

Dear Chairman of the Governors, governors and headmaster of the English College in Prague, dear Mr Urban, dear teachers, my fellow students, parents, ladies and gentlemen

It is a great privilege to be here with you today and a great honour to be entrusted with delivering the vote of thanks on behalf of the student body as we celebrate the completion of our studies at the ECP. The speech that Selma and I delivered at our Graduation Ball was unfortunately reduced by the poor acoustics to a very long 10 minutes of hardly understandable vowels and plenty of anxiety. Today, however, we have the privilege of being in a historic place, especially build to carry the sound of the human voice. And if Jan Hus managed to preach whole sermons here centuries before the invention of these (*points at the mike*), surely you will manage to hear me tonight.

Therefore, it is with great joy and gratitude, that I may firstly reflect, an activity that many of us perhaps came to despise while writing up our CAS and EEs, (reflect) on the ECP chapter of our lives that is now inevitably coming to an end. Secondly, today is also about giving thanks and there truly is so much to thank for. And thirdly, I'd like to encourage us to also look forward.

Dear friends, we have done it! This moment, which was just wishful thinking at the back of our minds for years is now a reality. Am I the only one who still struggles to comprehend the fact that the IB exams are behind us? Who felt that it was acutely not such a big deal? Right?

So, it was actually only a couple of weeks ago when we were exiting Spitalská and Sofia Petriv kicked Samuil for no apparent reason, that I realized that this is family. A particularly odd one I must say, but you don't build this kind of relationships overnight. The thing that struck me as I was reading through the speeches from previous Graduation Ceremonies, is just how much more did the previous year groups travel. Big names, like New York, Moscow and Paris. Well, we went to Krkonoše, and look, I think we managed to bond and have plenty of fun just fine. I only joined in Y3 so I can't speak from personal experience, but I heard that the ski trip with the Gavriněvs in 2017, as well as science lessons with Dr Brown, were a great start to the mysterious journey ahead in Y1. The second year came with yet more new people, which we got to know better during the adventures of the CCC trip as well as on the comfy coaches which lined the school corridors back then. In Y3, the house competitions and the ECAs, such as the debating club of Ms Collier, or the football games with Mr Gwillt, were running all at full speed, when suddenly, the pandemic completely changed everything. While we could stay in bed all the way till the start of the online lessons, or perhaps the whole day if we pretended that our camera isn't working, the quarantine also came with many challenges. Lack of friends, travelling and motivation was taking a toll on our health. The school was as adaptive and supportive as possible. The plenty of online house competitions, such as the online cultural olympiad, and the legendary online PE classes, helped us all to

get through that difficult season together. Apart from being forced to rethink the purpose of life, we learned the true value of community and that there is always a way as long as we stick together. Out of this isolation came new ideas, such as the now annual art competition for children from all around the country, and the online VHS Concert was also a great success. Teachers, students, egal, we all worked as a team. We were excited and freaked out at the same time to properly come back to school in Y5. We chose our IB subjects, and I am pretty sure that we remember the 2 years that followed perhaps too well. Time flies even faster once one jumps on the avalanche of IB assignments. The deadlines aside though, the IB encouraged us to deeper examine our academic interests. We also learned to take initiative and responsibility for ourselves and that we can be the masters of our destiny as long as we are willing to grab life by the horns and keep pushing forward.

Now moving to the thank yous. Luckily, we were not alone on that 6-year journey. The fact that we are here today is only thanks to all the amazing people who walked this journey with us. We want to celebrate these people tonight and where better to start than where it all started, with our parents. You paid for our studies despite the fact we daily declined the offer to passionately tell you all about how school was today. You put up with all the abbreviations of the IB like IO, IA work, well, more like AI work now. *(no we don't do that)* You put up with our ups and downs as well as with the ever-decreasing ability to speak our native tongue. And you made sure our dreams can indeed one day come true by pulling us out of bed even on the days we really didn't feel like it. We love you and we are so thankful to you. *(applause for parents)*

