



ȘCOALA NAȚIONALĂ DE STUDII
POLITICE ȘI ADMINISTRATIVE

DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA

Guy Verhofstadt,

Chair of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
in the European Parliament

LAUDATIO

Laudatio by Ramona Manescu, politician and member of the European Parliament for Romania, for awarding the title of Doctor Honoris Causa to Guy Verhofstadt, former Belgian Prime Minister and member of the European Parliament.

Distinguished Rector,
Distinguished guests,
Dear members of the academic community,
Dear colleagues,

It is a great honor to hold this Laudatio at the occasion of the award of the title of a Doctor Honoris Causa by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration.

I have the privilege to present to you an exceptional politician, and one of Europe's most experienced leaders. Guy Verhofstadt, former Belgian Prime Minister, Member of the European Parliament, leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group (ALDE) and founder of the inter-parliamentarian federalist Spinelli Group, has distinguished himself by an outstanding political career, by promoting innovative and daring ideas for the evolution of the European Union.

Let me begin by saying a few words about Guy Verhofstadt's life and great achievements.

Guy was born in 1953, and attended school and university in Ghent, where he studied the law. In 1972, he became President of the Liberal Flemish Students' Union in Ghent and, four years later, was elected as a City Counselor there. He professed as an attorney at law at the Bar of Ghent, but keen to follow his interest in national politics, Guy went on to take a number of high profile posts including Political Secretary to Willy De Clercq, National President of the Party for Freedom and Progress (PVV), an MP in the House of Representatives, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Budget, a Senator, and National President of the PVV and National President of the Flemish Liberals and Democrats (VLD).

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In July 1999 he became the first liberal Prime Minister of Belgium and also, a European visionary. He served as the 47th Prime Minister from 1999 to 2008. He was also a president of the EU Council (the second half-year in 2001). Since 2009 he has served as a Member of the European Parliament where he pursued his interests in European politics, he is the leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group (ALDE) after winning the unanimous support of the members, and founded the inter-parliamentarian federalist Spinelli Group. He is a member of the Club de Madrid, an independent organization of more than 80 former democratic statesmen who work to promote democratic governance and leadership worldwide. Since 2013 he is also Chairman of European Institute of Public Administration's Board of Governors. Furthermore, he has successfully harmonized his highly intensive professional life with a fine and balanced personal life, for he is well married and has two children.

I truly admire his remarkable work, his ideas, and his endeavours to have a stronger and evolving Union. Since I myself was a member of the European Parliament, I am inspired by his actions, his speeches, his valuable contributions. Let me present some of his most recent motions in the Parliament - Motion for a resolution on strengthening European democracy in the future EMU; Motion for a resolution on the situation in Turkey; Motion for a resolution on the review of the Irish Presidency including the MFF agreement; Joint motion for a resolution on the political agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020; Motion for a resolution on the crisis in Egypt; Joint motion for a resolution on the situation in Syria; Joint motion for a resolution on migratory flows in the Mediterranean.

I also wish to remind that he has had a valuable contribution through his proposed reforms to the Lisbon Treaty within the new Fundamental law of the European Union, a project developed along with the Spinelli Group and the German Think Tank Bertelsmann Stiftung. Some of Guy Verhofstadt's visionary advances in EU integration are as follows: - the EU is defined as a federation of member states; EU countries are obliged to respect the "values of the EU"; the European Commission becomes the EU government, while the Council where member countries sit becomes a second chamber of Parliament; the Commission is responsible to both chambers (the European Parliament and the Council); the Council and the Parliament obtain the right of limited legislative initiative; the rotating presidency is abolished; the number of Commissioners is reduced, the Commission President decides the commissioners' nominations; some MEPs are elected in pan-European electoral districts, on the basis of transnational lists; the Eurozone gets a separate budget; a new category of "Associated member state" is created; the ECB powers are enhanced; mutualisation of debt becomes possible on the basis of strict budget discipline; unanimity for treaty change is no longer required.

