In opening the 413th academic year of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, I have, first of all, the honour to read a message sent by the President of the Italian Republic, Prof. Sergio Mattarella, to whom I am indeed grateful for his generous words.

I turn now, for the first time in my new position as President of the Accademia, to the Academy’s members whom I thank for placing their trust in me, being well aware – as I stated at the moment of my election – of both the honours and duties, as well as of the satisfactions and of the institutional – and personal – burdens implied in my appointment.

I trust in the support of so many fellows with whom I have worked for years and whom I wish to thank all together, starting from the members of our excellent Executive Board.

I also give my warm welcome to the winners of the Feltrinelli prize, whom we shall shortly announce, and to the public, in which I can spot quite a few friends.

I deliver my speech knowing that the audience will listen with benevolence, although I am also a little intimidated by the watchful – yet not threatening – gaze of Federico Cesi and Galileo Galilei, whose portraits are just behind me. However, I’m glad to be under their eyes, as our concern about the present and the future must not make us forget our authoritative and breathing past.

1. I first turn to our new Italian and foreign fellows

Our new fellows join the Lincei not only because of the scientific researches that have made them prominent, but also thank to their dedication to science and knowledge. That is, because of their devotion to an aspect of learning that goes beyond the individual skills and the achievements of a single discipline. This is the purpose of the co-optations, which have to pass through no less than three stages of judgment: that of the Category (i.e. that of the discipline); that of the class assembly (be it the class of Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Natural Science or that of Moral, Historical and Philological Sciences) in which substantiated appraisals on the candidates proposed by the Categories can be mooted; finally, that of all Members of the Class, who vote at home by secret ballot.
This sequence of steps is essential because the Lincei are a Community of scientific wisdom with cultural beliefs that are deeply rooted in history; today these values provide guiding principles for the progress of civilization, the common good and human development. Such a scientific wisdom is often, but not always, reached with age; indeed age should not be looked upon as a discriminating feature to be an effective “Linceo”, even if the commitment to give our institution continuity does require an adequate intergenerational presence. Finally, science and culture should not have national borders and that is why we have to give adequate importance to our foreign fellows, although it appears natural that each member might consider a country in particular (in our case, Italy as part of Europe) as the prevailing recipient of their work.

The guidelines of our Accademia (science and culture, community and wisdom, past and present, identity and universality) characterize the Lincei from the Academy’s foundation; they are reasserted in its re-foundation, are found again in today’s statute.

2. Let’s start from the present

The Academy’s current mission is effectively and clearly defined by our statute to which I refer the new Fellows, and in particular to Article 1 which states:

“1. The Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, an institution of higher learning based in Rome, pursuant to art. 33 of the Constitution, has its own jurisdiction and carries out institutional duties in compliance with and within the limits of the State laws.
2. The Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei is formed by its Fellows and such a associational composition characterizes its structure and activity.
3. The Accademia aims at promoting, coordinating, integrating and spreading scientific knowledge at its highest level in the framework of the unity and universality of culture”.

This is why the Accademia dei Lincei is categorised among the “Institutions of High relevance” of the Italian Republic; this is why since July 1992 it acts as scientific and cultural advisor of the President of the Republic who, on his own initiative (motu proprio), has granted the Academy his High permanent Patronage since 2006. This is why the Lincei can provide public authorities (both on demand and on their own initiative) with opinions in the field of their competence. Therefore, universality and Italian character, freedom and institutional spirit meet each other in the Accademia. This is also our history and our present role, on which we shall now focus.

3. Our history

The Lincei have experienced a foundation and two re-foundations: the original late-Renaissance foundation, that of the Risorgimento, that of the Republic. We ought to never forget this.
In 1603, eighteen-year old Federico Cesi (a member of a very noble and powerful Umbro-Roman family) founded the Lincei, with both Italian and foreign fellows; later, in 1611, he co-opted Galileo Galilei whom Cesi eventually defended in the trials that made Galileo a victim of the non-scientific thought. With Federico Cesi’s death in 1630 the Lincei were extinguished institutionally but not ideally. In 1873 Quintino Sella re-founded the Lincei and with Terenzio Mamiani della Rovere (president of the Class of Moral Sciences) the Academy became the scientific cornerstone, with a strong European vocation, of the Italian Risorgimento and a hallmark of Rome as Italy’s capital. But it was also a symbol of the Italian identity, since both Sella and Mamiani were distinguished scholars and prominent statesmen themselves, engaged in the advancement of science and culture.

Benedetto Croce, Luigi Einaudi (the new deputy president) and Guido Castelnuovo (the new president) re-founded the Lincei once again between 1944 and 1946. In 1939, the fascist dictatorship had in fact suppressed the Accademia dei Lincei incorporating it in the acquiescent-to-the-regime Italian Academy, thus drifting afar from the spirit of our Sodality of which many members were in fact persecuted and forced into exile.

