

Address given by Göran Persson at the signing of Treaty of Nice (26 February 2001)

Caption: On 26 February 2001, at the signing of the Treaty of Nice, Göran Persson, Swedish Prime Minister, emphasises the importance of the Treaty for making preparations for the enlargement of the European Union to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and for fighting unemployment more efficiently.

Source: Persson, Göran, Statement in Nice. [ON-LINE]. [Stockholm]: Regeringskansliet-Government Offices of Sweden, [20.06.2005]. Disponible sur <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/3211/a/29204>.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_goran_persson_at_the_signing_of_treaty_of_nice_26_february_2001-en-782942dd-ecd8-4c42-8eeb-60f9d508b5e1.html

Publication date: 04/09/2012

Speech by Göran Persson at the signing of the Nice treaty (26 February 2001)

Mr President of the French Republic,
Madame Speaker of the European Parliament,
Mr President of the European Commission,
Mr Prime Minister,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We are gathered here to put our names on a historic document. With the new Treaty of Nice, we are removing the final obstacle for the biggest enlargement of the Union ever. With an early and successful ratification of the Treaty, the Union will be ready to welcome new members by the end of 2002.

The Union is growing, but not only in a geographical sense. With the enlargement, we will get new influences, new resources and new citizens with new expectations. This will be a positive stimulus to the further development of the Union.

Within the Union, there already exist a number of different traditions, cultures and religions. We are a Union of diversity, but also a Union with strong common values. In spite of the many differences, there is more that unites us. This is a tremendous strength.

At the Nice Summit, we did not only agree on a new Treaty. Another important result was the adoption of the Social Agenda. This agenda is a clear expression of something, which is unique for Europe our social cohesion.

With the Social Agenda, we emphasise that a good development is not only created through deregulation, competition and strict economic reforms. A good development also requires welfare and social justice. Equality and development must go hand in hand.

Employment is on the increase in Europe, but still 14 million people are without work. This is a gigantic waste of economic and, most of all, human resources. We lose creativity and entrepreneurship. In the long run, both economic and democratic development risk being jeopardised.

At the same time, we are approaching a situation where we will lack labour. That is why we must both fight unemployment and increase participation in the labour market. Given the present development of an ageing population and lower birth rates, we must create better opportunities for men and women to combine work with a family life with children.

The Union has already made its choice. We have decided to create, within ten years, the most competitive knowledge based economy in the world through concerted efforts in education, research, new technology, environmentally sound investments, increased social security and equality. We know that welfare is a productive factor which stimulates employment and growth.

This is the European way, which, today, characterises our decisions and creates a promising future for both Member States and candidate countries.

Imagine, for a while, the dreams for the future that young people in Riga or Warsaw harbour as members of the European Union! I believe that those dreams are not very far from our own visions of the Union of the future: a united Europe, dynamic and growing, characterised by cohesion and justice; a Europe that has its citizens and their wish for work and development as its most important asset.

The demands are high on the present members of the Union to meet the expectations of the candidate countries. But I am convinced that it is more than worthwhile to live up to them. A larger Union holds an enormous potential for development a development rich in diversity.

It is with all humbleness, but also with pride and high ambitions, that the Swedish Presidency would like to

contribute to this work.

I would like to express my gratitude to the French Presidency for its successful completion of the negotiations that led us to results here in Nice in December. My gratitude goes also to the former Portuguese Presidency for its committed work in the early stages of our negotiations. We can all be proud of the fact that we achieved consensus on a new Treaty.

Our negotiations dealt with difficult issues. Our timetable was strict. Everybody had to compromise. But a strong political will and a joint awareness of the importance of our task led to success. That success will now form the basis for our continued efforts, to the benefit of the citizens of the Union, to the benefit of peace, democracy and prosperity for all of Europe.

Thank you!