

Address given by Martti Ahtisaari on Finland's accession to the European Union (Tampere, 24 September 1994)

Caption: On 24 September 1994, one month before the referendum held in Finland on the country's accession to the European Union, Martti Ahtisaari, President of Finland, gives his views on the issue of the country's independence in the European Union.

Source: Speech given by President Martti Ahtisaari in Tampere, September 24, 1994. [ON-LINE]. [Helsinki]: The President of the Republic of Finland 1994-2000, Updated 18.02.2000[28.07.2003]. Disponible sur http://www.valtioneuvosto.fi/tpk/eng/speeches/speech_texts-1994.html.

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Publication date: 04/09/2012

Independent Finland and European Integration

We are currently preparing ourselves for the referendum that will decide whether Finland becomes a member of the European Union. At the same time, the international community is gradually putting an end to a half century of political division. There is more support and potential now for cooperation and reconciliation than ever before. The international community now has a real chance to create a better and more secure tomorrow.

Finland faces a historic choice. As a nation, we now find ourselves in the fortunate position of not being forced by any outsiders into making it. We really are the shapers of our own destiny.

The coming advisory referendum will be the first we have ever arranged on a foreign policy issue. It reflects, in fact, the inherent character of the whole integration process: The issue is of voluntary participation in cooperation between independent states.

The issue of independence has tended to dominate domestic debate about EU membership. We Finns hold our country dear. We work unceasingly for it. The welfare of its citizens in every sphere of life is something we cherish. In this, the EU issue neither divides nor discriminates between us.

Throughout its national existence, the most important cultural and social influences upon Finland have come from other parts of northern and continental Europe. Our geographical location has also meant interaction with Russian culture.

We have built up our national identity within these cultural cross-currents, holding onto what is most intrinsically Finnish, yet also allowing room for outside influences. Our national identity is consequently firmly rooted, and the outcome of a centuries-long process.

Thus, opening doors to the rest of the world does not threaten our national identity; closing doors would. This has always been true, and will be so in the future. For many years now, there have been two contrary trends in the international community: integration and fragmentation. Europe has experienced this very forcibly. The former Yugoslavia broke apart. The unification of Germany became possible when the cold war between two different social systems ended in the victory of democracy.

It is essential to note that even large nations have to work more closely with other nations to satisfy their interests and to ensure their economic well-being.

Since the Second World War, the market economies of Europe have gradually engaged in ever closer cooperation in order to ensure peaceful development and safeguard their standing amid global competition. The European Union has come to be the driving force behind this process.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union long felt that the EC challenged it politically. We have President Kekkonen to thank for the fact that we eventually signed a free trade agreement with the European Economic Community. The fading of the Cold War brought a rapid transformation in international relations on our continent. In particular, new opportunities for economic and political cooperation were generated.

The enlargement of what was the European Community and is now the European Union has taken place in a number of waves, first in the early '70s, then in the '80s. In the present - third - wave of enlargement, the Union is taking on a more distinct northern and central European dimension.

It is clear that the Union has never as yet expanded in any other manner, and according to the information at hand nothing has changed in this respect. Once the present enlargement phase is over, the Union is unlikely to expand again until the beginning of next century. If Finland fails to seize the present opportunity, we will not get another one for many years to come.

Enlargement has always been followed by a period of internal reform within the Union. In the '70s, it

developed modes of closer political cooperation; in the '80s, it formulated its single European Act, the first step towards the creation of a single market. Now, in the '90s, it intends to study the possibility of an economic and monetary union and to further develop foreign and security policy cooperation between governments.

Through enlargement, the Union is building the foundation for stable and balanced development throughout the continent. An enlarged EU is a vital factor for the future development of the economies in transition in eastern and central Europe. In promoting enlargement, we indirectly contribute to the development of these countries.

From Finland's point of view, enlargement of the European Union combines the goals of economic well-being and security. Each of us would do well to ponder what the situation would be today if the European Community had not begun to enlarge from the late '60s onwards.