One day a friend of mine, and a man of the highest international scientific level, who had been persecuted and had to flee with his family as a Jew, said, after becoming a “Linceo”: “The Lincei have always behaved well in history”.

4. Our mission today

With the institution of the Republic, the Lincei have become the National Academy we know today, with the benefit of a special relationship with the Head of the State, as evidenced by President Sergio Mattarella’s message that I have just read out. Luigi Einaudi (a great statesman and a distinguished scholar), who was “our first” President of the Republic, never renounced to be a “Linceo” as he continued to regularly attend the Academy’s meetings. He then instituted the prize of the President of the Republic, of which we are proud.

We are grateful to all the Presidents of the Republic, with a particularly affectionate thought to Carlo Azeglio Ciampi and Giorgio Napolitano of whom I could personally appreciate not only their closeness to the Lincei but also their heartfelt partaking in our historical and institutional dimension and in our scientific-cultural philosophy.

In his six years of admirable chairmanship of the Lincei, Lamberto Maffei has received great support from President Napolitano in a project that finds its fundamental motivation in the agreement between the Ministry of Education and the Accademia dei Lincei in order to – I quote – “encourage the advance of the levels of knowledge of the scientific world in the educational system”. Created by the Lincei, the «Lincei Foundation for the School», is now born and chaired by Maffei, who will foster this extremely challenging project (to which several colleagues are presently committed with generosity and liberality) that lines up with the traditional missions of the Lincei in a forefront position.

As for me, I have three projects in mind or, I’d better say, objectives. Actually, they still have to be examined by the Executive Board (although they have shown keen interest when I touched upon the idea) and, if necessary, by the assembly of the Classes.
5. **Institutional life**

The first objective is to support the institutional life of the Lincei with a regular scientific activity made of reunions, meetings and conferences involving our fellows as well as chosen external scholars. Considering the annual and triennial Reports of past activities of the Class of Moral Sciences which I chaired for six years and of which I had been Secretary for another six, I wish to express my great admiration for all of our fellows who have achieved such outstanding results in terms of quality, intensity and complementarity.

This might hardly appear as an exceedingly visible activity in the clamour of today’s media, but it is indeed valuable and a well-organized one in its different branches: “segnature”, “approfondimenti”, “lectiones breves”.

Annual planning is essential to avoid the building up of a crammed agenda of initiatives, of which many (perhaps too many) are hosted; the President and the Executive Board, as well as our employees, would hardly manage to deal with so many events, despite their efforts coordinated by the sagacity of Chancellor General Director Ada Baccari. And our financial resources are also limited, albeit wisely supervised by the Academician Administrator Maurizio Brunori.

I do appreciate this eventful activity, while at the same time I can’t help recalling a sentence that Einaudi wrote in 1947, shortly before becoming President of the Republic, when he was 73, an age which today would mean being at least 10 years older:

> “the members [of the academies, ed.] are proud to be part of it; and I confess that no award gave me greater pleasure than to be co-opted, that is called to become part of their limited sodality, by men whom I worshiped and whom I suddenly became theoretically equal to. In those men whose life does not usually offer many chances to receive awards and gain wealth, you can forgive the innocent vanity of attaching importance to the affiliation – not by appointment from above, but by free choice of those who are already part of it – to an aristocracy of peers ... they [the academicians, ed.] often speak a language incomprehensible to most people; and at all times those statements are appreciated as they deserve just by the few who have preserved, as the years go by, that particular form of curiosity that is called “scientific”, which consists of the awareness ... of not knowing anything, or of the yearning to continue to learn”.

Those are the activities in which, in the course of time, have taken part also the 14 Italian Nobel Laureate fellows and many other members of the Accademia who have been awarded no less important, albeit not so well-known, recognitions.

This confirms the international scientific level of our fellows and our Academy.
6. Cultural diplomacy and scientific policy

The second objective concerns diplomacy and domestic and international cultural-scientific policy. In this regard, a clarifying statement appears appropriate. Scientific research is barely carried out at the Accademia due to a lack of means and structures. Indeed, the same applies to many other academies, far wealthier than us, although they pursue a more effective scientific and cultural policy not only by presenting, as we do, a selected gamut of results of the research that their members carry out in their own Universities, but especially because they intervene in matters of public and institutional importance, often at the behest of their own Governments.

Scientific and cultural diplomacy can also be pursued through contacts with international academic organizations and through bilateral agreements with single national academies of other countries. The Commissione Relazioni Internazionali (CORINT: Committee on International Relations) is, in this regard, working well and should be potentiated.

