

Informal European Council: Athens Declaration, April 16th, 2003

"We the representatives of the citizens and States of the European Union meet today on this symbolic site, under the Acropolis, to celebrate an historic event: The signing of the Accession Treaty for Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia.

Our achievement is unique. This Union represents our common determination to put an end to centuries of conflict and to transcend former divisions on our continent. This Union represents our will to embark on a new future based on cooperation, respect for diversity and mutual understanding.

Our Union represents a collective project: A project to share our future as a community of values.

We are proud to be part of a Union founded on the principles of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. A Union committed to furthering respect for human dignity, liberty and human rights. A Union devoted to the practice of tolerance, justice and solidarity.

The essential value of this project lies in the ability of the Union to empower both its citizens and its member states. By working together we and our countries can hope to confront the challenges of tomorrow.

On the threshold of this enlargement, we confirm that the European Union should focus on those tasks that are crucial to the well-being, security and prosperity of its citizens.

We will continue to uphold and defend fundamental human rights, both inside and outside the European Union, including the fight against all types of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnic origin, religion or convictions, disability, age or sexual orientation.

We shall act together to foster sustainable development locally and globally, to combat environmental degradation, and to guarantee a better quality of life for future generations.

We underline our commitment to a dynamic and knowledge-based European economy, open to all, focused on sustainable growth and full employment, but also on social inclusion and economic cohesion.

We shall make the Union a genuine area of freedom, security and justice, and shall continue to uphold each of these core values.

We shall respect the dignity and rights of third country nationals living and working in the EU. The values we cherish are not reserved for our own nationals but apply to all those who submit to the laws of our lands.

On this historic day, as we celebrate the enlargement of our Union, we reaffirm the commitment we made in Copenhagen to "One Europe", our collective desire to see it continue to develop into an inclusive Union.

Accession is a new contract between our citizens and not merely a treaty between states. As citizens of this new enlarged Union we proclaim our commitment to the citizens of the candidate countries. We are also committed to developing ever deeper ties and bridges of cooperation with our neighbours and to share the future of this community of values with others beyond our shores.

We believe the Union has an essential role to play in the world. We shall work for a more open and equitable global economy and a truly shared global information society, to the benefit of all, especially people in less favoured parts of the world. To this end, we will promote relentlessly the dialogue among civilizations and contribute uncompromisingly to strengthening the institutions of global governance and expanding the reach of international law.

We are committed to facing up to our global responsibilities, we will support conflict prevention, promote justice, help secure peace and defend global stability. We are determined to work at all levels to tackle global terrorism and stem the weapons of mass destruction. To this end, the Union will continue to enhance its civilian and military capabilities to enhance stability beyond its borders and further its humanitarian goals. The Union pledges its support to the United Nations and its efforts to assure international legitimacy and global responsibility.

Our collective project, our European Union, is a dynamic one. Constant renewal, while learning from our rich traditions and history, is our very nature. We look forward to the proposals of the Convention on the Future of Europe and to further reassessments of both the structures and the membership of the Union. Our future Europe belongs to all its citizens, without exceptions or exclusions.

We pledge our commitment to defending the fundamental freedoms upon which democracy depends. The democratic ideal must be the rock on which our community of values flourishes, not just for the citizens of today, but for our children and their children. Only through the active participation of its citizens and civic organisations will the Union continue to grow in strength and legitimacy. Reaffirming our commitment to democracy as the fundamental value underpinning the Union, we recognise it also constitutes the fundamental challenge confronting us today.

Our Europe is a Europe for all".