

Address given by Thomas Klestil on Austria's role in Europe (London, 8 February 1995)

Caption: On 8 February 1995, Thomas Klestil, President of the Republic of Austria, delivers an address at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London in which he outlines Austria's expectations and ambitions in the enlarged European Union.

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Address by the Federal President of Austria, Mr. Thomas Klestil, on "Austria's Role in Europe: The View of a new EU Member" on February 8, 1995 at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London

Dear Sir Laurence,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was with great pleasure that I accepted the invitation of Chatham House to speak to you on Austria's role in Europe. When Great Britain and Austria became partners in the European Union on 1 January 1995, it is not for the first time, however, that both countries find themselves in the same economic and political group. In 1960 already, we were cofounders of the European Free Trade Association, a club that was essentially defined as an alternative to the European Community. Thirteen years later Great Britain left EFTA to join the EC. It took another twelve years for Austria to take the same step.

Of course, the reasons for our countries' relatively late arrival in the Community were quite different. Britain's hesitation has its origins in her global and Atlantic orientation and in doubts to bind up her fate to that of her partners on the continent. In the case of Austria, non-participation in the EC was connected with her status of neutrality. Already in the 1950s Austrian governments welcomed European integration as an innovative approach towards promoting prosperity and securing peace in Europe. But as long as the East-West division of Europe persisted, neutrality - the price for regaining Austria's full sovereignty in 1955 - was perceived as an obstacle to her full participation in this process.

Just like Britain, Austria experienced the gravitational pull of the growing force of European integration. Austrian initiatives to develop closer relations with the Community eventually resulted in the Free Trade Agreement of 1972 which served as a basis for a much more extensive participation in Western European economic cooperation. As a consequence, the Austrian economy is today already more integrated into the EU than even some of its traditional member states.

As the dynamics of European integration intensified in the mid-1980s, we realized that free trade was no longer a sufficient basis for our participation in the process of integration. On 17 July 1989 Austria applied for EC membership. The timing for this application - coming before the fundamental changes of autumn 1989 - reflects the strength of Austria's interest in European integration.

Subsequent developments confirmed that our decision had been right. In the years 1989 and 1990 the political and military division of our continent came to an end. As a result, the European Union found itself confronted with a new historic challenge. It became a center of gravity for European politics and an essential element of stability for all of Europe. EU membership thus assumed an even greater significance. We felt that only accession to the European Union would enable Austria to participate fully in shaping Europe's future and in taking her place at the heart of Europe.

I would like to emphasize here that Austria's interest in joining the Union was met with the consistent and active support of the UK government. Prime Minister John Major played a crucial role in the EU's decision at the Edinburgh Summit in December 1992 in initiating the accession negotiations. Throughout the negotiations we were able to count on Britain's understanding and advice and on her determined efforts to move the accession process forward. The fact that all British members of the European parliament voted in favour of our admission and that Britain was one of the first countries to ratify the accession treaty highlight this extremely positive and helpful attitude, for which I would like to express our sincere gratitude. Britain and Austria have thus an excellent basis for close and fruitful cooperation within the EU.

Domestically, Austria's European policy received broad political support by the people. We made a strong effort to engage in a comprehensive dialogue on the benefits and costs of EU membership and to build the broadest possible alliance of EU supporters. This policy paid off. On 12 June 1994, two out of three

Austrians voted in favour of EU membership, a clear confirmation of the government's policy and - more importantly - a strong vote of confidence in the European idea. At a time when the European Union was going through a period of self-doubt and uncertainty, the Austrian people displayed their faith in the concept of integration as a means of promoting prosperity and cooperation and as the foundation for a durable European order of peace.

I am confident that Austria will make a substantial contribution to the further development of European integration. Her economic strength is a significant gain for the Union and will strengthen the dynamism of the integration process. Owing to her economic and social stability, her highly trained workforce and her strong currency, Austria will prove to be a partner capable of enlarging and strengthening the basis for the Union's competitiveness on world markets.

At the same time, Austria's EU membership will provide a significant stimulus to the country's development. The elimination of border controls between Austria and her EU partners allows Austrian companies unhindered access to the internal market. This should make the country even more attractive as an industrial location and as a base for foreign companies.

EU membership will also enhance Austria's position as a gateway to the markets of Central and Eastern Europe. We experience already a considerable rise in foreign investment. The Austrian economy has weathered the recent recession without major difficulties. Thanks to our accession to the EU we are now confident that the recovery will be strong and sustained and that we will be able to build on the high levels of prosperity and stability achieved in the past.

Economic relations between Austria and Britain should also benefit from these developments. I hope that this additional potential of economic cooperation will be used to the maximum by British and Austrian business communities. I look forward to a significant rise in mutual investment and a considerable expansion of trade. Austrian companies will undoubtedly make greater use of London as a financial center. We also note a considerable British interest in joint ventures with Austrian companies in Central and Eastern Europe.

