

**Address by Mr. Carl Bildt, former Prime Minister of Sweden,
on the occasion of the commemoration of the 25th anniversary
from the European Union's Summit Conference in Corfu, June 1994**

For us Nordics midsummer eve is always a very special day, celebrating the brightest day of the year and announcing that summer has really appeared. And for us, midsummer eve 1994 was an even more special day as we, here in Corfu, signed the most important and most far reaching agreement Sweden has ever signed as we signed the treaty of accession to the European Union. We were pleased to do it together with **Austria and Finland**.

Europe was in the midst of tremendous changes. The Soviet colossus and its empire had collapsed. Germany had regained its unity. Numerous nations were seeking and charting a new future. Freedom and democracy was advancing. The Treaty of Maastricht had transformed the European Community into the far more ambitious European Union.

Nine out of ten Europeans in what previously was referred to as the West were already members of the EU, and the enlargement that was signed here in Corfu on that historic day was really the completion of the integration of the West of Europe.

For us Swedes it was a truly historic step.

Since the end of the Napoleonic wars we had sought security by trying to keep a distance to the turmoil and alliances of our continent, and fortune had been kind to us in that respect. We had been spared the horrors of war and occupation that ravaged so many during the first part of the 20th century. But now, as the old walls were falling down, we had decided that we had both an interest and a duty to fully engage in building the new structures of integration and security for all of our continent.

We should not forget that what was signed in Corfu on that day was not only these **three** treaties of accession. First, on that day was signed the not less historic Partnership and Association Agreement with Russia. A large Russia naval ship lay outside the port. President Boris Yeltsin was the guest of honor at the memorable dinner that evening.

And in my remarks at the signing I said that unifying the West part of Europe, as we were doing then, wasn't enough. The task was to unify all of Europe. The reunification of all of Europe was the historical task for the years that lay ahead, I said.

But there was no hiding some of the challenges that lay ahead.

In my remarks, I said that "beyond the Strait of Corfu lies Albania - with its liberation from communism - and beyond that Kosovo - with its remaining repression - and beyond that Bosnia and Sarajevo with the tragedies and the sufferings". Little did I know that I myself was going to spend the half decade that followed trying to end war and build peace just there.

Much has undoubtedly been achieved in this quarter of a century.

The huge enlargement after the one celebrated here, that brought the EU from 15 to 28 members, was perhaps the finest hour ever for the Union, bringing stability and prosperity to all these countries and their app 100 million citizens. The alternative would have been fragmentation, strife and possible even conflict.

For Sweden it was particularly important to see Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania being also able to join our union.

And we have weathered and handled financial storms by building stronger structures of cooperation also in these areas. But much remains to be done. We have not yet brought stability fully to the Western Balkans, and there is always the danger of the forces of aggressive nationalism coming back there. And Russia unfortunately decided to give priority to reclaiming old territories over becoming a part of our European democratic family. In the last five years more than 10.000 people have died as a result of its aggression against Ukraine. But our Eastern Partnership has brought hope to nations to our immediate East.

As we look ahead we need the European Union more than ever.

In a world of competition between an assertive China, a revisionist Russia and a disruptive United States we Europeans can only protect our interests and promote our values by working even more closely together. And that especially as we see parts of our neighborhood fracturing and falling down in new conflicts. The challenges of the Mediterranean region are certainly mounting.

And in a world where the Industrial Age is giving way to the Digital Age, and when we have to end our dependence on fossil energy in order to preserve our environments, the demand for working together are certainly not lesser than before.

It was a truly historic step that Sweden took here at Corfu, and it was a historic step for Europe as a whole.

Carl Bildt