

Cristina- Andreea Vasile, University of Bucharest

### **Young Interpreters Award 2019**

#### **“The Future Belongs to Those who Prepare for it Today” (Malcolm X)**

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I started writing this speech, I had to put my imagination to work. I put my headphones on, turned on my favorite song, closed my eyes and tried to stay focused. Straight away I entered a world of my own. A world which seemed familiar and at the same time, a universe which had countless secrets ready to be discovered.

A large conference room. Long rows of chairs. On each chair, there are people dressed up formally. They all have their headphones on. The speaker is up front. He is preparing to deliver his speech. On either side of the room- the booths. In each booth there are two people- also with their headphones on. These are the *interpreters*. I see myself in one of the booths. My mike is still off. The last two years flash before my eyes. I feel a little nervous, but very elated. The speaker turns his mike on. It looks as if an important obstacle race is about to begin. Or at least this is how it feels to me. Ready, steady, go: “Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen! Today I would like to talk about...”

This is the moment I have diligently prepared for during the last two years. Our timeline as human beings includes the same pattern: past, present and future. When I was little, my mum always used to ask me what I wanted to become when I grew up. I don't know about other countries, but here, in Romania, when your parents ask you this question as a child, most of them expect to hear the same answer: “I want to become a doctor.” Well, back then, my plans were slightly different. I did not want to be a doctor. I wanted to be a princess. I used to practice the royal posture, I tried on my mum's dresses and high heels and I even had a sparkly crown. Apparently, my childhood dream is about to come true. I will be a princess- a peculiar one, but still a princess from my point of view. Instead of my own castle, I'll have my booth; instead of a dress, I'll have a business suit; and instead of the sparkly crown, I'll have my headphones. But what really matters is that I will have the same mission as all the princesses in the Disney movies that I used to admire so much had: to reach people's hearts through my words.

This is absolutely paramount in conference interpreting. The MA program has been teaching me important lessons since day one. This is where I have learnt that as a future interpreter, one does not prepare for a simple profession. To me, conference interpreting is a calling which requires solid knowledge on a range of topics (actually, sometimes it gives me the impression that the interpreter resembles a walking encyclopedia). But this vast body of knowledge is the

result of long years of preparation and hard work- one doesn't gain knowledge by simply waving a magic wand (as it always happened to my favorite princesses). This noble profession does not only prepare one to become an expert in languages and communication or a machine which automatically conveys messages, as some think. It prepares us, future interpreters, for life, to be able to face the unpredictable, especially in our globalized world which is continually changing. It is here where we get the chance to turn the words we use today into tomorrow's echo.

When I first started to study interpretation, my main purpose was to be well prepared so as to pass my exams. I used to practice and practice and then practice even more, because I never felt fully prepared (I still do this, because I believe it is the key towards gaining experience and then making your words count). Yet now I have learnt an essential lesson: namely, it is never enough to memorize new words and idioms or to improve your interpreting skills. It's true that such thorough day- by- day preparation can ensure you pass the final interpreting exams. Although this is no guarantee towards a successful career. Interpreting also entails passing the hardest exam: the exam in humaneness. Unfortunately, there is no book to help us prepare for this exam. We must learn by ourselves how to empathize and how to create a strong bond with the people around. Sometimes we tend to think that we excel in communicating with people, but experience teaches us the opposite.

Interpreting is like climbing a mountain. I have chosen this comparison because it is very suitable in this context. At the foot of the mountain, reaching the top seems a piece of cake. But once we start the journey, we become aware of the obstacles that we have to overcome. A stone we stumble upon is a slip of the tongue. A rock is a sentence left unfinished. And an avalanche is the unpredictable. Just as the moment when you receive a speech in the booth before a simultaneous interpretation and you feel relieved; and then the speaker deviates from the topic and starts talking about a completely different issue. In order to become a professional mountain climber, one has to train hard and be ready to take risks. Same thing goes for conference interpreting. If we practice every day, if we devote our lives to this journey, if we understand that our words belong to the community and can change destinies and perspectives, then our long ride preparation as future interpreters will have paid off. The path towards the top is a bumpy one. Yet once we're there, the view is absolutely mesmerizing.

Malcolm X said: "*The future belongs to those who prepare for it today*". When I read this quote, I can think of several remarkable people who have significantly contributed to our future as a community. These are the EU founding fathers. They all came from different backgrounds, but they had in common the same ideal: to create an environment where people could live in peace, where they could feel protected and safe. These pioneers were very well prepared in their own fields. Not only did they have solid knowledge and years of preparation behind, they also had the gloomy experience of war, conflicts between nations and suffering. This is the reason why they decided to take risks, to work together and use their experience as a cornerstone of a brighter future. Hence, due to their courage and dedication, the foundation of the European Union became a tangible thing. At first there were only six grains of sand: Germany, France,

Italy, Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands. In time, other grains of sand have joined the community. And this is how a dream, some brave people who were prepared to work hard, fight and leave the murky past behind and a perspective on a brighter life have all contributed to our future as a strong, united community. This is how the grains of sand have turned into a mountain. It is due to people like them, who were prepared to take action that we live in peace today. It is due to inspirational people such as Malcolm X, who had the courage to speak up for his community and offer them hope, that African- Americans stepped up for their rights.

As a future interpreter, I intend to follow the example of all the memorable people I have mentioned above. To me, this determination to bring their own contribution to the world- or their own grain of sand to the mountain, if we want to stick to my metaphor- turns them into heroes worth looking up to. Even if I am only at the beginning, I am aware that a long journey is lying ahead of me. And when I say this, I am not simply referring to the vast amount of knowledge or to the experience that I have yet to gain. I know this continuous fight for perfection will keep following me throughout my life, especially when I think of a better word or a better solution in the booth. But interpreting is more than striving for perfection. It is about becoming an inspiration to the others, about learning that our words are important. I want to be prepared to fight by using the most powerful weapon mankind has: communication. My voice will become a remedy for the souls which need comforting; my voice will shatter conflicts between nations and will help reconnect bonds between them. I am a simple grain of sand right now. But with rigorous preparation, with the help of my fellow booth colleagues and my professors, I know I will be able to bring my contribution both to my own future and to the European Community's future. Through hard work and the strong desire to make a change, the path to the top of the mountain will seem less bumpy. This is Mount Interpreter! And one day I hope I will reach the top. Thank you!