

50 Years Treaties of Rome and the Future for the Western Balkans

WELCOMESPEECH TO THE CONFERENCE

Most honoured Prime Minister, Excellencies, distinguished participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guests from the region and representatives from the EU, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear friends, Welcome to the conference „50 Years Treaties of Rome and the Future for the Western Balkans“ that was conceived and organized jointly by the Directorate for European Integration of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Paneuropean Union of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Thank you Mr. Topcagic and Mr. Topic for making this possible. I am very happy about the large interest which our conference has triggered.

We have three chores today: a) to look back at the achievement of the forming of the EU 50 years ago to try a prognosis on future development – with a special focus on the chances of the Western Balkans, b) to discuss where the countries of the Western Balkans stand today in the association and accession process with government representatives of these countries and c) to see what is needed from civil society and possible for the NGO sector to support this process.

And concerning today's date, a Friday the 13th, let me tell you, we are very much in the tradition of the founders of the EU by choosing such a date, we are showing boldness. Because forming the EU was making the impossible possible, turning a dream into reality. Victor Hugo was one of the first, to speak about this dream. In 1849 he said:

“A day will come when all the nations of this continent, without losing their distinct qualities or their glorious individuality, will fuse together in a higher unity and form the European brotherhood. A day will come when the only battlefield will be the marketplace for competing ideas. A day will come when bullets and bombs will be replaced by votes.”

Because what philosophers and idealists like Viktor Hugo had imagined in the 19th century, Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman conceptualised and government representatives – among them Konrad Adenauer – signed in Rome 50 years ago seemed too bold to be true.

Joseph Bech, Luxembourg's foreign minister in 1957 declared: “Today is the first time in the history of the peoples of Europe to form a voluntary unity for progress and prosperity, laying aside rivalries and antagonisms to achieve common goals.”

Konrad Adenauer himself after signing the treaty stated: “This is a historical moment. We are united in joy with millions of our citizens. This European Community strives for peace. It is not aimed against any one. The door to accession is open to all European States.”

Thus, from the moment of its founding, the European Community and later the European Union has been open for – call it – enlargement, completion or unification.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.

The evidence, that this spirit prevails in the EU today is apparent in the Enlargement Strategy Paper of the European Commission from last November. I cite:

BOSNIEN-HERZEGOWINA

CHRISTIAN SCHWARZ-SCHILLING

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“Enlargement has been at the heart of the EU's development over several decades. The very essence of European integration is to overcome the division of Europe and to contribute to the peaceful unification of the continent. Politically, EU enlargement has helped respond to major changes such as the fall of dictatorships and the collapse of communism. It has consolidated democracy, human rights and stability across the continent. Enlargement reflects the EU's essence as a soft power, which has achieved more through its gravitational pull than it could have achieved by other means.

However, today, the institutions of the EU call for a consensus on enlargement. After the abrupt stop of the constitution in 2005 the EU has realized, that they need to work harder on both sides – supporting potential candidate countries to get fit for the EU and communicating the value of the broadening of the EU to the public. This is also a traditional goal of the Union. As Jean Monnet put it in 1952: ‘We are not bringing together states, we are uniting people’.

I personally can not believe that the dream of the EU is an exclusive dream of 6 – 9 – 10 – 12 – 15 – 25 or 27 states. It shall always stay the dream of people. You will therefore have the chance to make a difference: as representatives, negotiators, lobbyists of your citizens and your state. The EU is in constant change. That is the strength of the Union. You, your citizens and countries are already partners in this process. Stay active and increase your activities.

On Europe Day, the 9th May this year, we will publicise a collection of historical speeches building the EU from 1947 - 2007. Already now, I warmly invite you to the presentation of this publication. One day, your speeches will also be added to the work. Help to keep the vision and dream alive!

Thank you for your attention.