

The Natolin Speech (Poland)

Your Excellency, Mr Prime Minister

Dear Students,

Dear European Colleagues,

It is an honor and joy for me to be able to be here today.

I am very happy that the Natolin Campus of the College of Europe pays particular attention to the present and the future of the Eastern Partnership, which also includes the Republic of Moldova.

I would like to thank you for the fact that you promote, especially among young people, democratic values and a friendly attitude toward the neighboring countries of the European Union, both in the south and the east.

Many people who are present here today are the future leaders of Europe, the people who will decide the fate of our continent. Therefore the vision that you have and the opinions that you shape right now are extremely important.

I know that you have a lot of troubling questions related to how our continent can move forward in the period of emerging new global trends and forces. I know you are asking yourselves how we can maintain social stability under circumstances where the capital, ideas, innovations and people are more mobile than ever before in search of a better place to live. Yes, it *is* a challenge, a big challenge, but we can deal with it.

If you want to believe that Europe can adapt, modernize or evolve, please take a look around: Poland is the proof of the continuing dynamics of Europe!

Twenty years ago, the Polish nation embarked on the path of freedom. For many Poles, life seemed to present a bigger struggle than in the days of communism. Many worried that the situation in Poland would never improve. However, it did change for the better.

Ten years ago, when Poland was joining the European Union, many people said that it would take decades before countries like Poland become important players in Europe. But please look around today: Poland has a dynamic market economy, and the difference between the development of Poland and that of the richer nations of the continent continues to decrease.

In politics, Poland, led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk, is not only a member of the European Union, but a true leader.

Today, Poland is stronger than ever. Countries like Poland, being in the forefront of European events, guarantee that our continent can overcome all the challenges that it is facing.

For the Republic of Moldova, Poland is a role model in many respects, and especially in terms of promoting democratic reforms and European integration.

Your country had the courage, vision and the ability to work hard to implement the reforms which started immediately after the liberation from communism.

These reforms were difficult then, but today we see rewards for those short-term difficulties that you endured, and this reward is a long-term well-being of Poland.

Contrary to that, in Moldova, our contemporary leaders did not show too much courage in promoting reforms at that time. Our country chose the path that seemed to be the shortest. As a result, this approach can be summarized as twenty years of missed opportunities. We became the last country in Europe to be encumbered with the burden of the communist government.

Today, however, reforms are imperative for us. Our citizens, along with the politicians, admit that Moldova must change. And Moldova will change.

We are making decisions necessary to build a strong Moldova, in which future generations will live prosperous lives and will have more opportunities; Moldova, which will take a well-deserved place in the large family of European democracies as a democratic, pluralistic country with a developed economy and free citizens.

But change is not always easy. There are no generally accepted patterns of change. But we know that without change, Moldova cannot prosper. We are modernizing Moldova together to face the challenges of the twenty-first century. We are upgrading our education system to be competitive in a globalized world. We are restructuring the policies to have the laws that are observed and applied. We are simplifying tax policy and customs procedures in order to create an easier environment for the business community. All of these goals are widely supported by the public.

However, any reform has its opponents. Some schools have more teachers than students and there is some resistance when we talk about the need for change. Drunk drivers learn that they can no longer take care of the problem with a bribe. We have officials who

make a living shuffling papers from one desk to another, but who do not care about the rights of citizens. So the Government is faced with many challenges, but we are determined to follow our chosen path to the end.

I have to admit that today, for too many Moldovan citizens, a good life is possible only after the departure of Moldova. But Moldova is *actually* changing. Also people's attitudes change.

There is a new determination in our society to change the country, to become a Central European democracy and part of the European Union.

We are aware that we will not become a Member State of the EU this year or the next, or even the year after. But it is the path we have chosen for our country and which we will follow. To achieve this goal, we will need to greatly improve the economy and the justice system. We are not daunted by the scale of the task. We are aware that joining the EU will only be possible if we prove ourselves to be a reliable partner.

The first step towards the membership will be made next year, when the European Union and Moldova are to sign an association agreement as well as a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement. This in turn will mean a clear European outlook for the Republic of Moldova.

The progress which we note on the way to integration with the European Union provides for all our citizens, regardless of the language they use and regardless of whether they live on the left or on the right bank of the Dniester, with additional assurance that their rights will be respected. This also applies to all national minorities who live in the Republic of Moldova. I would like to emphasize that today all the Moldovan citizens who speak Polish form an integral part of our society – we respect their language and traditions recognizing their contribution to the development of the Republic of Moldova.

