

Thank you for this recognition to the University of Potsdam and particularly to the Chair of War Studies to encourage students to give the best of themselves.

I am also very grateful for the effort made by the academic and administrative staff of both University of Potsdam and University College Dublin during the hard times we've been through.

For many months, professors and classmates have almost been our single contact with the outside world. Our interactions through Zoom classes have given some aspect of normality to our daily lives.

In the end I feel we managed to enjoy the perks of the programme, here in Potsdam but also in Dublin, although I am very well aware that this has involved many headaches from your side. You have always shown real dedication and even devotion to teaching and doing research and that is really encouraging for us students, specially under unique circumstances.

During these days, nobody questions the importance of studying war history or foreign policy. Since February this year, people come to us asking for answers as we are all experiencing that the return of war to Europe has direct consequences on our lives, welfare systems, the energy supply and food security. Indeed, God gave physics the easy problems, therefore the floor is ours. Our field has gained momentum, and we shouldn't miss it. I here encourage the alumni to stay in touch, share ideas and give a hand when needed. We have the opportunity to revise the past to shape the present for a better future. We have a lot to offer to our societies, in whichever country it is, from Vietnam to the US.

Last but not least, I take the opportunity to address myself to the newcomers, to encourage you to raise your hand, sit at the Mensa with the people that you usually don't chat with and share thoughts and experiences. Because I believe that the greatest advantage of this programme is that there won't be two similar cohorts. And you, with your academic, professional and national backgrounds will make the syllabus by choosing the topics of your interest, which will be presented to your classmates, sometimes for the first time, as it has happened to me many times.

This program has meant to me a safe place to share ideas without the fear of being judged, a space where you can argue anything, as long as it can be backed with arguments. And I hope this bond doesn't end here, that this is not a goodbye but a *bis bald*, and that we can come every year and catch up on our projects in a friendly atmosphere.

I see this award as a compromise not to give up, to keep the curiosity alive, not to go with the mainstream even if I'm the only one who disagrees, and to always try to do better. I am not going to lie, it has been tough at times. But challenges give the sweetest taste when the day comes.

Here today we are celebrating, seeing old friends and wishing the best for the ones who take over. It feels like yesterday when I was sitting there during my first day, looking around at the faces of my new colleagues, wondering whether I had made the right call. Today I must say I couldn't be happier with that decision and prouder of belonging to this institution, which is way more than four walls. All of you, whatever made you choose to be here today, cheers to that.

*Vielen Dank.*