



College of Europe
Collège d'Europe



Natolin

Opening Ceremony Madeleine Albright Promotion 2023-2024 **3rd October 2023** **Speech Rector Federica MOGHERINI**

Madeleine Albright visited the College of Europe quite recently in Natolin, and it was a very emotional moment not only for the College community but also for all of us and for her, for sure, because it was for her a way of going back close to home.

This is traditionally, in our opening ceremonies, the moment where the Rector gives quite a long speech normally, to tell and introduce the patron, and share his or her own views about what kind of messages the patron of this promotion gives to you and what are the guiding lines that the patron would represent for you. This year, I have decided to share this task, this honor, with actually the two guests we have today.

Our keynote speaker President Petr Pavel, who will be introduced briefly in a short time by one of you, but let me say how honored I am to host him today at the College's opening ceremony. We used to sit next to each other at the NATO ministerial meetings whenever the European Union and NATO had joined sessions. And from that time, I remember his dedication not only to the security of the European continent but also today in his role as President of the Czech Republic, his commitments to democracy freedom, the rule of law, and European integration. And I'm really honored that we can host him here today Mr. President, thank you very much for having accepted our invitation. And obviously, having him today is also a way to honor the country and the city, where Madeleine Albright was born and spent the very first years of her life.

But also I'm going to share this privilege of introducing Madeleine Albright with someone who was a friend of hers and probably a mentee, the Permanent Representative of the United States to NATO, Ambassador Julianne Smith. Before giving her the floor, let me explain, because I think this is my responsibility as the Rector, why Madeleine Albright is our patron this year.

Well, first of all, because some of your predecessors, some of the alumni and faculty members and staff, indicated her name in a procedure that now is being established. You might not know this, but since I started as a rector, I decided to keep the prerogative of deciding which is the patron for the following year, but I will ask your advice. You'll also have the opportunity, approximately around the winter break, to indicate names of individuals that you believe are inspiring guides and figures to work on the integration of the European continent and the good relations with our partners. So the name of Madeleine Albright was indicated by several of the students, alumni, and professors of last year. But there are other reasons that drove me to choose her name. The names indicated were approximately 300 personalities, and I guess my mandate will not last 300 years so that I can honor all of them, but there are specific reasons why I thought Madeleine was a perfect patron for this promotion. First of all, yes, she was an American citizen, but she was born in Europe and she was actually a European refugee to the United States. She writes in one of her books, *Madame Secretary*, that for her the symbol of the Statue of Liberty has always meant the promise that it is meant to represent, that it was for her the place where she could find freedom in times when Europe was in a different place than today. She actually fled Czechoslovakia twice, for two different reasons that at the end of the day, were probably not so different. She was somehow a European refugee who became the first woman Secretary of State in the United States, so a history that I think is inspiring for many of us.

But there are very concrete ways in which she contributed to the European integration because you don't necessarily need to operate within the European Union to contribute to the European integration. And the contribution that she gave, all along her life, to advance European integration has been extraordinary. Think of the transatlantic bond, think of all her commitment to freedom democracy, rule of law in Europe, in particular in her own region in Europe. The last article she published, just a few months before dying, was all about how to fight against authoritarianism that seemed to be on the rise in many parts of the world, including in Europe. And she was sharing words of hope on the fact that this would have been reverted and that there is a future that is brighter for democracy and freedom across the world and in Europe.

There is an additional reason why, for me, it was important to have her as a patron this year, and this is because she has been a role model, she is an inspiration and I think she has been one of the main empowering factors of so many women around the world, so many girls, women, women of age, giving a strength and giving a model, giving energy that is difficult to compare with others.

And let me share with you an anecdote that I just shared with Ambassador Smith coming here: I met her for the first time, for me she was "*Madame Secretary*", I was very humbled and I just started as an Italian Foreign Minister and I was the youngest Italian Foreign Minister, I felt a little bit of pressure and she told me "Relax, it's okay. I've been there. I know what you are going through. It's not you, it's the system that is putting pressure on you. You're okay, you're in exactly the place where you should be. It's okay. It's going to be okay. You have a friend here, turn to me whenever I can be of any help". She wrote this down in a note and for me, this was a message because I thought "Well if she has felt this way and she's a giant, then it's going to be okay. Then I'm going to make it, somehow". And then she told me: "After a few weeks I was in office, colleagues were telling me, Madeline, are you gaining weight?" And she told me she replied to them: "No, I'm not gaining weight, it's my thick skin that is getting thicker". And I felt that so many of us could connect to that feeling of having things on your shoulders that you have the impression sometimes they're a bit too much and too heavy, but at the end of the day, you will make it and you do make it. So I think that she and her being this extraordinary role model for all women in leadership positions or aspiring to have some leadership positions is very much needed in our societies and our world today.

I will conclude by just sharing a couple of sentences that she wrote. One is in her book, it is the very last sentence of *Madame Secretary*, and that goes like this: "People sometimes asked me I want to be remembered. I reply that I don't want to be remembered, I am still here. But when the day comes, I hope people will say that I did the best with what I was given, tried to make my parents proud, served my country with all the energy I had, and took a strong stand on the side of freedom. Perhaps some will also say that I helped teach a generation of older women to stand tall and young women not to be afraid to interrupt."

And in the very last article she published in December 2021, she wrote something that I think can be a message also for you. She wrote: "The time is right for democratic forces to regain the initiative. Democracy is fragile but it is also resilient. In every region, the generation coming of age is smart, outspoken, and fearless. Worldwide, people are demanding more and although tattered and torn, the freedom flag is ready to rise." I think these words of hope from someone who has seen the best but also probably the worst of human nature in foreign policy are something that can guide you in your journey here at the College but also beyond.

It is my great pleasure to give the floor to Ambassador Julian Smith.
Thank you very much.

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