

**Speech by Mrs Ewa Ośniecka-Tamecka  
Vice-Rector of the College of Europe  
Start of the Academic Year 2019 – 2020  
Natolin campus, 4 September 2019**

Dear Colleagues

Dear Students

Welcome to the College of Europe Natolin campus, the year of the Promotion patron, Hannah Arendt.

As Vice-Rector of the College of Europe and the head of the Natolin campus for 12 years, it is always a great pleasure to speak at this meeting which begins our academic year.

I always delight in seeing so many new faces, as well as the familiar faces of my colleagues.

Every year on this day a new chapter in the history and life of Natolin starts.

Later today you will learn from my colleagues how we intend to support you here during your studies.

At Natolin we are proud to say that you, the students, are at the centre of our activities. We want you to be prepared for your future careers, to start working on relevant ideas and to be skilled to take concrete steps to put them into effect. That is why our offer to you is divided into two parts: on the one hand there is the European Interdisciplinary Studies Programme on the external and

internal dimensions of the EU and on the other hand the programme of extracurricular activities, with the focus on community and professional development.

Of course for us, the staff, there is the challenge of serving a completely new community of students every year. We have a great deal of experience. But every year is different. Not just because you are all different individuals. But also because expectations and experiences change, the world changes and we all change with it. The job market changes, the skills you will need change.

**However, I have to say that adjusting to this is an immensely rewarding aspect of our work, even if it requires considerable adaptations and creativity on our side.** But most of all, we are aware that we, staff *and* students, need to work together with the aim of building a supportive community where we can all fulfil our aspirations and potential.

That's really the essence of how **we** try to do things here at Natolin. We all have our different roles, responsibilities and perspectives, but at the same time we are in this together. This is a joint enterprise and every year we have to build it **anew**. To succeed in this we, students and staff, need to be completely on board from day one.

*Dear Students*

Needless to say, your main reason for coming here is, quite rightly, to study. You have chosen a very demanding and enriching programme of European Interdisciplinary Studies, which will mean long hours of study, papers and deadlines, study trips, a master thesis written by May and two sessions of exams. A huge amount to fit into 10 months!!

In this sense the academic experience may seem to you a little harsh. Just as in regular employment, you will be expected to turn up when you are required to do so, meet deadlines, and contribute fully to the programme. The Director of Studies will be strict, but she and all the professors and assistants will do all they can to help you in your commitment. **However**, in the end it will be up to you to make the biggest contribution.

Dear Students,

Natolin is not just about the academic programme. This is more than just a study experience. Here you will have the opportunity to contribute and grow as members of a unique working community that goes beyond the limits of the curriculum. You will have the chance to work in building the community through the student representation system. You will be able to set up clubs and societies and play a leading role in them. You will have a rich programme of professional skills development to take advantage of. You will have a tantalizing menu of languages you can take lessons in. There will be many high level extracurricular events organised by the two academic chairs. From time to time you will be honoured by visits from major academic figures, seasoned diplomats and high ranking politicians and officials.

All of this activity will form a vital part of your year here and will underline what it means to be a Natolinian.

But a word of caution in all this. You will need to be selective. At the beginning of the year there is usually a lot of enthusiasm to get involved in as much as possible. And this is very good! However, in thinking about the many extra activities, think first about where you want to be in 10 months' time. In such a short time quality will matter more than quantity. By focusing your efforts you will make a bigger positive impact on the community.

**Because building and contributing to the community will be one of your most important tasks here.** And probably it will be the most difficult.

It's easy to talk about community, about things like unity in diversity. It's much harder to truly experience it and test your openness and your ideals 24 hours a day. But here at Natolin you will actually have to live in a truly diverse group of 133 students representing 38 nationalities. And not only is the student body diverse, but the staff body is too.

All of us, staff and students, we come here with our own individual expectations, hopes and dreams, and at the same time we are also conditioned by our experiences and cultures. This affects everything, not least our understanding of words and concepts, like "community and diversity", or "rights and responsibilities." Things are complicated further by the fact that most of us have to work in languages other than our native ones. In addition, those for whom these languages are native may assume that all the nuances of what they say are understood, when sometimes they are not. We will all have

to work hard to make sure that we are understood and that we understand others.

And of course none of this means that we have to agree with each other. We will sometimes, *even often*, disagree. There may be conflicts. This is normal! But we should be able to disagree respectfully and we must work hard to resolve our disagreements and learn from them. We should be ready to change our points of view thanks to the insights and experiences of others.

**This is our task together this year: to build and to grow as a community of *true unity in diversity*.**

Dear Students,

In a short while we will break for tea and coffee in the foyer.

But before we do this, I just want you to pause and think about the place where you are now, about Natolin itself, where you will spend the next ten months of your lives together.

Natolin, for those of us who have been here for many years, has its *genius loci*: its distinctive atmosphere and spirit, which we have come to know. It means that it is truly a special place very close to our hearts.

During your time here you will have the extraordinary privilege to live in a forested nature reserve of 120 hectares. Thus do not be surprised to see fallen trees in the park. It doesn't mean that we don't care, but it is because these age-old trees pass their days here peacefully.

This beautiful park came into being in the 17th century and was part of the Royal Estate of Wilanów. The Natolin Palace was built in 1780 and soon after it became the property of the noble Potocki family. The name Natolin was adopted as a tribute to the daughter of Aleksander Potocki, Natalia, who died at the age of 29 at her home in Sławuta, today in Ukraine. The Potocki family gave to Poland many eminent citizens. One of them was Stanisław Kostka Potocki, an outstanding representative of the Polish enlightenment and the first ever minister of public education in Europe.

In the 20th century during the Second World War the Natolin estate became a headquarters for Poland's invaders, Nazi Germany and then the Soviet Union. During Communist times it served as the residence of that regime's president and later its prime ministers.

More happily, here free Poland's first Prime Minister, the late Tadeusz Mazowiecki, composed his first address to the Polish Parliament in 1989, after the fall of the communism. And it was here that in 1992 the Polish government developed the vision of inviting the College of Europe to set up its campus, which is called now, the Natolin Campus. It was the second campus of the College of Europe.

The first was set up in 1949 in Bruges to create a place where young Europeans could build bridges between them after the terrible experience of the Second World War and start to lay the foundations of the future EU; while Natolin's mission was to overcome the deep divisions left after the end of the Cold War.

The mission of the college of Europe now, with its two campuses, is to create a place where young people studying and living together under one roof are equipped to imagine and build a united future for their and coming generations.

**So, dear students, by coming to Natolin you join us and all your predecessors in pursuing this continuing mission.**

And as you know, the College of Europe is a prestigious institution with a reputation which attracts the finest teachers, experts and speakers. It has among its alumni leaders in the government, public and private sectors. It is the sum of all its alumni, of its current staff and students, and is an on-going adventure where every member contributes. Every one of us has the responsibility to represent the Institution with dignity and pride.

Dear Students

To return to what I said earlier. You are here to learn from your studies and from each other, working together, building our community, to make the year as successful as possible. You are here to learn how to take inspiration from each other.

Today you become part of the Natolin College Community, our shared Community, our History and our Reputation.

All this, I hope, will strengthen you, transform you and, with the tools that we provide you with, help you to realize your dreams. Remember, your future lies in your hands.

Make good use of this time here at the College of Europe!

We the staff will be with you on this journey during the next ten months.

All the best!