Indeed, Austria's close relationship with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will enable us to make a significant contribution to the Union's policy with regard to this region and help to build European unity by gradually extending the scope of integration. It would be a severe constraint on Austria's potential at the heart of Central Europe, if our Eastern borders were to remain permanently the external borders of the Union, thus drawing new lines along the former cold war frontiers of Europe. There is no better way to reinforce stability and to enhance prosperity in our region than the step by step integration of our neighbours into the Union. I am glad that Austria and Britain share the same approach on this issue which could well be the Union's most important challenge in the years to come. If we take the perspective of enlargement seriously, we will also have to agree on institutional reforms that enable the Union to function properly even with a significantly larger membership.

Austria also shares the British view that the European Union must look outwards. Accession to the EU will not distract us from developing our relationship with other parts of the world. On the contrary, we see EU membership as a means to intensify and promote our cooperation with partners outside the Union. Austria will join Britain and other member states in working for a Europe that is not a closed shop but an open house with many doors and bridges, in constant communication with other regions.

Just like you, we too see integration as a means to achieve unity not uniformity. Europe must never become a uniform superstate. Diversity and pluralism make up the strength of this continent, its wealth in terms of languages and life styles, of traditions and cultural values. A new European identity must complement, not replace the diverse existing identities. Austria like Britain is committed to ensuring that the Union fully respects the principle of subsidiarity and that there should be as little distance as possible between decision making and the people.

We believe that the success of the Union depends on narrowing the gap between its institutions and its

citizens. It is our common task to convince the people that what is at stake in European integration are not some distant and unreal questions but matters of direct consequence for their own lives. The referenda on the Maastricht treaty have clearly shown the risk of a top-down approach to European integration. Europeans are obviously no longer prepared to automatically accept whatever has been negotiated by governments. We have to learn from this experience as we approach the preparations for the intergovernmental conference of 1996. Only through a timely and comprehensive debate can we ensure that the further development of the European Union will receive the necessary public support.

The intergovernmental conference will take place at a time when we have only limited experience with the functioning of the Maastricht Treaty and when many of its provisions have not yet been fully implemented. Some of the divisions that have overshadowed the negotiations of the Maastricht Treaty are still unresolved and the present political climate in Europe does not seem to be conducive to the achievement of momentous progress in 1996. We should therefore avoid creating unrealistic expectations which would only lead to a damaging backlash of public opinion.

A solid dose of Anglo-Saxon pragmatism and a sense of realism is certainly an essential ingredient in any recipe for a successful intergovernmental conference. The member states should, however, avoid the mistake of an overly modest level of ambition. We believe that the Union faces important challenges in the years ahead, challenges that require adjustments in the policies as well as in the institutional structures of the European Union. Austria will therefore be among those countries that work for significant progress in 1996.

If we take the perspective of enlargement seriously we have to agree on institutional reforms that enable the Union to function with an enlarged membership as well. Austria is also interested in the implementation of the Economic and Monetary Union. We do not believe that the relevant provisions of the Maastricht treaty should be the subject of new negotiations at the intergovernmental conference. As the success of the Monetary Union will depend on the strength of the commitment to monetary stability, we are opposed to any weakening of the convergence criteria. Yet there is a clear political link between the overall results of the intergovernmental conference and the prospects for the third stage of economic and monetary union.

There is no doubt that the further deepening and widening of the European Union will be the major challenge in the years to come. In combining both, differentiated forms of participation in integration will have to be considered. "Variable geometry" has been part of the process of integration from its early days. It appears likely that there will even be a greater need for such an approach in the future. Those countries that are willing and able to move ahead should be allowed to do so.

Care should be taken, however, that the overall cohesion and viability of the Union will not be impaired. Closer cooperation, in which only some members would participate, should therefore be agreed upon by all member states and the unity of the institutional framework should be preserved. Different circles or levels of integration should be of a transitional nature and remain open to all member states. Attempts to establish different categories or "classes" of membership will not find our support as this would contradict the very essence of the process of integration.

Maybe Austrians are to a greater extent than other West Europeans aware of the fact that Europe is currently going through a period of reduced stability. The tragedy in former Yugoslavia, in our immediate neighborhood, has made us acutely sensitive to the renewed threat of aggressive nationalism in Europe and to the insufficient capacity of the existing international instruments for coping with such crises. The dangers to the new Europe go far beyond the military sphere. They include the risks of large-scale environmental destruction, of uncontrolled flows of migration and of organized crime and international terrorism, to name but a few.

In her geographic position, Austria is more exposed to these risks than other West European countries. The radical changes in the security environment necessitate a thorough adjustment of our security policy. Such an adaptation has to proceed from the premise that our traditional policies no longer constitutes a sufficient response to the new challenges. Most of the security problems facing Europe today cannot be resolved by any state alone, but only through collective efforts and common institutions.

Austria's accession to the European Union constitutes by itself an important step towards increasing her security. We see the Union - in spite of all its divisions and limitations - as a community based on law and solidarity, where the partners pool parts of their sovereignty and their resources in order to resolve common problems through common action. The Union's cohesion and solidarity emanate from the interdependence and partially the fusion of economies of member states. It thus offers to each partner a security guarantee which might well be more reliable than even more formal commitments.

