



College of Europe
Collège d'Europe



Natolin

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Start of the Academic Year
College of Europe in Natolin

Welcome Address

by

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Dear Students,

Esteemed Professors,

Distinguished Colleagues,

and Friends,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the College of Europe in Natolin as we commence the academic year 2026/2027, the Promotion of Johannes Gutenberg.

Each year, we are excited to see a new cohort of talented, dedicated students. I believe that some of you may feel anxious about the year ahead – don't worry, that's completely natural.

Your hopes and aspirations have brought you here and the College of Europe in Natolin, with its outstanding reputation, is the place where these hopes and aspirations can become reality.

Today marks the beginning of your Natolinian journey, a journey demanding in its ambitions and generous in its possibilities. My speech will not soften the challenge ahead of you. The programmes we offer are rigorous. The expectations we hold are high.

Yet this intensity is not a trial to be endured in solitude. Natolin is built upon something more than individual achievement. It is built by a community of dedicated and attentive

faculty, staff, and peers whose diversity of thought and experience will shape your understanding as profoundly as any lecture hall.

The College of Europe was established almost 80 years ago to create such an environment for young Europeans to come together and reflect on the future of our continent after the atrocities of the Second World War.

50 years later, in the wake the end of the Cold War, which made the reintegration of the continent possible, the College of Europe put its anchor here in Natolin, where you are now.

From today you are to become part of this Natolin story, part of this genius loci of which I speak: overcoming divisions, seeking understanding, building bridges.

Dear Students of the Guttenberg Promotion,

Your patron de promotion's inventions democratized access to texts, displaced scribes, and seemed to threaten the gatekeepers of knowledge. The printing press did not diminish the need for scholarship, judgment, or rigorous thought. It demanded more of them. A world of printed texts still requires minds trained to think critically.

Today, we face a parallel moment. Like Gutenberg's press, technologies such as AI reshape how knowledge is acquired and circulated. But they do not eliminate the human capacities that genuine learning demands: the ability to think critically, to judge wisely, to create with intention. Natolin exists to cultivate these capacities that no tool can replace.

Over the months ahead, you will encounter ideas that challenge your assumptions. You will work alongside colleagues whose perspectives differ from your own. This is not incidental but central to your time here.

Natolin is a place of transformation. It encourages you to understand complexity without retreating into certainty, to engage across difference with respect and clarity. This is Natolin's purpose to which you are now invited.

Dear Students,

This places upon you an opportunity: to engage fully, to contribute generously to this community, to take seriously both the privilege and the responsibility of your presence here.

We stand ready to support you. Our faculty are here to guide you. Our institution exists in service of your intellectual and personal development. But the essential work is yours. We trust you will undertake it with the seriousness and dedication it demands.

This is your year and the start of a great adventure.

A great, wonderful but still unfinished adventure begun by your predecessors in Natolin more than 30 years ago.

Remember that, in the end, this adventure you are embarking on is not only your individual journey, but one you share with the people around you.

Dear Students,

Use this year well.

Test yourselves to your limits.

Keep your aspirations high.

Learn, develop, grow and look further.

Welcome to the College of Europe!

Welcome to Natolin!