



# Universiteit Leiden

Your excellencies, Mr. President, Mr. Minister, Mr. Ambassador, *Mijnheer de burgemeester*, *Mijnheer de Rector Magnificus*, dear guests, dear colleagues and students – ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Rick Lawson, I am dean of the Law School of Leiden University. It is a great honour, and a great pleasure, to welcome you here in the *Groot Auditorium*, the Great Hall of Leiden University. I welcome you here both on behalf of Leiden University, its *Europa Instituut* and the Embassy of Ukraine in the Netherlands.

Mr Poroshenko, ladies and gentlemen, we are most grateful that you are willing to join us today. We are fully aware that you have a busy schedule, and that you carry great responsibilities. You lead the largest country wholly in Europe with more than 44 million inhabitants – a country with a long and rich history, a country that finds itself today in a period of turmoil. And then you also carry the huge responsibility to provide the world with chocolate; one of my colleagues was in Ukraine last week, and this is the only piece left of the serious quantities of Roshen chocolate that she carried back to Leiden!

Mr Poroshenko, your excellencies,

As I mentioned before, we find ourselves in the *Groot Auditorium*, the Great Hall of Leiden University. This place has been the very heart of our university for more than 400 years. It is here that Sir Winston Churchill received an honorary doctorate shortly after the Second World War. It is here that my predecessor prof. Cleveringa protested, in the early days of the Second World War, against the dismissal of his Jewish colleagues by the Nazi occupying forces. As a result, the students called for a strike, and the Nazi's proceeded to close down the university. It was only after the liberation, in 1945, that the university opened its gates again.

For us it was a defining moment, a moment that made clear for once and for all that freedom of opinion, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, non-discrimination and respect for the human dignity of all are the core values of our university. Values that are shared widely today, luckily, in all countries of our continent.

Mr. President,

Prof. Cleveringa held his famous lecture on 26 November 1940, and yesterday we had a ceremony on this very place to pay tribute to his courage. We do so by inviting a guest speaker. So yesterday we had a very inspiring lecture by Mr. Donner, the vice-president of our Council of State.

Two years ago our guest speaker was prof. Timothy Snyder of the University of Yale. He is a specialist of the Second World War as it developed in Central and Eastern Europe – the territories to which he refers as the ‘bloodlands’. Because it was in these territories, including the territories of your great nation, that most people died, that repression was harsh and merciless – actually much harsher than it was in our part of the continent – , and that horrors occurred which are well beyond our imagination.

... “beyond our imagination”. I believe it may be difficult for us, in the West, to fully understand the situation that your country is in today. In this part of the continent we have not war for 70 years. We are more prosperous than ever before. We were born and raised in democracies governed by the rule of law. We enjoy free travel, we have access to the latest in technology, fashion – we can even obtain Roshen chocolate!

In these circumstances, where freedom and wealth are taken for granted, one may easily forget that this is not a natural situation. One may easily neglect the institutions and conditions that are necessary to maintain and preserve our open societies.

But the horrible terrorist attacks in Paris have made one thing clear: security cannot be taken for granted. Freedom, our way of life, cannot be taken for granted. To maintain and to protect our way of life requires efforts and sacrifices, time and again. And perhaps, after “Paris”, we are better able to understand, to *feel*, the very difficult situation that your country finds itself in today.

This is why we are so grateful that you, Mr. President, are willing to join us today, and share with us your thoughts on European integration.

And with that, Mr. President, I should like to pass the word to my colleague, prof. Christophe Hillion who will introduce you to our audience.

But before giving him the floor, just a point of order. After your speech, Mr. President, there will be a short Q&A session with our students. This session will be moderated by my colleague prof. André Gerrits of the Faculty of Humanities. Finally the director of the *Europa Instituut*, prof. Stefaan van den Bogaert, will bring this ceremony to a close.

Thank you for your attention, thank you for coming to Leiden.