



College of Europe
Collège d'Europe

Brugge



Natolin



Communications Office

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

H.R.H. Princess Mathilde addresses College of Europe students

Bruges, 2 February 2006

More than 250 students and staff of the College of Europe, Bruges campus, attended Princess Mathilde's presentation on Microfinance, while students on the College's campus in Natolin (Warsaw), Poland were linked via video-conference. The Rector of the College of Europe, Paul Demaret, welcomed Princess Mathilde, who is the most recent member of the Belgian Royal Family to come to the College.

Princess Mathilde took the opportunity to inform students from over 45 countries about her experiences as an Emissary of the International Year of Microcredit. The students were reminded of the obstacles that continue to remain for small entrepreneurs who are in a financially difficult situation as this often excludes them from the traditional banking system. In addition, Princess Mathilde pointed out that in developing countries financial services must be nearby, that the appropriate financial and legal framework is often still absent and access to new technologies is limited.

Princess Mathilde also mentioned several anecdotes from her travels in India, Mali and China, which helped put microfinance into context. She called for the promotion of inclusive financial instruments which would allow micro-entrepreneurs to function independently.

Looking back on the Year of Microcredit, Princess Mathilde remarked that it 'was one of the United Nations' most successful years' and pointed to the raising of awareness on a global scale that this year achieved. She called for microfinance to 'become a viable, sustainable business' rather than solely charity work. In closing, the fact that microfinance also exists throughout the whole of Europe was mentioned to demonstrate that microfinance can and should be implemented on a global scale.

Following her presentation, Princess Mathilde and Ms. Christina Barrineau of the United Nations led a roundtable discussion with students of the College of Europe, looking at various aspects of microfinance in more depth. The combination of Ms. Barrineau's expertise in microfinance and Princess Mathilde's personal experiences led to an interesting discussion and exchange of ideas. Student questions ranged from the need for interest rate ceilings to the idea of group lending and the possible advantages to implementing microfinance in areas with high levels of immigration.

The student participants are already considering organizing a conference on the subject of microfinance, thus demonstrating the Princess's hope that they will 'give further thought to the issues, and share ideas on how to make financial services more accessible to the poor.'

www.coleurop.be

The **College of Europe**, founded in 1949 and based in Bruges and Natolin (Warsaw), was the first and is one of the most reputed institutes of European postgraduate studies, which prepares individuals from over 45 countries to work and live in an international environment. The College of Europe offers study programmes in economics, interdisciplinary studies, law and politics and administration, while also providing a range of tailor-made seminars and training courses targeted at executives and public sector officials. *For more information: see www.coleurop.be.*
