

Andrei Dinu-Ionita
Romanian Club President

Welcome to Columbia University and welcome to our 5th annual Romanian Conference. I am really happy to see all of you here. Organizing this year's Conference has been a great pleasure for us and we are all very excited about bringing all of this together.

Lately, our Romanian Club has experienced a period of blooming that is entirely due to our incredibly dedicated club members. I'd actually like to take a moment to introduce them to you. Andra Mihali, the club's Event Coordinator, who has been taking care of all the details of the Conference and the smooth running of the event. Monica Nania, the club's Treasurer, who made sure that we have funds this year and manages our budget. Angela Radulescu, the club's Executive VP who helped me organize all of this and with whom I handle practically everything in terms of planning and event management. Myself, Andrei Dinu-Ionita, the Club's President. And finally and most importantly, Daita Ciobanu, who is the oldest member of our club, has maintained the Club's legacy in the past years and has carried the weight of the Club on her shoulders more than any of us.

I'd also like to acknowledge a previous board member, Tony Romani, who helped us with planning for the Conference this year and has contributed with many ingenious ideas in the past. Finally, I'd like to thank the Romanian Consulate and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Consul General Mr. Pietro Pavoni and Deputy Consul Andreea Berechet for their generous support in sponsoring this year's Conference.

Whenever we think about Romania, some of us think about either the Romanian Communist era and the ravages it did to our country, the tragic history and numerous misfortunes and bad decisions that led to poverty and corruption or the emigration of its people abroad because of better conditions, if we're in a particularly pessimist mood; or, some think about the traditional values, the ancient legacy of the past, the colorful

traditional garments and the cheerfulness of the Romanian dances and habits, if we're in a more optimistic mood.

However, we often forget about the recent improvements in Romanian society and the amazing rate at which our country is building itself a quite glorious future and shaping up into an important player in world society. There has been a lot of talk in the past about taking the *first* steps towards improvement and making the *first* efforts to obtain a better position for our country. I think that time has *passed* and that Romania has reached the point when it is actually *taking* those steps as opposed to just talking about them. In recent years, Romania has become part of the European Union, has created great opportunity for foreign business investment and has begun significant international collaboration to restructure the economic, public and governmental systems. With each year, Romania's growth as a nation increases. I think that we should start thinking about the future and stop looking at the past. Get encouragement from the pre-war period, and the Little Paris, but remember that the future is *in* our hands and is being built now, *by* our hand.

As the country's development becomes more and more apparent, I think it is important to acknowledge that many of Romania's brightest minds are studying at the best universities in the world, and that much of Romania's most capable people are abroad. I remember reading the other day, at the Consulate's headquarters here in New York, a message from President Traian Basescu, who was saying that almost a third of the country's population, almost 8 million people, almost the size of this great city we are in right now, live or are active abroad. I think that the Romanian diaspora is contributing enormously to improving the Romanian image abroad and I believe that as time flows by, Romania's future and position in the world will be greatly affected by the efforts and attitudes of Romanians abroad.

It may be a gross overstatement and it may be far too early to tell, but I believe that Romania is currently on its way towards becoming a world leader and an important player in international relations. I think in the many years to follow, its position will

improve substantially and become crucial in the constant movement of nations, because of the hands of Romanian leaders and community builders.

Recent years have brought great progress and flourishing in the arts, with an internationally acclaimed Romanian cinema movement that is often described as a new wave and characterized by a minimalistic style. Sibiu has just finished its period as the European Cultural Capital. George Enescu's genius works still attract great public attention in various places around the world, and some of the best performers of this age are interpreting his work. Also, Romanian markets are becoming highly enticing for business developers and multinational investors such as McKinsey, who will be telling us all about the Romanian financial market. Romania's position is coming together and a stable platform for improvement is already on its way.

I am very happy to be able, as the President of the Romanian Club at this university, to bring you all together here and present to you our amazing speakers and their work. It is really a great accomplishment for me as an individual to see the product of this club's labor, and present Romania's image by looking at the future and its prospects. We each have different opinions about which direction Romanian efforts should go, and I hope this event provides a small forum for discussion of those issues and some inspiration for your endeavors.

Without any further ado, I'd like to open the 5th annual Romanian Conference at Columbia University and invite our first speaker to give us her presentation.