Since the outburst of the crisis in the European Union, Guy Verhofstadt has been actively involved in identifying the most feasible solutions for consolidating the European project. He has been one of the leading politicians promoting the federal Europe as a

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means of social and economic recovery, and, also, as a way of coping with the EU's democratic deficit. In his vision, a federal Europe is the most comprehensive response to the financial crisis, as it "means more than a discussion on policy, it means you build a real European government, a European democracy". Furthermore, he has been among the first EU politicians pleading for a truly united Europe, which also includes Greece, as, in his own words, "abandoning Greece to its own devices may be tempting but would be catastrophic for the credibility of the remaining members, undermining the very essence of a single currency zone underpinned by the collective economic and political will." Noteworthy, in his public discourse, Guy Verhofstadt has always emphasized the idea of European solidarity as an important building block of the European project, premising the emergence of a genuine European public sphere that would be able to stimulate a true sense of belonging to the EU, a sort of European "we-feeling". In fluid times, when several giants, such as the BRIC states, are on raise, federalism, unity and solidarity represent the EU's key positioning advantages. Only by developing these strengths, could the European Union act as a powerful political actor in a globalized and ever dynamic world.

As Verhofstadt wrote in a letter to *The Economist*, "there are two ways of reacting to the situation we are in. One is to become cynical and prepare the funeral pyre for Europe's economy. The other is to try and change the hearts and minds of both the politicians and the people." I strongly believe that we should all strive for change and get inspired from his solutions and ideas.

Since this is an occasion of receiving an award, allow me to introduce to you some of Verhofstadt's most distinguished national and foreign honours for his activity - Grand Cordon of the Order of Leopold (Belgium, 2008); Grand Cross of the Order of the Crown (Belgium, 2007); Grand Cross of the Order of Honour (Greece, 2005); Grand Cross of the Order of the White Rose of Finland (2004); Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland (2004); Grand Cordon of the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit (2003); Grand Cross of the Order of the Dannebrog (Denmark, 2002); Grand Cross of the Royal Order of the Polar Star (Sweden, 2001); Grand Cross of the Order of Isabella the Catholic (Spain, 2000); and Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic (1986).

Last, but not least, I want to emphasize the influence that Guy Verhofstadt has on EU studies and policies through important contributions, courageous and visionary analysis and books that have received recognition in the academic life. In addition to his duties as a politician, Guy published a number of well-known books that bring new perspectives for Europe including *The United States of Europe* (2006), *The New Age of Empires* (2008), *Emerging from the Crisis: How Europe can Save the World* (2009), and *For Europe!: Manifesto for a Postnational Revolution in Europe* (2012). I believe that his works are a required reading for anyone who is interested in Europe.

Guy Verhofstadt is not only an exceptional politician whose contributions lead to very important changes and supported the goal of ensuring the evolution of the European Union, but also a great intellectual that helped all of us understand the prospects of the

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European Union, the crisis and its challenges, the solutions and choices available for EU's future. He most certainly has an outstanding place among distinguished European intellectuals supporting the evolution towards the United States of Europe. This is one of the reasons his work attracts so much interest in a time when the European dream seems to be fading under the burden of a long and difficult crisis.

Even though Verhofstadt performs an incisive critique of the Union, he is also one of its most important visionaries. It is my belief that a great leader can clearly identify the problems, indicate the weak points, admit the mistakes and come with exceptional solutions, strategic visions and above all, a strong call for action.

We can only admire his initiatives to promote and support cooperation, federalism, common benefits, legitimacy, and the prevalence of European interests and politics over the national plan. From the very beginning, Guy Verhofstadt has had a vision for Europe. Ever since he initiated the Laeken-process in the Council, which was supposed to lead to a European Constitution, he wanted more than a Constitution, he wanted the evolution of EU into the United States of Europe. Some of his contributions and proposals ensured the base for a federation, such as a common army, a common EU tax, people's involvement in electing the president of the Commission, or the Council's meetings streamed online in real time. He emphasized the need to have a common socio-economic policy in order to have a strong common currency, and most importantly, the need to build a genuine political union in order to ensure both the integration and partnership among states.

Through his visionary ideas, through his critical thinking, through his much inspired actions, Guy Verhofstadt has constantly demonstrated his commitment towards a bright future for the European Union.

I believe that all these outstanding achievements are enough arguments for the honour that the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration receives today by welcoming such an illustrious figure into our academic community.

I will conclude by underlining once more that Guy Verhofstadt is a great visionary who will inspire many generations with his views on Europe, and by awarding him the Doctor Honoris Causa title, we proudly invite him to join our academic community and we hope that our collaboration will only grow deeper from now on.

It is a privilege that you are here. Thank you very much!

Ramona Mănescu
Minister of Transport, Romanian Government

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