

Dear Herman von Rompuy,

Dear Lord Mayer Philipp,

Dear Prime Minister Garibashvili,

Dear Prime Minister Yazeniuk,

Dear Laureates of the international Charlemagne Prize,

Excellencies,

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we have assembled here to laude one of the great European leaders of our time; a man of substance rather than of dominance; a man of determination but of quite moderation. His legacy will leave a lasting stamp on the high office he was the first to ever hold; an office, which is one of the most challenging one can imagine; leading a council of 28 heads of state or government; a man who fulfilled his task with as much skill and success as he produced little noise.

But in a deeper sense, by lauding him, we laude a higher good: the European ideal. We are doing this at his own request. He, himself, asked us not to speak about what he means for Europe, but what Europe means for us.

Is this not the best vindication and testimony of his service to Europe? By putting, even at such an occasion, this higher good ahead of his own recognition. By lauding the ideal Herman van Rompuy has dedicated his service to, we truly honor him.

I am grateful for this opportunity. I would like to thank Herman van Rompuy for this kind invitation. As much as our purpose today is to honor him, I feel honored to speak here myself. At this critical juncture of our history, this is a gracious signal of solidarity and support.

But in a deeper sense, his invitation to us also points to a fundamental truth: That here today, three prime ministers, from European countries still outside of the EU, pay tribute to the ideal of European unification, is in itself a testimony that this ideal remains unfinished work.

These days in the east of our common continent, we see a geopolitical struggle evolving – the like of which we thought not to witness in Europe again. This is not a struggle we have chosen for ourselves. But nor can we evade it.

For in a deeper sense, this is for us not a struggle for power and influence in our region by one side or another. It is first and foremost a struggle for the modernization of our countries. And it is more than that; it is a struggle in which our very future is at stake.

Esteemed Audience,

You ask what Europe means for us? I can answer in one word: A future. Not just any future. Not even just a better future. But a future at all.

Since our independence, we went through nearly two decades of decline and stagnation. For 20 years weak institutions, corruption and a rent-seeking economy stifled the country's development. For 20 years Moldova found itself nowhere between west and east without a development model of ourselves. More and more of our young and well-educated people left the country.

This situation is untenable. European integration is the hope that remains. European integration is nothing less than an existential question.

Today we are still struggling with the same problems. But since 2009, when the parties of today's coalition first came to power, we have made a clear choice for European integration. In this aim we must not hesitate, nor compromise.

Drawing back on European integration would be tantamount to risking long-term survival for some momentous de-escalation. In this respect it is still true what

Benjamin Franklin wrote two and a half centuries before, in another struggle, and on another continent: “They who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety“.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, it may be at the fringes of the European Union that the value of European integration is most obvious. It may be at the fringes of Europe that you find some of the most determined champions of European integration.

We defend Europe where it is most challenged today. We do this in a competitive environment, in which part our political forces are deeply split over the EU. And we do this in an environment of polarization and intimidation that leave many Moldovans unsettled and unsure.

But do not believe that Moldovans are less European - or less believing in European values – then any other European society.

What does Europe stands for? Equal rules for all; institutions that serve the good of the many instead of the interests of the few; a functioning market instead of privileges and monopolies; the rule of law instead of corruption, democracy instead of authoritarian rule.

As other Europeans, we cherish our own traditions. As other Europeans, we seek in Europe, not uniformity but union: A community of openness and plurality, a space of freedom and welfare: united by solidarity among nations instead by the domination of one over the other.

For us, the EU is like a distant mirror, displaying an idealized image of ourselves: an image of what we would be, rather than what we are. It is our hope for the future. But for many of us it also appears as a dream too good for us to be true, a fairy-tale rather than a future reality.

As far back as they remember and into the most recent times, our people went through too many hardships, and too many disappointments. And yes, again, many fear that European integration may just be idle talk and hollow promises.

I do not blame those of my fellow countryman, which thus have turned skeptical on European integration. I tell you: their skepticism will be gone as soon as they see they can believe in its reality. This time we must not and we will not fail them.

As Herman von Rompuy put it once: “to make a dream come true, you have to live the dream!”

The European dream is the dream we are aiming to live. In less than a month we are signing the Association Agreement with the European Union. This is an ambitious document taking our integration to an unprecedented level.

And yet, as President van Rompuy pointed out at his recent visit to Moldova, in his own careful wording: On our European journey the association agreement “is not the final goal”.

Esteemed audience,

In this magnificent city, and even more in the namesake of the prize to be presented today the ancient history of Europe meets its present, and its future. Through all the centuries spanning from the times of Charlemagne until today, Europe changed in many ways out of recognition. But through all its evolutions and revolutions, through its breaks and its diversity past and present transcends a common heritage and a common destiny.

We in Moldova, despite being heirs of our own long history and traditions, represent today still a future chapter of the European project. But being here does not feel like calling on a neighbor but like a homecoming and a reunion.

For being called to this homecoming today, I am moved and I am grateful to Herman von Rompuy.

Herman von Rompuy has set an example of leadership that has, I think fittingly, been described as *a force tranquille*. He performed his duties during some of the most challenging times in the history of the European Union. As *chef d'orchestre* his legacy can less be measured by any individual intonation, but by the melodic performance of the concert as a whole. I am sure that orchestrating such a concert requires stable nerves, a sense of humor and, first of all, also a sense for harmony.

Dear Herman van Rompuy,

Reading through your literary works gave me the impression that with respect to harmony, humor, and discipline your poetry and your politics are but different reflections of the same qualities.

I felt tempted to summarize my laudatio in a haiku poem myself. But in trying I learned that for all the simplicity and strictness of its measure, to prevail in this art requires quite more deep and comprehensive skill than European integration.

We honor here today a man in whom substance outmatches appearance; a man of great depth and subtlety, whose intentions have to be read as much in his gestures than in his statements.

It has been a truly generous gesture; letting here us three, from the new frontier of European integration, speak today on his behalf, as well as on ours. It is a gesture of a man who can be proud of many achievements in critical times, but puts himself behind the great idea he serves.

If it would not be for many other accomplishments, it would be for this spirit that he deserves this high award.