**Address at the formal award ceremony for the Prešeren Prize of the University of Ljubljana for students – 2016, 7 December 2016**

**Prof. dr. Tatjana Avšič Županc**

Dear Mr. Rector, dear prize winners, dear colleagues, and dear guests!

I hereby thank the Prešeren Prize Committee of the University of Ljubljana for bestowing me the honour of addressing this year's winners. Because so far I have received a few awards for my research and professional work, I completely understand the feelings you might be feeling today.

University of Ljubljana has been awarding the Prešeren Prize to its students for more than six decades. It is the highest recognition of research and artistic work that exceeds the boundaries of ordinary undergraduate study curriculum. Today we celebrate and award academic excellence for the best student achievements at the University in the past year. Dear prize winners, your achievements are proof that during your studies at various faculties you were able to develop intellectual curiosity and independent thinking, critical assessment and evaluation skills. With your research projects, diploma or master's thesis, artistic works you have demonstrated and proven that you were able and willing to achieve something more during your studies. You were ready to exceed mandatory study obligations and thus proved to yourselves and others that you are brave, hard-working and that you desire to attain more knowledge than your studies require, and that you can do more and give more.

Particularly, the knowledge is that one important element and foundation of any progress. Unfortunately, the recent crisis, from financial, economical, moral and political, shaped an environment that encourages short-term goals such as a goal to be and have more with minimum effort. Such an atmosphere and conditions are not in favour of quality and research-oriented knowledge since knowledge development is a long-term process which does not lead to material results that are instantly visible. Therefore, your achievements, time and effort you have put into your knowledge are so much more encouraging for all of us. With this, you have shown that it is possible to stand out in the crowd and achieve higher goals, better results and new knowledge that lead to progress. I hope and wish that this prize for the work you performed will help at least a bit towards building your confidence and to become a prospect for your future professional development.

If I combine knowledge and your education at the University up-to-date, I cannot go past my conviction that at the University we provide knowledge that is useful but it is not definite. Different times, conditions and spaces call for the ability to apply this knowledge, complement it and build upon it as well as to be able to tackle the different, new and the unknown. You, who are sitting in the front row today, are some of those students, who were eager to meet the new and unknown riddles and questions, because during your studies you were able to broaden and build upon the knowledge you gained at the university. We could say that you have reached the highest peak of professional skill development we are able to provide to the students of the University of Ljubljana if they want it and are ready for it.

The majority of you has probably completed the undergraduate studies and is continuing to acquire new skills and experiences as doctoral students. You are facing new challenges, new questions and riddles as well making different decisions and probably taking the first real responsibilities. The latter, taking the responsibility, is something I find is often absent from the majority of new generations of doctoral students. This is probably due to generational differences, the time which we live in, parenting and general global trends. But should you follow the path into the research or academic world, sooner or later you will encounter situations that will require important opinion, proposal for a solution of a problem and maybe even a decision. What I would like to emphasize is the fact that we can learn how to face such situations and even master them once we gain enough experience, but this is only possible if we are willing to face them. In other words, this is something that awaits you in the future and because you have already proven that you are able to exceed the average I would like to advise you not to avoid responsibilities, but to accept them and face them because this is the only way you will be able to evolve into a mature, responsible and above all credible individual.

Should you embark on the path of research, the credibility – to be “the one we can trust” – is very important for your progress and success. To become and remain a trustworthy person in the area of your expertise is a long process, is a value which is difficult to achieve in today’s social and cultural environment. I would like to particularly point out the fact that you should establish a certain amount of criticism towards yourselves and your work as well as towards others and the environment in which we work and live. For the young persons of today this might be a goal, which is hard to achieve since we live in the world of rapidly advancing information technology industry, numerous social networks and media of doubtful quality. All those factors drive us down the fast lane of speedy reactions and decisions which can sometimes have a negative impact on ourselves as well as on our work. Therefore I wish for you to posses just the right amount of criticism and respect because this is one of the essential foundations for your successful work in the future.

Dear winners, should you continue on your research path let your current knowledge and experiences lead you, however, remain open to new knowledge and skills. Take advantage of your curiosity, search for the unknown and be persistent, consistent and critical. Set clear and above all realistic objectives and only by believing in them you will be able to reach them. Simple means to achieve the objectives are rare, usually the path to success is filled with obstacles and great efforts. You have already shown that you find those paths challenging and that you are also able and willing to embark on them in the future. Therefore, take advantage of your abilities and I wish you all the wisdom and luck.

Dear winners, my sincerest congratulations to you at this celebration of your award, which might be the first important award you have ever received and I firmly believe it will not be the last.

*The spoken word shall prevail.*