Moving from our families to the wider ECP family, our friends, the staff, the refractory, the KFC employees in Fenix, the line B metro drivers, etc. It is impossible to mention all the beautiful bonds and relationships that we have formed with one another, our teachers, and other members of staff over the course of our studies. We could talk about the everlasting smile of Ms Selbie, the Russian pexeso Olympics with Ms Pavkova, persistent checks on whether we are all right from Mr Baxter, or indeed more push-ups than pure perfection with Mr Stroughan. There is however a handful of people that can not go unmentioned tonight and that is our tutors. Aqua started with Ms Pavkova. *(applause)* You were like a mother to us, even before that motherhood had to be interrupted by the real one. Aqua was then handed over into the loving care of Mr Tognini *(applause)* who composed "a banger" tutor time playlist and brought us back on a cheerful note. The Terra tutor group also changed hands over the years. Both Mr Prietto *(applause)* and Mr Pugh *(applause)* took very good care of us and the games played on Christmas day will always be warmly remembered. Ignis will never forget the most delicious carrot cakes in the world made by Ms Baxter. *(applause)* And Ms Reardon *(applause)* was also keeping Ventus well fed, both physically with M&S goodies and mentally, with morning meditations. We want to thank our tutors, for always being there for us, for making us

feel at home in school and for ensuring we start each day with a smile on our faces. Thank you.

Another special group of special people is the upper school team, a club of elite IB individuals. *(applause)* Thank you for your support and guidance during times when we felt like the world was crashing down. We are so grateful that whenever we missed a deadline, you never failed to inform us, and our parents. When things got more serious in the end, you successfully convinced, well, most of us, that the next Friday really is the very last option to turn in our CAS and not fail the IB. Thank you that you trusted us and tolerated our continuation of reviving the last bell. Still-illegal unfortunately, yet still awesome. Thank you.

Now let me say a few words about our headmaster, he also will be dearly missed. It might look like he has the most simple job in the school, right? Greeting the students in the morning, saying a bunch of insightful metaphors, just get those from Chat GPT. Well, it is actually not as straightforward. You have to watch out, what if Mr Emmerson or Mr Baxter wanted to replace you? You have to maintain peace between the German and the French language faculties. There is real blood and sweat behind those wisdom-imparting metaphors. The assembly about jumping downhill on a mountain bike comes to mind. The whole ECP community flourished under the leadership of Dr Brown and soon, the ECP building will too. I remember years ago when I had the entrance interview with the headmaster, I thought I might impress with some constructive criticism and suggest that the school might consider reconstruction. Well, Dr Brown was already, as always, one step ahead of us. Thank you sir for making the school such a pleasant, safe and exciting place. I think that our year group is a great example that your focus on nurturing relationships is bearing good fruit. Thank you. *(applause)*

Next up, we also have to thank the Chairman of the Governors, Denis Keefe *(whom you already heard)* and the Governors. They are the elders of the ECP community who have the life experience and guide the school to stay on the right path. Thank you. *(applause)*

Furthermore, we would like to thank our special guest, Mr Urban for coming to be with us today and for the inspiring speech. Thank you.

*(applause) Selma gives the book*

Finally, we have two special thanks at the end. The first one is to Ms Rankin and I would like to invite Anise to the stage. She is going to say more.

*Anise thanking Ms Rankin*

The very last thanks, *(this time I promise)* is for Ellie. We want to thank you for all of your hard work, which was often happening behind the scene. For example, Ellie created the Graduation Ball posters, but more importantly for today, together with Mr Švéda and Estella, they created the Graduation Ceremony surprise, which you will be able to see in just a moment. *(even I haven't seen it yet)*

To wrap it up, today obviously is not only about closing the ECP chapter of our lives but also about starting a new one. I have already mentioned Mr Jan Hus, at the start. This is the place where he preached sermons that inspired and changed generations all around the world. He was not only a priest, he also taught at university. He had something, access to the scriptures, knowledge and the truth. He saw that the church had taken all of that away from the common people. The world today is full of people that are being exploited by others for the lack of truth that would set them free, for the lack of education. And we, who are sitting here, just like Mr Hus, have something to give and that comes with a responsibility. Thank you, ECP, for providing us with the finest education and all the tools necessary for making a difference in this world. Change is never easy, Jan Hus had to sacrifice his life for his teachings, but I believe that this school has taught us that change is worth fighting for, especially if we do it together and that there is beauty in sharing what we have with others. Many students, including me, could study alongside you only thanks to the great generosity of the school and other donors. Saying that ECP completely changed my life as well as my future possibilities is not an overstatement and I believe it applies to all of us here. We have much to be thankful for and much to look forward to. Thank you. It was an honour to speak to you today and enjoy the rest of the evening.

Kryštof Folbrecht, May 2023