

**MESSAGE OF ACCEPTANCE FOR HONORARY
DOCTORATE AWARDED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF
BUCHAREST TO HRH FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL
DEVELOPMENT - 31ST MAY, 2014**

Mr. President, Rector, Ladies and Gentleman, I am so delighted, and greatly flattered, to be with you here today and to be among such a prestigious academic community within the Aula Magna of the University of Bucharest. I need hardly say how enormously honoured I am that you should have so generously considered awarding me with this Honorary Doctorate. It is even more generous of you bearing in mind that I have only been an annual visitor to your very special country since I was lucky enough to come here first in 1998.

Perhaps my warm regard for Romania is partly inherited for, as some of you may know, my great, great, great grandmother was Claudina, Countess Rhedey (my great grandmother, Queen Mary's, grandmother), and Queen Marie of Romania, who was my great grandfather, King George V's, first cousin (the granddaughter of Queen Victoria!) was another of my relations who, of course, developed a special bond of love and affection with the people of Romania. In addition to this family connection, I have long been deeply conscious of the appalling suffering, sacrifice and privations visited upon the people of Romania through not only two World Wars, but also the long post-war Communist dictatorship.

This has given me a profound admiration for the enduring resilience and indomitable spirit of all Romanians rooted, no doubt, in the rich cultural, religious and ethnic identity that has helped to make this country such a unique part of Europe. Romania has become closer to my heart for these reasons, but over and beyond these connections I have come to love Romania for its unique and unspoilt natural beauty, its fascinating patchwork of landscapes and rural communities, each with their own diverse customs, together with the astonishingly rich and varied biodiversity of a countryside that is truly a European and international treasure.

I believe there are few, if any, European countries that can claim such a wealth of meadowland of a High Nature Value that is host to the most extraordinary range of biodiversity – and this at a time when the world is suffering a catastrophic loss of species and entire ecosystems. These meadows and the surrounding forests are of global, not just European, significance and I hope you don't mind me stressing that within Europe we are, I am afraid, honour-bound to ensure that they are preserved for future generations.

As perhaps an indication of the longevity of my interest in Romania, I remember that in 1989 I spoke of my dismay at President Ceausescu's "wholesale and wanton destruction of his country's cultural and human heritage"; his aims to transform Romania's rural environment into urban collectives designated as "agro-industrial complexes". As I said then, the extraordinary cultural, architectural and agricultural diversity of Romania is not only part of her natural wealth, but a possession of inestimable value to all of humanity.

However, even now, tragically, all too often the region's really remarkable historic architecture and rural settlements seem subject to piecemeal destruction – largely, it appears, through lack of information in the local areas. I don't somehow think I am alone in feeling how vitally important it is that this aspect of Europe's cultural heritage is preserved and I am delighted to have been able to offer my support to various organizations and activities in Romania that promote training courses and initiatives to develop and increase knowledge of rural skills to help stem this tide of destruction. As I travel around the country it is so sad to see the old way of life disappearing, and also so many jewels of meadowland, forest and historic architecture being destroyed, year by year. If I may say so, it seems such a mistake! For a period in Great Britain we made the same ghastly mistake, and we so lived to regret it; the loss of such a wealth of our nation's history and biodiversity, gone forever.

I have become very fond of your country over the last sixteen years and I hope and pray that Romania will be able to keep that which she still has; to keep things distinctly Romanian, and not throw everything away. In this regard, you surely have the example of both Italy and Switzerland to remind you that it is possible to be “modern” and at the same time to retain those traditional aspects of your long and proud heritage – precisely because they give meaning, cultural and spiritual continuity and, above all, a sense of true “belonging” in an age of increasing uncertainty and dislocation.

Romanians have much to be proud of, and this pride should lead you to do everything possible to protect your traditional way of life and historic architecture. Without these things a nation can become almost extinct. What I see being

created today so often has no roots and no meaning. But the historic architecture and associated landscapes I see all over the country are distinctly of Romania, and are such an immense asset.

From the richly ornamented houses of the Bucovina, the carved wooden homes of the Maramures, the wonderfully decorated dwellings of Oltenia, and the solid Saxon houses of Transylvania; all these places define you as a people. And why should this be of any importance? Because, if they are preserved they will bring huge financial benefits to your country in the future, just as has happened in Great Britain.

Your traditional architecture and way of life are things of which Romanians can be truly proud; to lose them would mean losing so much, not least your spiritual identity...

At the same time, of course, it is equally vital to ensure that whatever new development takes place in these unique landscapes pays due attention to cultural identity and well-tried principles. It would be a tragedy to lose that precious identity in a welter of inappropriate, mono-cultural ugliness that now seems to be spreading its meaningless corrosive way around much of the world – which is why, for instance, a project that I have heard about, to restore the citadel in Saschiz, apparently with Norwegian and Romanian backing, could be of such importance....

Likewise, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have striven over the past sixteen years to stress how important it is that the true value of these landscapes and their traditional rural communities is properly understood. It would be a terrible

irony if, just as the rest of Europe is realizing the urgent need to reinvigorate the rural management skills and the workforce that are required to build a resilient rural economy, for these to be lost in Romania. It is, it seems to me, of the utmost importance to support strategies for sustainable development in these threatened areas so that the rural population, the local councils and non-governmental organizations can launch initiatives to prevent the loss of this priceless environment. There are huge sums of money available from the E.U. to support rural development programmes, but the application of these funds has to be handled sensitively if they are not to destroy what they are expected to protect. I know that much work has recently been done in the establishment of the Rural Development Programme in Romania, and I do hope that it might still be possible to insert measures to assist the small-holders and young farmers, who are such an essential part of the rural economy, and perhaps particularly so in the mountainous regions and areas of High Natural Value...

Let me end, then, where I started, by saying what a very special privilege it is to have received this honorary doctorate from such an eminent University. I am deeply touched by so generous a gesture and can only hope, if nothing else, that I have in some small way been able to help contribute towards an understanding of the critical importance of Romania's ecological, cultural and rural inheritance – not just to Romania, or to Europe, but to the world at large. You have so much to cherish and so much to celebrate, but it must not be the celebration of a curious, if attractive, relic from a past age, but rather the appreciation of a legacy that will ensure the development of an economic model that is resilient to the challenges that will inevitably arise as we confront a loss of both natural capital and social/cultural capital, as well as the

severe ravages of climate change. In this, the world has much to learn from Romania, but above all else, knowing what we do, we have no choice other than to provide for the future survival of our children and grandchildren. Being now a grandfather myself, and bearing in mind my affection for this country and her people, I feel deeply for the future of all Romanian grandchildren and their unique cultural, spiritual and natural inheritance.

ENDS

Word Count: 1,460 words