



## Informal European Council

Athènes (Grèce) - mercredi 16 avril 2003

**Speech by M. Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic, at the ceremony of the signature of the European Union Accession Treaty (Athens) April 16th, 2003**

(...)

A time of metamorphosis has come for Europe. A time of achievement, if we wish it, is opening up.

We are celebrating more than Europe's enlargement. We are celebrating its unification. Four hundred and fifty million Europeans will come together in the most extensive integration project ever undertaken in the world peacefully.

This day, a wonderful dream is coming true.

Let's remember it!

In 1945, Europe was emerging from war, barbarity and the atrocities of the holocaust. With the decisive assistance of the Allies, at the cost of millions of human lives, the most monstrous chapter of our history closed, leaving a Europe in ruins, mutilated and torn by an irreparable schism.

For nearly fifty years, the heart of our continent was split between democracy and dictatorships in a balance of terror. The fracture that started in Europe spread across the entire planet.

Yet we made good use of these decades. My country is proud to have undertaken, along with the founder States, the creation of what has become the European Union. This Union organized, expanded, created its institutions, laid down its rules, and built and developed its assets, anchoring peace and cooperation in shared prosperity.

Yet our Europe remained a Europe by default, only half-deserving of its name as long as half of its people were excluded from it.

The advent of freedom and democracy in Eastern Europe gave each and every one of us great hope!

Hope, first of all, for you who are joining us after enduring so much to win back your rights and working so hard to be able to share our assets.  
Hope for the Union, whose ideal of peace and freedom is now winning through.

Hope for us all and for all our peoples, finally reviving centuries of exchanges that have fashioned the European soul, and opening up an immense



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space for our children to work and fulfil their dreams, a space where so many activities and talents can grow and blossom.

We have a responsibility to make this achievement a beginning.

The Union, now richer in diversity, must maintain the cohesion that guarantees its strength and effectiveness. This new Europe will not be able to fulfil our citizens' expectations if, as we are seeing with the current crisis, its political ambitions are not clarified and its running is not extensively rethought.

Enlargement will be successful if we make the most of this historic moment to reform the European political project. This is the objective assigned to the Convention, which will propose a draft Constitution for Europe in the coming months.

The European Union is about more than just a large market, common policies, a single currency and free movement. It is more importantly about a collective ambition, shared disciplines, firm solidarity, and naturally looking to the European family. Europe will therefore put its all into forging a multipolar world and making its voice and values heard, in harmonious and balanced co-operation with its major partners in the world.

Now that we have grown from 15 to 25, we cannot afford not to bring all countries back into the European fold! European construction must continue. Over and above the rights and duties of everyone in the Union of 25, soon to be 27 and even more, some would like to go faster and farther based on the euro and Schengen models. It should be the role of what I have called the pioneering groups to launch new cooperation, respectful of the *acquis communautaire* and open to all those who wish and are able to join them. This is the essential driving force of tomorrow's Europe.

Let's learn from the present situation. Let's make the most of our differences so that Europe can build the bridges ahead!

I have confidence in the enlarged Europe, since I know that our united peoples have the vitality and talents to take up the challenges.

What a tower of strength this reunited Europe will be tomorrow!.

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