

Chers Voltariens,

C'est un grand honneur pour nous deux de pouvoir remémorer cette année incroyable que l'on a vécu tous ensemble à Bruges, au Collège. Tout au long de l'année, les grandes amitiés que nous avons forgé tout comme les inoubliables moments passés ensemble, nous ont permis de surmonter les périodes de stress et d'angoisse.

N : En particulier, la terrible nouvelle de la perte de notre cher ami et collègue Édouard nous a envahi d'une grande tristesse. En même temps, la solidarité et l'aide qui a jailli parmi les étudiants ont été une source d'espoir et de force dans ces moments difficiles. Ce sens de la communauté qui s'est développé dans notre promotion nous remplit d'orgueil et de gratitude.

Hence in the upcoming 15 minutes we would like to relive, not necessarily in a chronological order, some major events of this unique experience with you guys - la Promotion Voltaire of 2014

N: It all started, when we received our acceptance letters and found out we were coming to the College of Europe, but we didn't quite know what to expect.

We heard from Anciens of previous promotions that this would be an intense year but also an unforgettable one, and now standing here, we can safely say that our dear colleague Simon was right in saying that for many of us this year was the „time of our life that we would not wish on our worst enemy“

N: It started off very nicely. Manuel and I were both here for the intraweek – the sun was shining, we had so much free time, we were able to discover a new residence every night with the regular parties. But then the rain started and the foreigners arrived from all over Europe and beyond, from the highest peaks of Andorra to the northern shores of Scandinavia, from the western-most coast of Ireland to the beaches of Sydney.

We were fearful in the beginning but soon enough we realized that only some of these newcomers were idiots. Thus began our wonderful year in Bruges.

N: We soon got accustomed to the regular lifestyle of the College and to the beauty of repas froid.

We learnt that the best adventures take place outside the Ring. We got used to the fact that everything is always on the intranet and that in order to get the best of everything, the rule of “first come first served” applies.

N: Also in all other domains of social life, we realized that strict rules apply and that Guido the night watchman would turn up at 1.30 am on the dot to regulate our behavior and remind us that there was also studying to be done.

Not only was there rivalry between the four departments, but there was also a degree of competitiveness between the many residences. This became apparent in December, when Christmas trees were coldheartedly stolen, poor Biskajer falling victim to this a grand total of three times. Luckily Dragos was always awake and alert to make sure that nobody touched OG. *We predict that no matter where we go or who we become, Dragos will always be there to keep an eye on us like a Guardian Angel.*

N: The founding father of the College, Salvador di Madariaga, envisioned a College of Europe filled with intelligent individuals and academics which would never judge a book by its cover when it comes to meeting people from different nationalities, but this was impressively proven wrong at our national stereotype party, where we had a pimp from Sofia, some fishermen from Portugal and our very own beloved Angela Merkel in her finest outfit and bailout money.

As time went on, we realized in daily trips to the canteen and the library, that a lot of these clichés and stereotypes were in fact true. It turned out that the Spanish really are loud and expressive, the Italians like to complain about the cuisine, whilst some other countries prefer to remain amongst themselves to preserve their culture and language.

N: But of course, by living and studying together, we did learn a lot about other nationalities, especially during the various national weeks that took place. We were able to attend conferences with high-level speakers, taste many different types of food and beverages during the receptions that followed and experience the different styles of socializing during the various national week parties.

Another form of cultural exchange, which is, what this College prides itself of, was the learning of basic expressions in every language. Some words even became part of our daily vocabulary, most significantly "que nice" and some select Italian swear words which we've used more than necessary.

N: Also, some people had their names adapted in order to accommodate to the multilingual environment, for example "Sammy Guapo" became a trademark, and the fact that no one could pronounce Joao's name became the theme of a song, and still we are sure we have not managed to pronounce his name correctly.

Also part of the multicultural experience was the fact that this is not only the College of Europe but also the college of international love and student affairs, which is not surprising given the high standards of beauty and intellect currently present in this room.

N: It is, after all, the part of l'esprit du college to drunkenly stumble from the El dorado student bar to La Tristesse to café pick and then eventually into the arms of a fellow student. Manuel and I have lost count of the couples that have been formed here, let's just say that every party brought with it new adventures and endless drama. Rumour has

it that 25% of couples formed here go on to get married and live happily ever after in the future – let's see if this is true in the future.

This year has also been an important one – despite the long history of the college dating back to 1949 - in a sense that our promotion was the one to experience many things for the first time. D'abord le fait qu'on célèbre une cérémonie de fin d'année avec une implication directe des étudiants représente une avancée notable qui entrera dans la tradition. Pour cela, nous remercions Monsieur le Recteur Monar de nous avoir confié le privilège de nous adresser à tous ici réunis au nom des la communauté des étudiants du Collège

N: We are also the promotion that has benefitted from an extraordinarily high number of visits from many heads of state and other VIPs. To name a few, we had Mario Monti, Wolfgang Schauble, Alex Salmond, and near the end of the year the visits culminated in importance with the visit of the Chinese President Xi Jing Ping and of the American President Barack Obama.

It was a very enriching experience to be able to witness these people speak, and the very fact that the College was able to welcome so many high-profile guests underlines the significant role it holds in European affairs.

N: Moreover, the amount of selfies that we took during these events made our friends back at home jealous and gave them an insight into how hard the lifestyle is at the College.

As well as that, we have also been the first promotion to have our very own rugby team, which in addition to the football teams, have won us many victories, sustained countless injuries and filled us all with pride, especially when we witnessed the small Pandas grow into mighty Grizzlies on the pitch.

N: We have also been the first promotion to brew our own beer, thus transferring theoretical knowledge into practical results and demonstrating an ability to sustain ourselves. Moreover, although they were not the first of their kind, Willy & the Rokolos surely must have been the greatest college band of all times – it is always a joy to listen to such a talented group of musicians.

All in all, we can all agree that it's been a very enjoyable year, and this has also been made possible by the College staff. We thank the residence ladies who would encourage us to do well every morning, to our lovely librarian Renée who would make sure that if the morning coffee didn't wake us up then she certainly did with her stories at the library, to the canteen staff who worked hard and withstood our criticism, to provide us with good food as well as patiently cleaning up the remnants of our childish food fights.

N: Our thanks also extends to the Student Affairs Officers, Olivia and Julie, and the College staff, including the professors and assistants. We'd also like to thank our fellow

student reps, with whom it's been a pleasure to have worked in our attempts to make this College more dynamic.

Last but not least, we'd like to thank our fellow students for making this year such a memorable one. In particular, the various Internet clowns have provided us with constant amusement and means of procrastination. We take this opportunity to unveil one of the biggest secrets of cette promotion Voltaire we'd like to ask the secret Classic CoE blogger who reflected on our daily life in such blunt and hilarious ways, to stand up here now and reveal himself, to claim the applause he or she rightfully deserves...

N: Ceci nous mène à la fin de notre discours, mais aussi à la fin de cette année. Ces 10 mois passés ensemble ont été fantastiques et cette dernière semaine a été particulièrement émouvante – malgré les intenses périodes de stress, nous avons réalisé et apprécié la valeur des amitiés créées ici. Et comme Voltaire l'a si bien dit: "l'amitié est le mariage de l'âme", and indeed, the friendships we have made here span across national borders and beyond the restraints of the many different languages we speak.

We wish you all the best of luck with whatever you do, and we hope that no matter where we all go, be it Brussels or Paris or Finland, we hope that the Bubble and the Bruges Mafia will continue to follow us around.

Thank you, Merci und Dankeschön
You have been amazing!!!!