a post-communist society, in which we went from a dictatorial regime with no freedom of speech whatsoever to an exacerbated freedom of speech that quickly became a cacophony of voices without any auditory receptacle, no order, and no feedback mechanisms.

We have probably all heard about the recent protests of the students in the law school, demonstrations that were happening during the proceedings of the first Faculty Council meeting last week, and we heard great anguish, anger and distress from students, faculty and staff. The Faculty Council members during last week's meeting expressed their full support for any distress faculty, staff or students in the law school may have experienced, and I would like also to echo the sentiment from the Senate side.

The truth of the matter is that in this country, during difficult times the unity shows, as we have all seen on 09/11/2001, and it may be unparalleled vs other countries.

During the past year, we lived through a pandemic that challenged our lives so much! I believe that harnessing the power of freedom, building resilience, working together and united, paying great attention to our wellbeing and wellness (the Senate's theme for this year!), and avoiding at all cost personal and professional burnout should be amongst the most important mechanisms to develop, refine and apply relentlessly. Let this academic year be under the auspices of communicating better with each other, building together the mechanisms that will allow us not only to survive, but to stay healthy and to overcome all challenges, being stronger, becoming better at what we do collaboratively every day (remember the Olympic motto "*Citius, Altius, Fortius*"?) and more resilient. United.

Thank you.