The basic condition for membership in the European Union is respecting the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Part of our activities undertaken during our preparation for the integration is to strengthen the rule of law and to create a strong and independent judicial system which is fearless and uncorrupted when opposing abuse, regardless of where it occurs.

Also, our mass media are more developed and our politics more mature.

In our desire to become a member of the EU, we have built and will continue to build a state based on democracy and respect for human rights, a country with the rule of law.

Let me turn now to the economic imperatives that determine our desire for greater European integration and joining the European Union.

"More Europe" for Moldova means more jobs, more competition, more investments and a greater hope for the future.

Moldova is a small country with a small economy, but at the same time we have been engaged in trade. The ratio of our trade to GDP is over 90%. Commerce is the lifeblood of our economy. Food in the stores, gas in the kitchens, medicines in the pharmacies - it all depends on trade.

And the integration with the EU – "More Europe" – means a more competitive trade. It means more and better protection of our consumers against monopolies.

"More Europe" means a bigger and better choice of suppliers in terms of quality and price.

"More Europe" means a bigger and better access to goods and services that meet the highest standards.

And "More Europe" again means that Moldova can be competitive for investments. As part of the largest market in the world, we can become a significant destination for capital from countries such as France, Ireland, Germany, Hungary, Romania, and, of course, Poland.

And the investments will mean better and better paid jobs and new incentives for our citizens who have left our country after regaining independence to return home.

In fact, I am firmly convinced that if we make an important step towards European integration which would be the introduction of free mobility of people in the visa-free Schengen zone, the medium-length result would not be the abandonment of Moldova by even more citizens. I expect their significant return to Moldova, because people will know that they can come back without losing the right to stay and work in other countries.

In this process, Poland has been and remains a friend of Moldova, through ongoing support in the cooperation process.

Indeed, it is right to say that Poland was the driving force of the Eastern Partnership: this is an indicator of the important role it plays in Europe.

The Eastern Partnership was beneficial for Moldova, as it has placed a challenge before us. We had to work hard to meet the requirements of the European Union.

When I hear more and more statements that Moldova is a champion for the Eastern Partnership, I feel very proud. Proud of the effort put forth by all of our citizens in order to fulfill our promises. Proud of the fact that we have done the job successfully.

What's more, I am proud that we can show all our European partners that the Republic of Moldova can be reliable and keeps its promises.

When we talk about Europe, we do not want charity or adjusting the rules to our advantage. We do not count on the pity of Europeans, but we do not want them to remain indifferent to our problems either.

We are simply asking what principles we should follow. Therefore, I believe that our integration with the European Union is essential, and in due time we will be capable of becoming members of the EU, with the full support of the other members.

Moldova makes promises only if it can deliver on them and we promise that we will be a country that works hard and plays by the rules.

A few decades ago, our countries were united in a military pact in Europe that was divided by violence. We fought together, but today no one has any reason to feel threatened by our strengthened and renewed pact.

Today, Europeans do not have to and cannot unleash wars to solve their problems. Instead of fighting against each other, we should work together for the common good. And no one is aware of the importance of this aspect more than the Poles.

The Europe characterized by spheres of influence, superpowers, mass deportations, gulags and military borders is over. In its place we are building a new continent, inspired by the glory of our common history – democracy, literature and enlightenment – dimmed by our common suffering during the occupation, aggression and totalitarianism.

Europe is a continent where all citizens are valued and where everyone will be able to use their talents.

Poland is and will be a leader in the construction of this new European home.

And Moldova, as a full member of the EU, will be a valuable partner and a friend to all.

Dear friends,

Your event is named after Vaclav Havel, one of the most visionary characters in Europe in recent decades – the "champion" of the fight for democracy and human rights and also of the European unification. Therefore, to finish, I would like to quote Vaclav Havel, who said that "the process of European integration should be continued, since it is of fundamental, or even existential importance for the whole world, not only for the Europeans."

Therefore I am asking you, when you graduate from this great educational institution – the College of Europe – not to forget, even for a moment, that the attainment of this vision – building an integrated Europe – is not yet complete. And it is our job, duty, to continue the efforts of European integration, which has brought Europe so many decades of peace, democracy and prosperity.

Thank you.