



TOESPRAAK DOOR KRIS PEETERS
VLAAMS MINISTER-PRESIDENT EN
VLAAMS MINISTER VAN ECONOMIE, BUITENLANDS BELEID, LANDBOUW
EN PLATTELANDSBELEID

Europacollege - inhuldiging Verversdijk

28 juni 2013

Dear President Méndez de Vigo,
Dear Rector Demaret,
Dear Minister Reynders,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Prime minister of Denmark and one of the most famous alumni of this College of Europe, once said: "*European decision making is not pretty. But it does work*". Now, we may discuss about the first part of this statement, because the complexity of Europe indeed requires a certain taste. But I am sure that no one in this room will disagree with the second part.

Over the past 6 decades, the European Union has brought peace and prosperity to the continent. Even during today's crisis, when the Union is being criticized, we should not forget the incredible progress we have made since the end of World War II.

The success of the Union has many fathers. The history books are full of stories of great European leaders who pushed the Union in new directions. Names like Jean Monnet, Paul-Henri Spaak, Jacques Delors or your former President Jean-Luc Dehaene are synonymous with a stronger and better European Union.

But what the history books usually don't mention, is the incredible role that was played by thousands of European civil servants, diplomats and administrators. Before starting those impressive careers, many of them were a member of the student body of the College of Europe.

Depuis ma dernière visite à ce Collège, en 2007, j'ai eu l'honneur d'assister à beaucoup de Conseils ministériels d'agriculture, de pêche et de l'industrie. Pendant la Présidence belge en 2010, j'étais même Président du Conseil de Pêche. Pendant ces conseils et les négociations à Bruxelles et à Luxembourg, j'ai rencontré pas mal d'alumni de ce Collège.

J'ai donc vu personnellement la professionnalité de ces gens, ce qui prouve qu'un diplôme de cet institut renommé est en effet un certificat de qualité.

Dames en heren,

Het Europacollege is dus een instituut waar Vlaanderen trots op is. Dit college is van groot belang voor de internationale uitstraling van onze regio. De Europese beleidsmakers van morgen worden hier vandaag opgeleid. De invloed van het College op de carrière én het wereldbeeld van al die mensen, is immens.

Ik denk dat het bijvoorbeeld geen toeval is dat Nick Clegg, alumnus en Brits vice-premier, geheel tegen de Britse stroming in, een overtuigd Europeaan is.

Het college versterkt dus het Europees karakter van Vlaanderen. Wij liggen letterlijk en figuurlijk in het hart van de Europese Unie. Wij delen zelfs broederlijk onze hoofdstad met elkaar. Dat is een troef die we moeten koesteren. Dat doen we door Brussel uit te spelen wanneer we buitenlandse investeringen proberen binnen te halen. Maar dat doen we ook door het Europacollege te ondersteunen.

De Vlaamse regering heeft daarom een bijdrage van 7,7 miljoen euro geleverd aan deze schitterende nieuwe site. En als ik vandaag het resultaat aanschouw, dan ben ik er meer dan ooit van overtuigd dat dit de juiste beslissing was. 7 jaar na de inhuldiging van de eerste fase, is dit een prachtig nieuw hoogtepunt in de geschiedenis van het College.

Our significant financial contribution to this project, is only part of the support we continue to give to this College. We have for instance allocated a 50.000 euro per year subsidy to the Natolin Campus in Warschau. With these funds, several students from the Western Balkan and countries neighbouring the EU in the East, can enroll in the College. In doing so, we create more understanding about the European Union beyond its borders.

This subsidy, ladies and gentlemen, is part of a larger general policy on academic diplomacy. I firmly believe that academics are a great way of generating more cross border cooperation. This is why I involve the Flemish universities in my foreign policy. I encourage and support them in setting up cooperation with other universities from around the world.

At the same time, we promote Flanders as a great place to come and study. Here too, the College of Europe plays a key role. This institute draws bright young minds from around the world to Flanders. It strengthens the open character of our society and economy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With the inauguration of this new site, the College of Europe turns another page in its already very impressive history. After the summer, this site will welcome another generation of young people, that have the capacity to shape Europe.

This site is proof that the College of Europe is still a vibrant and dynamic organization. This is thanks to the students, the staff and the governing bodies of this institute. But in particular, this is also thanks to the great work of Rector Demaret. He has built his career on strengthening this institution.

For over 30 years, he has been a driving force here in Bruges. And in his tenure as Rector in the past 10 years, he has made sure that the College is ready to remain a center of academic excellence in this 21st century.

I would therefore like to congratulate him with his work here in Bruges. This beautiful new site is a magnificent end to a magnificent career.

I thank you.