As for the relations with international organizations, fellows of the Accademia dei Lincei are Chairman of EMAN (Euro Mediterranean Academic Network) and of ALLEA (All European Academies) Working Group Science Education respectively, while other fellows are members of the governing bodies of ALLEA and IAP (InterAcademyPanel). Many more fellows of the Accademia belong to the scientific committees and working groups of international organizations such as the ALLEA Working Groups on E-Humanities and on Social Sciences and Humanities and are members of the Environment Steering Panel of EASAC (European Academies Science Advisory Council). As regards bilateral relations with other national academies, the organization of initiatives in cooperation and the exchange of study visits by scientists of the two countries involved are envisaged. The Lincei also benefit of partnership agreements with numerous foreign academic institutions, including Asian academies, like those of South Korea and Vietnam as well as the Japanese STS Forum, that have recently joined the group.

In 2017 we shall host the “G7 of science”, that is the annual meeting of the National Academies of Sciences of the G7 countries that is held prior to the political and institutional summit. This year the meeting was held in Berlin with the active participation of Chancellor Merkel at the closing session. Of this event I have informed both the President of the Republic and our Prime Minister with whom the collaboration of the Lincei will be of crucial importance for the 2017 G7.

In this regard we have been working for some time now on an initiative (which has already seen two meetings while another will take place in 2016 in connection with the 50th anniversary of the flood in Florence) concerning the Cities of art and their resilience to catastrophic events. This is an interdisciplinary subject between the two Classes on which we hope to have the cooperation of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and other institutions and agents.

Just yesterday came in the news that the InterAcademyPanel (an association of 107 scientific academies from around the world) has granted us a loan.
About 40 academies and foreign cultural institutions based in Rome have long been engaged in the appraisal of the City’s thousand-year-old heritage of history, culture, art, architecture and archaeology. With such institutions we ought to be more systematically in touch through the cooperation, if necessary, of our specialist Foundations, like for example, the Caetani Foundation.

Other Foundations embedded in the Accademia dei Lincei may offer a constructive contribution. In particular, the Donegani Foundation, with its specific prestige, would be ideal to collaborate with some of the most innovative Italian companies in the field of the preservation of the country’s artistic and architectural heritage.

No less important is the role of the Academy’s Committees and of the Interdisciplinary Centre Beniamino Segre.

Finally, after careful consideration, we might consider giving our patronage to some deserving Italian research institutes that would certainly be honoured to receive such a recognition.

7. Reward and promote excellence

The third objective aims at rewarding and encouraging excellence outside the Academy. This is a field where we must deeply question ourselves because, no matter how prestigious our awards are, both national and international public opinion still seems not to grasp their full relevance. In spite of this, the Prize of the President of the Republic and the Prize of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage confirm our high rank in the Institutions. The relevance of the Feltrinelli Prizes, which is also financially significant, as far as the profile of the winners is concerned, is comparable, in many cases, with that of the most important international awards.

We must attach increasing importance to our work aimed at promoting and encouraging younger researchers who have made important discoveries, as well as at rewarding eminent scholars whose work has set the pace in the history of science. We must be aware that since 1950 we have awarded 91 international prizes and 250 national prizes and 27 prizes for outstanding works of high moral and humanitarian significance.

In detail, 60 prizes were awarded to Italian nationals and 20 international prizes were awarded in the field of Moral and Historical Sciences; 76 national and 20 international awards were assigned to the category of Physical, Mathematical and Natural Sciences; 56 national and 15 international prizes were awarded in the field of Humanities; 61 national and 18 international awards were presented in the Artistic field; 57 national and 18 international awards were conferred in the field of Medicine.
The time has come to outline a history of such awards, from which we might clearly realize how much we have contributed, in the exercise of our scientific wisdom, to promote and reward science.

No less important would be the publication of the winners’ essays in a dedicated series of the Lincei, which should be given the widest international circulation. These are two further proposals which I hope to give shape to in the future.

8. In conclusion: a memory and a hope

Today we are assigning the Feltrinelli prizes for the class of Moral, Historical and Philological Sciences: four national awards and one international award. We shall also confer the prize for a work of high moral and humanitarian relevance. I will illustrate them in a moment, but let me now first express the warmest congratulations of all the Academy to the winners.

I shall conclude now with a memory that is also a wish for the Lincei. In the academic year 2014-2015 Giorgio Salvini (a great physicist) and Giovanni Conso (a great jurist) have left us; they both held important Institutional and public positions. Their work has bestowed prestige onto the Accademia dei Lincei where they were scrupulous witnesses and faithful heirs of the centuries-old tradition of our Sodality, which they have enriched with science and culture together with deep humanity. The memory of them today is also a hope for the future of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei.