

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Address of H.E. Aleksander Kwasniewski
President of the Republic of Poland
Delivered at the Opening Ceremony of the Academic Year
at the College of Europe
(Bruges, 2 October 2001)**

„Europe: our common responsibility“

Mr Rector, Mr President of the Board, Dear Students, Honourable Guests,

I would like to thank the College of Europe for giving me the opportunity to speak here. This College is a symbol in itself for the Europe that has been created throughout the last 50 years. For me it is both a great honour and responsibility to address you today and find myself among most prominent personalities and devoted Europeans who in the past were the ones to open the academic year in Bruges.

Having been founded more than 50 years ago the College of Europe remains a special place, a European microcosm where the idea of our united continent, sharing common values, tradition and culture has taken a real and tangible shape. Poland takes much pride from our contribution to this unique educational and social phenomenon - „a laboratory of ideas“ to use the name that Jacques Delors called the College. In Bruges, long before „the iron curtain“ fell down, Poland had always been perceived as part of Europe. The creativity, energy and enthusiasm of both Polish students and professors have earned a well-deserved recognition here. Let me just mention Professor Jerzy Lukaszewski, who for 18 years held the prestigious post of Rector of the College and left a distinct mark both on the past of this institution and its today's shape.

The close links between Poland and the Bruges College manifested themselves best when the second campus of the College was founded in 1994 in Natolin. To me the idea of „one College - two campuses" perfectly embodies the role of education and culture in building a united, modern Europe. For me it is a great satisfaction and pride to address you today knowing that in a few days it will be Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt who will open the academic year in Natolin.

The establishment of the Natolin campus carried on a significant message. It proved that in accordance with the intentions of its founding fathers, the College of Europe does remain an *avant garde* of the European integration project. It immediately recognised the role and the potential of Central and Eastern Europe in the process of unifying our continent. It gave an acute response to the challenge of EU enlargement by means of educating people to fully exploit the possibilities of the united Europe. I am convinced that the activities of the Natolin campus, its growing role and high esteem in Europe have already proved that it was a right decision to start the second campus in the country which was the first one in Europe to establish the Ministry of Education (1773).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The history and the development of the College have always been closely interwoven with the process of European integration. Over the years the College has evolved in line with the unification of our continent. It has had to meet the requirements of rapidly changing Europe. The Treaties of Rome, the birth of the European Union, the launch of the Single Market, the establishment of Economic and Monetary Union - every time the College, its students and professors stood up for these new challenges, ready to contribute to their successful completion.

Now, we have entered another qualitatively new phase in the process of European integration. On the one hand the European Union is faced with an unprecedented historic challenge of enlargement that is sometimes referred to as a real rebirth of the Union. On the other hand one can hardly deny that the idea of European integration has been suffering from the lack of public support and involvement. The time has been ripe to start a Europe-wide debate on the future of our continent. Almost seven months have now passed since the official launch of this debate. The multitude of ideas and projects how to make the Union function better is quite astonishing. Not only political leaders but NGOs, social partners, business groups want to

make their voice heard. I am convinced that this creative ferment is capable of bringing a real added value to the future of our continent. A thorough analysis and recognition of the present strengths and weaknesses will help us to rethink and redesign the way Europe is done.

I agree with those claiming that the problems the Union is facing nowadays are rather those of a mature community than those of a pioneer settlement. It is though ever more important to make the best possible use of the time that we are given and start to fill the words with content. As it is my firm belief that our ability to act and take courageous decisions in the years to come will depend whether the project Europe will be given a fresh impetus or whether it will end up in chaos and disillusionment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am convinced that in the current debate the accession process must be seen as a catalyst and not a possible threat to the further EU development. The contributions of Poland and other candidates to this debate prove that they aspire to join a strong and efficient Community which will aim at becoming one of the most influential civilisation centres of the modern world.

I am looking forward with confidence to the completion of the first stage of the debate on Europe with the signing of the Laeken Declaration in two months. I believe it will be a launching pad for a more structured debate which will begin next year. A credible and efficient way to prepare the next Intergovernmental Conference will contribute best to reviving people's interest and trust in the EU actions. That is why it is with satisfaction that I welcome the idea of setting up the Convention as a platform to carry out the debate in its second phase.

As regards the legitimacy and efficiency of the Convention's future works I would like to draw your attention to three key elements. Firstly, it is of essential importance for the Convention to bring together the representatives of both national governments and parliaments. As such a composition including all the sources of national and Community legitimacy will fully validate as well as strengthen the mandate of the Convention itself.

Secondly, since the forthcoming Convention is to focus on the constitutional debate concerning the future enlarged Union, I am convinced that from the outset the candidate countries should participate in its works and be represented by both national governments and parliaments. Our active presence, opportunity to fully speak our minds will demonstrate the

will of both sides to work together on shaping the future European Union which will soon exceed 20 members.

The third issue to be emphasised is to ensure the functioning of the structured dialogue and co-operation between the Convention and the other actors i.e. social partners, independent experts and all the interested citizens who would like to make their contribution to the debate. To this end I truly support the concept of creating a Civil Society Forum as a broader platform of co-operation and an instrument to facilitate the works of the Convention. Yet to make this model an operational and efficient one, regular basis dialogue and information exchange between the Convention and the Forum should be provided.

While a variety of topics concerning EU future is being discussed at the moment such concepts as democratic legitimacy, accountability and transparency seem to dominate most of the contributions to the current debate. The central and fundamental dilemma is how to win and secure the citizens' support and consent to the actions taken at the community, supranational level.

I touched upon this issue in my Stockholm speech of May this year. While calling for forging a political union I stressed that the starting point of such a discussion lies in the old and new member states. As they, in my view, remain the primary source of European integration in the foreseeable future. Having said that, there is an urgent need to bring the European issues closer to the national level, to make them an integral part of the domestic agenda. They should be made a subject of nation-wide debates and political competition at the very level of nation-states.

As the business of the EU is now greatly interdependent and interconnected with the domestic politics both of the current and future Member States, a national sense of responsibility and ownership of the European issues needs to be revived. We need to incorporate European politics as a permanent and natural dimension of national public life. As in this way a distinct presence of European issues in the parliamentary elections both in the current and future Member States will be fostered. In my view it will make our public opinions aware to what extent national and European politics interweave. At the same time it will affirm the central and decisive role of the citizens concerning the European Union functioning and its further development.

Another fundamental question is how to work out a model which offers our parliamentarians an efficient and timely access to and influence on the national decision making process as regards EU issues. In this field Poland as a candidate country has already gained valuable experience through the works of our parliamentary committees of European integration and European law. Yet in the context of the forthcoming accession the model should be further strengthened and improved.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Focus on the EU reform and its enlargement as the single most immediate goals should not distract us from thinking in broader terms, going beyond the 2004 perspective. From the historical point of view the EU attitude towards its neighbourhood and the ability to take up the role of an actor on the international scene will be of the same importance as the proceeding process of deepening integration.

Since we are debating the future of our continent against the horrifying background of the tragic events in the USA, Europe is called upon to ever more deeply commit itself to the world political scene. While promoting stability and peace, defending justice and democracy, the Union is to be a living proof that it constitutes more than a free trade zone but a community of states firmly based on common values and aspirations. Our solidarity and will to stand united against such an evil as organised crime and terrorism is needed more than ever before. That is why I am convinced that the European Union needs to take up every effort as to ensure that all the countries equally benefit from a global system of stability and prosperity. To this end the EU's actions comprise both the internal and external dimension of the European policies. On the one hand joint efforts to build up the European Security and Defence Policy, on the other the creation of the European area of freedom, justice and security will contribute to stand up to the challenges of the XXI century. To this end I do not share the views of those claiming that the present situation is so complicated that it will eventually result in distracting and slowing down the processes of integration on our continent. Just the opposite, in my view the challenge we all have been facing at the moment is another argument in favour of ever further integrating and enlarging both the European Union and NATO.

Having said that, I am a devoted proponent of an open Europe, a community open to the prospects of membership of those European countries which demonstrate their European

aspirations and declare their will to fully meet all the criteria of EU membership. The alternative will be risking instability at external borders of the enlarged Union, increasing migration and creating ever bigger development gaps on our continent. „The fortress Europe“ is definitely not a solution for the world of globalization and information revolution. On the contrary, the growing impression of exclusion will result in frustration and protest which might become dangerous for the stability of our ever more integrated continent. To this end it is highly important for the European Union to acknowledge and step up the aspirations of the fledgling European democracies. To them the EU membership itself, as a symbol of stability and prosperity, is an irresistible attraction and ambitious goal to achieve in the years to come. With this in mind I have already suggested that in the nearest future a reasonable and beneficial development could be creating the European Area of Co-operation – a type of association which would give the EU possibility to influence the process of internal changes in the neighbouring countries, including an offer of political and economic integration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Enlarging the EU to more than 20 members, reforming the way the Union is governed, strengthening its role on the international scene - to successfully face these challenges we need both a clear vision reaching far beyond the horizon of short term national interests as well as pragmatic and realistic approach to make this vision a reality. In this context Simon Stevin (czyt: simon stevin), the patron of the forthcoming promotion of the College of Europe is the right figure to look up to as a great scholar and engineer who truly mastered the ability to combine theoretical knowledge and practical skills. This unique combination of skills will by no means be of an essential value to the young people gathered here, who soon will actively participate in shaping the world of the XXI century.

A successful completion of any visionary, courageous projects is hardly possible if we let the disenchanted and fearful take the lead in the current debate on the EU future. In our countries we have strong domestic public opinions, now the need to create and foster an active, conscious European public opinion becomes ever more urgent. Let us not be afraid to demonstrate the belief in united Europe, its values and achievements. This applies both to the European political class, social partners, business groups as well as to the young competent, responsible Europeans of whom the Bruges and Natolin graduates are the best example: do not hesitate to make use of your unique combination of faith, enthusiasm and knowledge and

pass on the Bruges formula to your societies. We need more optimism, openness and interaction while pursuing the goal of changing the European political, economic and social landscape. The arguments and facts are there. We have to deploy them better and clarify to the public the message on enlargement, on its motifs and benefits. If we want Europe to be our success story we must not build it on fears and stereotypes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I am speaking to you only a few days after the parliamentary elections in Poland, let me finish with some remarks concerning the perspectives of Polish accession process.

So far a long and difficult way in our preparatory efforts has been covered while the most difficult decisions are still ahead of us. Yet I believe that Poland has already proved and will still demonstrate its capability to anticipate and manage the enlargement process effectively while at the same time the present Member States will confirm in practice the fundamental principle of solidarity.

Poland's accession to the EU remains a top priority task enjoying the support of more than 50% of Polish citizens. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that in the September elections the two parties determined to work for Poland's speedy accession to the EU i.e.: Democratic Left Alliance and Civic Platform have gained more than 53% of all votes. Law and Justice and Polish Peasants Party, that have entered the Parliament, also show understanding as regards Poland's efforts to join the European Union. That is why despite a relatively considerable parliamentary representation of those sceptical towards Poland's membership of the EU, in my view there are no significant threats as regards the continuity of our accession process. We will be of course witnessing intense and tough public debates on the conditions of Poland's membership in the EU but it is an unavoidable part of parliamentary democracy. I would like to emphasise once again that it will not have an impact on either the speed or quality of our preparations to join the EU. I am convinced that the newly formed government will accelerate the on-going preparations and make every effort to conclude the negotiations in accordance with the timeframe and declarations of the Nice and Gothenburg EU Summits.

It is my firm belief that in this very last phase of preparations political will and determination coupled with wide public support will contribute to the completion of the historic process of

Poland's accession to the European Union which will be a „virtuous circle" - a truly „win-win" outcome for Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe in Europe which is a community of all, an opportunity for all and responsibility of all. And I am convinced that it is in our capacity to pursue this goal. Now that we have the wind in our sails we need to work hard to succeed and firmly anchor the project of the EU enlargement and its development among our citizens. It is not an easy task to be completed in a short term perspective. But, to paraphrase professor Walter Hallstein, - if you do not believe in miracles as regards Europe, you are not a realist. It is my sincere hope that among us, both in the current and future Member States, there is enough of European realists whose faith, knowledge and determination will pave the way for the miracles to happen.

Thank you for your attention.