

**Speech by Mrs Ewa Ośniecka-Tamecka**  
**Vice-Rector of the College of Europe**  
**Official Opening of the Academic Year 2018 – 2019**  
**Natolin campus**  
**25 October 2018**

*Commissioner,*

*Excellencies,*

*Honoured Guests,*

*Professors,*

*Colleagues,*

*Dear Students of the Manuel Marín Promotion,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I would like to warmly welcome you to the Natolin Campus of the College of Europe and to the Opening Ceremony of the Academic Year 2018 – 2019 of the Promotion Manuel Marín – for many years a member of the European Commission, as Vice-President and also Acting President, and a former Speaker of the Spanish Congress of Deputies. And, especially, I would like to welcome you, Commissioner Navracsics, and thank you for joining us as our guest of honour and keynote speaker.

For almost 70 years the College of Europe has been linked to the process of European integration. During that time the European project has had many huge successes, but it has also gone through a series of crises which have sometimes appeared to have no solutions. Nonetheless, it is always important to remember that many of these crises have, in fact, been resolved. Indeed, one of the lessons of the history of the EU is that, at first glance, the solutions to problems are not apparent or may seem too difficult to achieve. The present time, with its crises of the Eurozone, migration, institutions, and Brexit is no different.

It is at times like this that we need to look to the example of those who have come before us. To the example of those who started building the European construction in the ruined and unnaturally divided continent after the Second World War, or those who – since then – have led the development of the European project. The problems they encountered were often greater than those we face today, and the solutions were no more obvious. And it took, and takes, and will take, people of knowledge and wisdom based on experience, as well as imagination and bravery to search for the solutions *and* to carry them out.

Former European Commissioner Manuel Marín was one of these people. That is why he is the Patron of this academic year at the College of Europe.

Manuel Marín, who died prematurely last year, was a man who was able to discern solutions that were not obvious and to create lasting and meaningful success for his country, Spain, and for the European Union.

But when he was in his childhood and youth it was not at all apparent that he would ever have this chance. He grew up in an isolated Spain under dictatorship. But, like many of his generation, he refused to accept that state of affairs. He became interested in European integration and imagined a European and democratic future for Spain. In 1972 he started study abroad at the University of Nancy. Then, in 1973, he became a student at the College of Europe in Bruges. Afterwards, in 1974, he worked at the College as an academic assistant, before carrying out an internship in Brussels. I can

well imagine the effect these experiences had on the young Marín as a citizen of a country on the outside of the European Communities and still a dictatorship. I am sure that the many problems he must have faced in getting his voice heard and understood will have strengthened him for the tasks ahead. And they were very difficult tasks.

Returning to Spain, Manuel Marín joined the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, then still operating underground. Then, after the death of Franco in 1975, he became fully engaged in the transition to democracy. He was elected a member of the Spanish Parliament in 1977, in the first free elections in Spain since 1936. In 1982, he became the Spanish Secretary of State for Relations with the European Communities. In this role, he took on the task of Chief Negotiator of the Spanish accession to the Communities, until June 1985 when the Treaty of Accession was signed.

Spanish membership of the European Union may seem natural today, but in the early 1980s it took a particular mix of tenacity, wisdom, knowledge, political sensitivity and technical mastery to manage these famously tough negotiations. Not discouraged by difficult odds, Manuel Marín achieved his aims, which were probably beyond the imagination of many others. Similarly, only a few years later, Eastern Europeans - including, Commissioner, you and me - we started our difficult journey to become members of the European Communities. And we both know from personal experience how hard that was. And we both know how difficult it was for many to imagine that it could succeed!

Manuel Marín's experience prepared him well for the important task he would face in the first year of his next appointment as a Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for Social Affairs, Education and Employment, a post he held from 1986 to 1988. In this role, he was charged with convincing the European Community member states to create and fund a new scheme for trans-European educational exchange, what came to be called the Erasmus Programme.

It may seem obvious to us now that such a scheme for educational and cultural exchange should exist and be funded by the European Union. However, this was not the case back in the late 1980s. Then, there were many in Europe who resisted such an idea. They did not want to give political support to this project. It seemed to be too expensive. Indeed, it seemed that Commissioner Marín would have to withdraw his proposal altogether. But, in the end, he won the backing of the member states in 1987. Erasmus has been renewed ever since with literally millions of young Europeans benefitting from it. It has laid the foundations for the creation of a European community of higher education. It has helped forge a meaningful European identity to sit alongside the national identities of generations of Europeans. Manuel Marín can truly be said to be one of the founding fathers of Erasmus: one of the most successful projects of European integration.