During the debate, questions have often been raised about the fate of our borders if we become a Union member. Would we become the target of unchecked flows of immigrants from elsewhere? Would our crime rate rise? Would our lakes and lakeshores be ruined? These concerns are understandable.

No single country can cope alone with such new threats to its security. Once again, the EU offers us the best means of dealing with these problems. Without collaborating inside the EU, we will not be able to cope with them satisfactorily for long.

As I have emphasized on different occasions, the European Union is above all a system of cooperation between independent states, a new kind of union between states. This fact is also written into its founding treaties.

For small countries, in particular, the Union offers greater opportunities than staying outside it would do.

Ireland, Portugal, Greece, Denmark and the Benelux countries are examples of small EU countries where the advantages of membership are felt to be very much greater than the disadvantages. The EU is the best guarantee that small countries will not become mere objects in great power politics any more. No more, no less.

A couple of weeks ago I met one of the leading advocates of European integration, the former British Prime Minister, Sir Edward Heath. He stressed that the new Member States of the Union - and by this, he meant Ireland, the Mediterranean countries and Denmark - have had more opportunity to develop their rural areas and rural livelihoods as members of the Union. He asked why on earth a country like Finland, with a huge land area and largely dependent on its forests, would not come to enjoy the same benefits.

For the whole of Finnish society, EU membership will in any case mean an adjustment process that will be difficult in many respects. However, it is a question of adjustment not to lesser, but to greater, opportunities. Outside the European Union, there would quite simply be less opportunities open to us. Every major analysis tells us so. Otherwise, we would never have embarked on the process.

I appeal for a national consensus to approve the national adjustment package required for the development of rural areas. This package would guarantee that people in country areas could at last look to the future with confidence. It would put an end to the eternal squabble about whether Finland needs farming, and if so, how much.

A farm industry dependent on the GATT agreement and on national political decisions would face a less secure future.

Joining the European Union and cooperating more closely with democracies like our own will require courage, for this decision will have far-reaching and important consequences. Saying no to this opportunity would not be a sign of courage but of recklessness, and would in reality entail great risk. We would be

deliberately placing ourselves outside the sphere of increasing cooperation among the stable European democracies. Our place is where nations are building their future on the basis of free will, equality and the rule of law.

I believe that the Nordic countries' contribution to the EU would give the Union a special northern dimension and guarantee that it is developed into, not a union of bureaucracies, but a union of citizens. And of citizens whose roots are firmly in their own homelands, in their individual national identities.

The Union offers us a better chance of strengthening the security of our continent, and of dealing with global security concerns. In this, we would be taking further what has long been the main line of our European policy. We have always striven to put an end to the Cold

War division and to increase cooperation throughout the continent.

There has been considerable debate about whether we would become a part of a military alliance, when the Union in its intergovernmental conference takes up the question of deepening its common foreign and security policy.

As I have stressed in different connections, Europe's security situation needs to be constantly reassessed. This is also true of the means by which security is strengthened. The alliance structures of the Cold War - what is left of them - are currently adjusting themselves to the new era. A new, more comprehensive European security order is being gradually created. We must be involved in this process on the basis of our established policy. We have a lot to contribute to it.

I hope that the time left before the referendum will give citizens an ever clearer picture of the real options. I have confidence in that the Finns are realists, that they look ahead. And that they understand what is good for the fatherland.

A week or so ago, I paid a visit to the province of Lapland. The countryside there was at its most beautiful amid the autumn colours. The people of Lapland showed firm trust in the future. I was told many times that the people of Lapland have always survived change. And they will this time, too, they said.

At Inari, I happened to pick up a brochure of the local civic institute. The Eino Leino poem printed on the cover seemed to me to demonstrate excellently the cultural aspirations of the people of Lapland. I should like to close my speech today by quoting that moving and beautiful poem:

(English prose translation)

"Rise great, my Finland, rise and soar,
rise from your hills and fells,
rise from the shores of your azure lakes;
home of our purest hopes,
cast off all petty strife,
raise the banner of hope for all nations,
show now what, too,
the small can do,
when its dreams are great."