I hope many of you have visited the Churchill War Rooms on Horse Guards Parade in the heart of London, tucked in between the two great British Ministries of State, the Foreign Office and the Treasury.

It contains the underground rooms from which Churchill and his Cabinet, ran the second world war, laid out as they would have been before a key meeting of the War Cabinet, maps and all.

The War rooms now house a brilliant interactive exhibition on the life of Winston Churchill. I took the 14 year old daughter of a friend there this summer. At the end of the visit she turned to me and said ‘Aunty Ali, that was better than EuroDisney!’ There is no higher compliment from a young teenager!

And there is so much in the life of Winston Churchill which appeals to young people and which I hope will continue to inspire the young people who study here at the College of Bruges. The obstacles he overcame – an unhappy home as a child, a difficult time at school, being arrested in South Africa, the disaster at Gallipoli, the years in the wilderness in the 1930s, the ‘black dog’ of depression. Truly he is an example of resilience, of believing in yourself, of picking yourself up and starting again. And thank goodness for the freedoms we enjoy today that he did.

The breadth of his interests is also striking and I hope also a model for young people to day. Another place I would recommend for a visit is Churchill’s home at Chartwell, just south of London, now in the care of the National Trust. It is a place which breathes the very personality of Churchill. But it is also full of paintings by Churchill himself. And full of the books he wrote - The World Crisis; A History of the English-Speaking Peoples; The Second World War; Marlborough: His Life and Times, and many others Boris Johnson has said that Churchill produced not just more words than Dickens, or more words than Shakespeare – but more words than Dickens and Shakespeare combined. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature “for his mastery of historical and biographical description as well as for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values.” And there is also a plaque on the wall around the kitchen garden that states ‘The greater part of this wall was built between the years 1925 & 1932 by Winston with his own hands'.

The College of Europe is of course in Belgium, and I meet many Belgians who remind me of all that Winston Churchill did during the Second World War to help liberate their
country. One of my early commemorations after my arrival here was to place a wreath at the Churchill memorial in Uccle in Brussels, on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Brussels in 1944. And I recently hosted a reception earlier this month for the Wiener Anspach Foundation – which links Oxford and Cambridge University and the ULB. One of its former chairmen told me that the last time he had been in the British Residence in Brussels was as a young man, 50 years ago, to sign the condolences book on the death of Winston Churchill.

Better scholars than I have argued about whether Churchill’s famous speech in 1946 proposing the building of a United States of Europe foresaw the UK as inside or outside that United States. What it is now clear is that the British people today see it as outside such a political construct, and my Government is taking the will of its people forward. But we in the UK are equally clear that, though we will no longer be in the European Union, we share Churchill’s commitment in the 1946 speech to making Europe ‘live and shine,’ and a place which is ‘happy and free, prosperous and safe.’

Rolling forward 71 years from 1946, in her Article 50 letter in March this year, one of Churchill’s successors, Prime Minister Theresa May said that the UK’s decision was ‘no rejection of the values we share as fellow Europeans. Nor was it an attempt to do harm to the European Union or any of the remaining member states. On the contrary, the United Kingdom wants the European Union to succeed and prosper. And we want a deep and special partnership, as the EU’s closest friend and neighbour, with the EU when we leave.’

In her speech in Florence on September 22 she said that her aim is that, ‘when this chapter of our European history is written, it will be remembered not for the differences we faced but for the vision we showed; not for the challenges we endured but for the creativity we used to overcome them; not for a relationship that ended but a new partnership that began.’

‘A partnership of interests, a partnership of values; a partnership of ambition for a shared future: the UK and the EU side by side delivering prosperity and opportunity for all our people.’

The College of Europe has done and will continue to do so much to take forward the flourishing of Europe and the European Union, and in particular through the training you provide for its future leaders. You develop in young people creativity and innovation, and the skills to see vision carried through into action.

For all these reasons, I am delighted that the College continues to honour Winston Churchill as one of its founding fathers by naming a room after him. I thank you.