

Closing Ceremony
Eliane Vogel-Polsky Promotion 2021-2022
24/06/2022

**Speech Herman VAN ROMPUY,
President of the Administrative Council of the College of Europe**

The past year has been special for you in any case. An academic year at the College is a unique intellectual and existential experience. Living together with fellow students from almost fifty countries simply makes one a different person. You are not what you were a year ago. Once a Bruges citizen, always a Bruges citizen.

You came here with covid still in place and you are leaving this city with the war on your minds and with the possible threat of an economic recession. Since 2008, it has been a succession of crises. We call it the perma-crisis. So your stay here is doubly special because of the general climate in which we all live. It requires an effort to remain hopeful. Hoping, by the way, is not passively waiting for progress but actively working for a better world.

The College is welcoming more Ukrainian students as the EU did yesterday! The EU is welcoming Ukraine with its more than 40 million citizens. We must show that we are a Europe of humanism, a bulwark against barbarism. The Union as a work of peace is therefore still relevant. Until 24 February, for some people peace was not a sufficient argument for the existence of the Union. In one day, everything changed. We hope that Ukraine will return to normal life and enjoy peace on its entire territory. There is no lasting peace without justice and without respect for international and humanitarian law.

The College is not only an institution of transfer of knowledge but also of values. In your long life you will be confronted with many unexpected developments in Europe and in the world. The stakes today in the East are sovereignty and values. Later people will say: Remember Ukraine!

Your promotion was under the posthumous patronage of a Belgian woman, Eliane Vogel-Polski. Be as fearless as she was and as brave. The world belongs to the brave. For her, Europe was linked to equal rights for all and to solidarity. Here, too, it was about values. The Union is a revolutionary idea, but we do not choose revolutionary methods. Working step by step towards a better life for more and more Europeans and non-Europeans. Prosperity for all. Happiness for all. I wish the same for you in your personal life. The more satisfied, the happier you are in your personal and family life, the more you have the strength to work for the common good. I wish you that strength.

Meanwhile, I wish you good holidays. From now on you are an alumnus of a prestigious and warm College. Bon vent!