Particularly with regard to the non-military security threats of today's Europe, ranging from unsafe nuclear reactors to drug trafficking, the Union alone has the strength, the know-how and the resources to tackle these problem with any chance of success. It alone has the capacity to develop and apply a comprehensive security concept that takes into account the political, economic, social and environmental dimensions of security as well. One of the priorities of Austria's EU policy will therefore be to contribute to the strengthening of the Union's action in all these fields.

The growing problem of international crime calls for improved cooperation in the areas of Justice and Home Affairs. This would bring tangible benefits to the people and strengthen their support for European integration. We therefore see a clear need for reviewing the respective arrangements of the Maastricht treaty with a view to strengthen them at the intergovernmental conference in 1996.

Prevention and management of international crises by the Union is still at an early stage. The provisions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy were supposed to strengthen the Union's capacity as an international actor. Experience has shown, however, that the development of an effective policy in that field is obviously a longer-term process. It will require upgraded mechanisms and - more importantly - a stronger political will of the member states. Only if all partners are determined to approach foreign policy issues of general interest together and in a spirit of loyalty, will the Union be able to pursue a coherent and effective policy.

I am under no illusions with regard to the difficulty of achieving major progress in this area in 1996. Yet, the dark clouds over Europe's security show that we do not have much time to wait. Austria has every interest in a well-functioning foreign and security policy of the Union. We are therefore committed, without reservations, to the relevant undertakings of the Maastricht treaty. The Austrian Parliament has recently passed a constitutional amendment that provides the legal basis for an active and comprehensive Austrian participation in the Common Foreign and Security Policy. And we are looking forward to taking an active and constructive part in the discussions on its further development.

The Western European Union's contribution to European security is also a matter of great interest to Austria. On the date of her accession to the EU, that is on 1 January 1995, Austria became an observer to WEU. This status affords us the possibility of attending various WEU fora and of expressing our views on subjects under discussion. Austria intends to make full and active use of its observer status and to develop strong cooperative ties with the WEU in line with its important role in European integration.

It is my firm belief - and this is another point where British and Austrian views converge - that the development of a European security and defence identity must proceed complementary to the Atlantic Alliance. The active involvement of the United States and of Canada in European security is essential, particularly at a time of reduced stability and a higher risks of crisis. We are well aware that during the Cold War Austria's security relied to a large extent on the strength and determination of the Western Alliance. Even though since that time the security environment has changed radically, NATO continues to play an indispensable role in reinforcing Europe's security.

Since 1989 NATO has come a long way in adapting its doctrine, its structures and its policies to the new situation. The North Atlantic Cooperation Council and the Partnership for Peace initiative have established a valuable framework for multilateral security cooperation. They help to overcome the divisions of the past while ensuring by their inclusive nature that no new divisions are created.

The Austrian government has recently decided that Austria will also participate in the Partnership for Peace initiative. Our participation will focus in particular on the area of peacekeeping where Austria has accumulated substantial experience within the framework of the United Nations. We are confident of being able to make a significant contribution to European peacekeeping as well. Austria's participation in the Partnership for Peace programme will be another stage of her involvement in cooperative security structures in Europe and a valuable opportunity to develop her relations with the Atlantic Alliance.

Austria also attaches considerable importance to the strengthening of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Spanning the globe from Vancouver to Vladivostok, the OSCE provides an irreplaceable forum for a continuing broad dialogue, in which the interests of all participants can be brought to bear in a truly comprehensive perspective. Furthermore, the OSCE has established promising capabilities in preventive diplomacy, crisis management and peacekeeping. It continues to play a significant role in arms control. Considerable progress has also been made in recent years in adjusting OSCE to its new functions. But still, much remains to be done.

This brief sketch of the various European security structures shows that we are confronted with a process of continuous and far-reaching transformation. There is still considerable uncertainty regarding the configuration of European security structures five or ten years from now, their interrelationship and the precise options offered to individual states. This situation requires for countries like Austria a continuous review of their security policy in order to safeguard their national security interests and to contribute as effectively as possible to overall stability in Europe.

Austria's basic approach, however, is clear:

- European security cannot be assured in isolation but only through common efforts and shared responsibility;
- Since no State can guarantee its security on its own, all have to contribute to common security; and
- as there is no security without solidarity, European security structures will have to be developed jointly.

As you can see from this summing up of Austrian views on various aspects of European policy there is much common ground between Britain and Austria. Like all EU partners we will certainly have diverging views on some issues, but I do see a good basis for close and fruitful cooperation on many others. Moreover - and this might be even more important - I am confident that our increasing contacts at all levels will bring our countries and citizens further together.

The better our mutual understanding will grow, the greater will be the solidarity between us. This will be the most solid foundation for building a more peaceful and more prosperous Europe that develops in harmony with the interests and aspirations of its peoples. It is also in this spirit that I am looking forward to the partnership of our two countries in the European Union and to the further deepening of our traditionally excellent relations. I am convinced that a friendship which had endured during the darkest days, when Austria's name had disappeared from the map of Europe, will also stand the test of time when both, the United Kingdom and Austria, are about to face together the challenges of our common future.