

Address given by Wolfgang Schüssel at the signing of the Treaty of Accession (16 April 2003)

Caption: On 16 April 2003, at the Informal European Council in Athens, the Austrian Chancellor, Wolfgang Schüssel, refers to the historic scope of the Treaty of Accession of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs) to the European Union.

Source: Rede von BK Schüssel anlässlich der Unterzeichnungsfeierlichkeiten (16. April 2003). [ONLINE]. [Wien]: Bundeskanzleramt, [17.05.2005]. Disponible sur http://www.austria.gv.at/Docs/2005/2/8/Rede_HBK_Erweiterung.pdf.

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Address given by Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schäussel at the signing of the Accession Treaty on 16 April 2003

Today marks a pause.

Today we are interrupting our day-to-day work while we contemplate the most important achievement of recent years: the enlargement of the European Union.

This solemn act sets the seal on our common resolve to live together in future as equal partners. As of this moment you, the ten accession countries, have a seat and the right to speak at our meetings.

We Austrians extend a warm welcome to you in this European Union of ours. Today we want to impart to you a very special sense of inclusion, of belonging, of being welcome.

As ‘young’ Member States, we well remember that combination of happy expectation, tension and exhaustion that sometimes accompanies tough accession negotiations up to the actual moment of accession. We know how great were the demands and efforts involved, what great sacrifices were required and how divergent the tangible views of the future can sometimes be. Today, however, we may say for sure: together, we have done a good job.

An entire generation of politicians, experts, diplomats, interpreters and journalists have contributed their imagination, their skills and their commitment to this achievement. It is thanks to their dogged persistence and also, perhaps, to their faith that today will signal the beginning of a new era in Europe’s collective memory. At this point, let me also offer special thanks to EU Commissioner Günter Verheugen for his magnificent achievement.

For when did the 21st century actually begin? Was it really on 1 January 2000?

I myself was born in 1945, which means that I both experienced and was able to help shape the broad course of events that led from the destruction caused by war via reconstruction to the achievement of peaceful coexistence in Europe.

In the minds of us Austrians, who grew up with the experience of a border secured by barbed wire, minefields and watchtowers, in some respects the 21st century only begins today. We dreamed of being able to live with our neighbours in a freely determined community, of leaving behind the ravages of totalitarianism and loss of freedom, of tackling the future together — that is the Europe of which we dreamed during the confusions of the 20th century, that is the Europe for which it is worth working.

Europe’s wounds have begun to heal.

In some areas, the process of seeking and finding our way together may still only be just beginning. In some areas it may still be clouded by painful and not fully digested experiences. Yet we know that the closer we come together, the freer our hands will be to shape our common future.

Half a century ago, Europe was liberated, with vigorous help from outside. Today, that liberation has been given a huge forward impetus — by us and from within us.

We are uniting not states but people. Like them, we hope; like them, we are glad.