Opening speech at the 2nd edition of STRESS CONGRESS, "Stress and Longevity", Palace of Parliament, 31 October 2019

Distinguished audience,

When Madam Professor Luiza Spiru invited me to give the opening speech of the Congress "Stress and Longevity", I do not think she had in mind the fact that, having turned 80, I am entering the ranks of the longevivors in good standing, nor how much stress I was subjected to as President of Romania between 1996 and 2000. Rather, I think she was thinking of a dialogue between researchers in sciences which, although they seem very independent, have many things in common. And perhaps who better to talk about longevity and stress than a professor of geology? Because if we talk about longevity by evoking age, we need a referential, and that referential can only be the age of the Earth. Of the more than four billion years that make up the age of the Earth, if we choose the periods that designate the types of life, we see that the Palaeozoic lasted around 300 million years, the Mesozoic around 200 million years and the Neozoic around 65 million years. They were followed by the Quaternary, the period in which man appeared, more than 1 million years ago, into which the prehistory of hundreds of thousands of years falls: the Palaeolithic, the Mesolithic, the Neolithic and ends with what we consider to be the history of civilisation over the last tens of thousands of years. I have chosen round ages to distance myself from the hubris of some geological researchers who claim accuracy to the tens of millions or millions of years.

If we want to talk about stress, we must remember that around 1955, when stress first began to be mentioned in medicine, this term was borrowed from geology, where stress had earlier been designated to indicate lateral pressures in orogeny, and was in turn taken from mechanics theory. Stress in geology is not a negative phenomenon. It has shaped the Earth's current topography and the major Alpine-Carpathian-Himalayan orogenic chain that starts in the Atlantic Ocean and ends in the Pacific Ocean was formed by stress.

Dear colleagues, I have no doubt that we all want to be as long-lived as possible, to have a beautiful and fulfilling life and to cheat death, the only certainty of the human condition. It is the aspiration we find in the fairy tale that marked our childhood, *"Youth without Old Age and Life without Death".* As another reason for being invited to a congress of scientific researchers may be my current position as President of the Institute of Advanced Studies for the Culture and Civilization of the Levant, I would like to remind you of the work of a world-renowned Romanian Orientalist scholar - Mircea Eliade, the novel *“Youth without Youth”.*

The fantastic novella "Youth without Youth", a replica of the Eminescian fairy tale I mentioned at the beginning, was directed by the American director Francis Ford Coppola, not by chance in Romania - the first frames of the film being shot at the Ana Aslan Geriatric Institute.

*Youth Without Youth* is the story of an old professor from the between-war period who decides to put an end to his life, a life that he considers monotonous and wasted, because his dream of becoming a famous orientalist, his intellectual and erotic aspirations of his youth had never been fulfilled. He is saved at the last moment by a lightning strike, at which point the old man suddenly rejuvenates, becomes immune to all signs of ageing, and his intellectual capacities increase to such an extent that he has access to the *ancestral collective memory.* He becomes a scholarly personality, hunted by the secret services, lives for several decades the life he wanted, celebrates his centenary in Nice in the company of a beautiful woman... We could say that he is given the life he dreamed of, only that his inability to share his identity and the story he was living leads him to return to the small provincial town he left before deciding to commit suicide. As in Eminescu's fairy tale, there follows the inherent energy transfer with the environment: back in his native place, he grows old again, loses all his intellectual qualities, and the only details he remembers from the last part of his rich and exciting life are not his personal achievements, but the events of World War II, the Hiroshima bombs and, later, man's first step on the Moon...

Beyond all its metaphysical implications, this novella is an illustration of what medical experts like you advise us to do to manage stress: concurrently setting realistic goals and objectives such as: *what do I want out of life?* We need to set personal priorities and boundaries - the awareness that we are a tiny dot in an infinitely rich universe, that the world does not begin and end with our dreams and aspirations, which helps us not only to manage stress but also to find our place and our contribution in the world we live in.

I would like to conclude by reminding you that thanks to advances in medicine in recent decades, people are living longer. And if surgeons and internal medicine specialists give us "extra life", gerontologists and stress researchers help us to live more dignified and beautiful lives. It's why we should be grateful to them.