

# Speech ACT!

Rector Monar,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Dear Students,  
Dear Family and friends,

**“Act and Change Together!” This is my topic today.**

This is also the motto created by a number of students here in this room during the past year, the ones who were involved in the group ACT!, the student charity group of the College of Europe at the Bruges Campus.

Throughout my speech I will use famous quotes that will help me illustrate some important points. Some may find these quotes resemble some kind of “homespun wisdom” but if you actually repeat these quotes to yourself everyday, you will start to take them seriously and live by what they say. My mother who is present today was my inspiration in this.

I would thus like to introduce you to the charity group of the College of Europe named ACT: three simple letters for three not so simple words **Act & Change Together!**

1) So let me start with **Act** and my first quote: “Commitment is an act, not a word”. It is curious because this quote comes from a master of words and famous writer, Jean-Paul Sartre. And for me it is exactly what I experienced this year in the College. **While we need words to learn**, understand and develop personally, what really commits us to others, or creates links with others is what we do.

This year, with the group ACT! that I represent today, we can surely say we acted. **We committed ourselves to charity work** because being in the College of Europe is not just about learning Europe but also living Europe. **15 students from 13 different nationalities** gathered their interest, motivation and energy to develop 12 projects, raising 3223 euros during the year. Our projects ranged from helping our closest

neighbours here in Bruges to assisting very far away populations, because we believe solidarity does not have geographical borders, nor cultural borders, nor sectorial borders.

**To give you more concrete idea**, we helped as local neighbours an asylum-seekers centre, a hospital for children with cancer and a homeless centre. We also helped European neighbours like the Ukraine population, during the recent crisis, through financing medical assistance. And finally we did not only help neighbours but we also had a true global outreach and assisted the Philippines last year, also for medical assistance.

Yes, this is what “Act and Change Together” means to us.

2) Parlons à présent de **changer**: « Pour s'améliorer, il faut changer. Donc, pour être parfait, il faut avoir changé souvent. » nous dit Winston Churchill. Et en effet la qualité ne réside pas dans le fait d'agir une fois parfaitement mais de répéter cette action parfaite. Et il est d'ailleurs toujours temps de commencer à changer quelque chose qui est devenu par répétition une mauvaise habitude.

**Mais quand je parle de changement, je ne vous parle pas de devenir autre chose**, il ne s'agit pas de se forcer à faire différemment ou mieux, non ! Il s'agit en réalité de ne pas se laisser entrainer dans le confort et la facilité de ce qui se présente à nous **et donc il s'agit bien de changer l'évidence**, surtout aujourd'hui pour les étudiants comme nous ! Beaucoup d'opportunités, notamment professionnelles, se présentent et se présenteront à nous, mais **pensons plutôt activement à ce vers quoi nous voulons aller et changons ce penchant naturel** en nous qui vous convainc que cette facilité n'est pas si mal, puis finalement que c'est ce qui nous correspond le mieux ! C'est ça le changement dont je parle avec Act and Change Together. Il ne s'agit pas simplement d'agir, mais de le faire **en questionnant ce qui se passe, en remettant en question ce qui nous entoure et en changeant l'histoire qui ne nous correspond pas**.

3) Now the last word of ACT!: Together. Why **together**? Because “Great things are done by a series of small things brought together” said Van Gogh, and **what we do today already counts and slowly contributes to a bigger future, whatever the size may be**. Do not postpone an action because you feel it is not big enough. You may feel like a drop in the ocean but do not forget there is an ocean because of all these

drops and your action can eventually become a wave by coordinating! **The best example, you all know so well now is the European project** we are part of. This message may seem basic or mainstream but, I am asking you: who does naturally consider his own potential in connection with others'? **You are all starting your career soon and you probably think about it individually** because you certainly dream about being special? Having a legacy? Winning a nobel prize or being famous? Well, this is great of course, but you will not be able to do it alone!

In a way, one of the aims of the College of Europe is **to create this idea in you of pushing through common projects and ideas**, even if and actually, even more because you come from very different places and cultures and would not meet otherwise.

Another example of how much this is true is once more our group ACT! this year. We were maybe 15 to manage the group and coordinate the projects, but in reality nothing could have been possible without the participation of all of you. Some gave us ideas that led to our best projects like the Intradeqs Quiz for Ukraine, others participated in a very active way like for our Saint Valentine's auction, but all of you contributed. So I would like to use this speech to thank you all, from students to staff and administration for your help, time and generosity during the year.

**And now my last quote, of course from our dear Patron Voltaire**, and I am not only addressing myself here to students but to all of you: "Every man is guilty of all the good he did not do". Do not consider doing good to others but also to yourself as a bonus, but as a duty. You are all successful today because you have learned great things, met great personalities, but I hope you realize now this would mean nothing if you don't Act and Change Together!

I repeat: "Every man is guilty of all the good he did not do"

Please, whichever obstacles you'll face and whichever exciting opportunities are ahead of you, don't be guilty of not using **your** amazing potential!

I thank you all.