Columbia Holds Second Annual World Leaders Forum

By Ernest Bock, Katherine Moore, Colin Morris, Jonathan Schonberg and Shari M. Whitley

From Sept. 20–29, Columbia hosted its annual World Leaders Forum, an event developed in conjunction with the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) and The Earth Institute. The event reflects President Lee C. Bollinger’s vision for Columbia as a center of public debate, promoting open dialogue and greater understanding of the critical global issues of our time. The following is a selection of presentations from the forum.

On the Mend, Romania Looks to EU Membership

After Romania’s 1989 revolution, President Ion Iliescu, who played a central role in his nation’s revolution against totalitarian rule in 1989, spoke to Columbia’s World Leaders Forum about how the collapse of communism had “changed the face of Europe” and expressed sympathy for the victims of communist oppression. Iliescu said, had created a “rigid and ossified society characterized by red tape and a government that was unable to respond to change in the economic and political fields.”

The country has moved forward since then to bring it closer to a democratic society, democratic institutions, political pluralism and the rule of law. Iliescu said his presidency has been guided by a commitment since 1992 and is coming to the end of his last term, has supported and promoted the “democratic spirit and European values” over the country, according to John Micgiel, adjunct professor of international and public affairs at Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA).

In Romania, that change came about after the revolution that overturned the brutal Ceausescu regime, a government that had isolated the country from the West, and sowed fear among the people with repression and purges. Iliescu, who has been ousted from political life after being placed in the crossroads of his last term, has supported and promoted the “democratic spirit and European values” over the country, according to John Micgiel, adjunct professor of international and public affairs.

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The country’s 1990 independence from the Soviet Union by 2007. The result of years of communist oppression, Iliescu said, had created a “rigid and ossified society characterized by red tape and a government that was unable to respond to change in the economic and political fields.”

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