I am proud to say that now the College of Europe, with its two campuses, is described in the Erasmus+ programme as one of the 'designated institutions pursuing an aim of European interest.' And this reflects very well our beginnings and our longstanding mission as an institution. Indeed, we have been a champion of European education since 1949, even before the European institutions were established!

In the 1940s, after the destruction and pain of the Second World War, there were a few visionaries who started to think about the means to create a lasting basis for peace and unity in Europe. Famously, they met at The Hague Congress of 1948. One idea they had was to employ the power of education to help build the conditions for lasting cooperation and peace. Out of this was born the idea to create a College of Europe, a place where young Europeans could come together under one roof to study ideas for future European integration and create among themselves a new truly European *esprit de corps*.

In 1949, when the College of Europe in Bruges opened its doors, it was not obvious that its aims could succeed. Many of those who came to the College in those early days would have wondered how it would be possible for them to work together and imagine a common future together. And

why? Because only a few years before young Europeans had been training to kill one another! However, it turned out to be possible and this small institution prepared the first young pioneers who would work for the European project. And since that time we have been constantly linked to the history of European Integration. This seems obvious and natural to us now, but then it was the stuff of idealists and dreamers. Yes, they were idealists and dreamers, but they worked hard on concrete solutions and they succeeded. However, the European adventure was still unfinished.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, at the end of the 80s, the chance arose to reintegrate the unnaturally divided continent. Once again, the College of Europe knew how to respond. Following an invitation from the Polish Government, it chose this part of Europe to set up a new campus: a campus for young Europeans, this time from all parts of Europe, East and West, North and South. And thus, Natolin came into being. Its aim at that time was to help build the experience and knowledge necessary to achieve the goal of reintegration of the whole continent. The success of this mission was not at all obvious in 1992, when Natolin opened its doors. At that time, even though the Cold War had ended, Europe was still divided: physically, economically and, most of all, in people's minds and hearts. But this did not deter us! And we succeeded. Indeed, some years after, many Natolin graduates took part in the process of negotiations for the big wave of enlargements and, I should add, they were on both sides of the table.

And by the way, it was Manuel Marín who, as the then President of the Administrative Council of the College of Europe, signed the agreement with the European Commission and the Polish Government establishing the Natolin campus of the College of Europe. A copy of the agreement with his signature has been hanging in the foyer here since 1994. So it was to our great joy that many years later, in 2009, his daughter, Paloma, became a student here in Natolin.

*Commissioner,*

*Dear Students,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Here in Natolin we have over 130 students coming from 40 nationalities and almost 100 academics and other teachers coming from around 30 nationalities. This means that the College of Europe Natolin is not just a place where we simply teach European integration and the relations of the EU with its neighbours and the wider world. It is much more than that. It is a place where we truly experience the joys and challenges of living in a complex community of many cultures and outlooks. Still living together under one roof, where we study together and imagine: imagine a common future together.

Because of our European convictions, accumulated experience and tradition the College of Europe has a unique ability to adapt to the changing educational needs in Europe and for Europe. And we promise to build on our success, and go on educating generations of young Europeans able to deliver solutions to the new challenges still to be faced in the as yet unfinished European adventure.

And it is no exaggeration that our role as a mature institution of European education is in a large measure made possible by the Erasmus programme created all those years ago under the stewardship of Manuel Marín. This programme now has a superb champion in you, Commissioner Navracsics. You have been a champion who has embraced Erasmus+, who saw through the celebrations of its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, who supervised the preparations of its next mandate with a doubled budget, and who has advocated for the next programme to be ever more inclusive, to be democracy- and tolerance-enhancing, both in its design and experiences offered. This is why we are very honoured that you should have accepted our invitation to be the keynote speaker today at this official opening ceremony of the Academic Year 2018 – 2019, the Manuel Marín Promotion. We are looking forward very much to hearing from you about your vision for Erasmus and for the future of European Education.

*Dear students of the Manuel Marín Promotion,*

I wish you all success for the rest of the academic year and, of course, for your professional life after. We hope that the knowledge and experience gathered, the wisdom gained, the openness you offer to one another, will result in your being able to make lasting contributions to the next successes of European construction.

And please remember the education you receive here carries with it an obligation: an obligation to move societies forward.

My dear Maríneros: now it is your turn! Imagine Europe! Imagine your Europe! Imagine your world! Imagine your common future and *l'esprit du College* will strengthen you!

Maríneros: imagine – do it – and succeed!