

'Yes to Europe, yes to Austria' from El País (26 June 1994)

Caption: On 26 June 1994, the Austrian Chancellor, Franz Vranitzky, outlines in the Spanish daily newspaper El País the impact of Austrian accession to the European Union following the positive outcome of the referendum held two weeks previously in that country.

Source: El País. 26.06.1994. Madrid. "Sí a Europa, sí a Austria", auteur:Vranitzky, Franz.

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Yes to Europe, yes to Austria

The 'yes' on 12 June paves the way for Austria to join the European Union. On that day a two-thirds majority of Austrians — with a turnout of over 80 %, unparalleled at European level — voted in favour of full EU membership. This represents clear progress towards the goal to which the Federal Government of Austria has aspired since July 1989 in its path towards accession to the EU. The Treaty of Accession will be signed in Corfu today. The final stage, ratification of Austria's Treaty of Accession by the Parliaments of the 12 EU Member States at the end of the year, should not be an insurmountable obstacle on the country's road to the European Community.

There are various reasons for the Austrian population's wholehearted support for EU accession: first, convincing economic arguments; second, a conscious preference for openness and internationalism; and finally, the conviction that effective, lasting solutions for today's vital issues, involving so many extremely complex interrelationships, have to be found outside national borders. At long last, and perhaps most importantly, Austria will make up for a historic omission: after years of gradual, partial economic integration as a member of EFTA, an associate member of the EC and a member of the European Economic Area, it will henceforth automatically play a full part in the process of European integration from the moment it joins.

The result of the Austrian referendum means a change of future direction for the European Union, too. Enlargement is occurring precisely at a time when everyone is looking to Brussels for common, lasting solutions that will ensure competitiveness, employment, environmental balance and political stability in Europe.

After the (not always positive) experiences arising out of the process of ratifying the Treaty of Maastricht, the determination with which Austria is approaching Europe will provide the European Union with valuable new incentives for integration, since, rather than merely adopting common rules, EU membership means participating actively in constructing a common future for Europe.

The Federal Government of Austria sees the 12 June referendum as a clear mandate to cooperate actively in the future of Europe. The focus of Austria's future European policy — based on common European values and a common political culture — will be the construction of a Europe of solidarity, a Europe of common security, a Europe of new neighbourliness and, finally, a Europe of global responsibility.

The principle of solidarity is manifested firstly in an active social policy. In the opinion of Austria, which can cite proven successes in its wages and employment policy, this area should also be set aside in the future — in line with the principle of subsidiarity — primarily as a matter for the national autonomy of each Member State.

What is more, since the globalisation of social policy is a necessary adjunct to the Treaty of Maastricht, it is the second item on the agenda of Austria's social programme. The latter must also include the defence of high social standards throughout the European Union and the introduction of Europe-wide projects to prevent distortions in the internal market programme resulting from social dumping. Being a country characterised by social consensus and institutionalised dialogue between management and labour, Austria will also contribute to the social dialogue at European level. Finally, an aggressive growth and employment policy and specific programmes for the implementation of the European Commission White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment will be needed to make it possible to address the highly topical problem of unemployment in European countries in an effective manner. The impetus that could be given to employment in the transport sector by extending the trans-European communications networks, as proposed by the European Commission, is similarly a tool of an innovative environment policy. Besides providing incentives for environmental protection and transport technology, this encompasses above all the idea of making greater use of rail and combined rail-road transport. Just a few weeks ago, the Transport Ministers of Austria, Germany and Italy declared their common political will to seek an environmentally-friendly solution for transalpine traffic. In addition, during negotiations on Austria's accession, the European Union has declared that it intends to

reconsider its environmental standards in the next four years with a view to raising Community levels.

Austria can offer the EU the experience of a neutral country, derived from many decades of participation in United Nations peace-keeping operations. Austria is also prepared to contribute to the creation of a new peace order for the whole of Europe and common security arrangements which are not merely military but which also consider national disputes, economic reforms involving major sacrifices, migration flows and environmental threats as destabilising factors and, therefore, as challenges.

‘Greater Europe’ is also part and parcel of this concept of solidarity. Achieving this without the Eastern European states would be inconceivable for Austria. The same priority must, nevertheless, be given to broad dialogue with all the Mediterranean countries.

Defining the right time and conditions for such mutual rapprochement will be one of the essential tasks of the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference.

The principal theme of these talks will, nonetheless, be the issue of determining the new institutional balance within the European Union. In other words, this will mean increased democratic development and compensation in the EU. Against the background of gradual integration, Austria is interested in close cooperation between the EU institutions. This will also pave the way for greater European Parliament involvement.

The issue of legitimacy and acceptance of the European Union by its member countries’ peoples also arises in the context of the Ioannina compromise and with a view to future enlargement. This will have to be discussed in depth, since it is an essential condition for any continued development of the process of European unification.

In 1995 and 1996, Austria will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Second Republic and hold its millennium celebrations. This will be a very appropriate setting in which to present Austria’s Republican, cultural, federal and international face against the background of its history and identity. Since 12 June, it has been evident that ‘European Austria’ must also be added to this list. With accession to the European Union, Austria will re-emerge in 1995 in the history of the centre of our continent with a determined and active European policy.

Franz Vranitzky is the Federal Chancellor of Austria.

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