



College of Europe
Collège d'Europe



Natolin

Opening Ceremony Madeleine Albright Promotion 2023-2024
3rd October 2023
Speech by Herman Van Rompuy
President of the Administrative Council of the College of Europe

Bruges connects the new with the old. The glory of yesterday as a port city with its golden time already in the 13th century combined with its role as today's big energy port in a Union that no longer wants to be too dependent on one supplier, following the Russian invasion. This College also connects old and new. It was founded when the European Community had only six members, the time of pioneers, the time of idealists who saw their dream realised during their lifetime but the new is also here today with the president of the Czech Republic, an E.U. member state but occupied by the Soviet Union for decades, say by Russia. The patroness of this promotion is named after the other great Czech Madeleine Albright who later became US Secretary of State but who cherished her origins and who later witnessed the unexpected but hoped-for liberation of her homeland.

Our Europe, 'Notre Europe', Jacques Delors would say, is more meaningful than ever, in times of war on the very borders of the Union. The Union is the greatest peace project in human history. We are children and grandchildren of peace. The price we paid for it, are the graves of millions of soldiers and civilians, so cherished around Ypres in what in Flanders we call the Westhoek, the West corner. Ukraine is also paying such an absurd price and they too, as a future member of the Union, will be rewarded for the suffering and death of so many, especially young people. Their deaths must not be in vain. No matter how young they are, they will be the fathers and mothers of freedom.

The College of Europe is more than an educational institution. Besides knowledge, it conveys values, the values of humanity, of personalism in which every human being counts wherever he or she comes from. Each person is literally worthwhile. Besides a head and a heart, the College also has a soul, arising from the chemistry created by the meeting of people from nearly 50 countries. It snatches you out of the small world we all live in. Europe transcends us. You will leave Bruges within a year as different and better persons: more open, more tolerant, more convinced Europeans and, above all, with friends who have shared a part of your young life. It is also about staying in city on a human scale. The College is a place of knowledge and ideals but, above all, it is an experience. There are already enough negative emotions, revolving around fear, insecurity, violence, anger, jealousy, around war and climate disasters. The College wants to help turn fear into hope. We want to work with the academic community, with all other staff, with all of you to create a climate of hope. Hope is a verb.

The College is alive and kicking with its branches in this good city and in Natolin near Warsaw, with its new Diplomatic Academy and with new plans to plant our flag elsewhere as well.

I wish you a happy stay. With your new friends: make it one of the best years of your lives.
Good luck. Bon vent.

Disclaimer: This text might not be an exact transposition of the speech, spoken words prevail:
<https://youtu.be/kprsX60HVb8>