

- *Check against delivery* -

Excellences,  
Honorable guests,

It is a great pleasure and honor today to be present at the 25<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Summit of Corfu **in 1994**, which also marks the anniversary of Austria's signing of the Accession Treaty to the European Union here on this magnificent island.

Corfu has always had a special attraction for Austrians, its most prominent Austrian guest being the famous Austrian Empress Elizabeth "Sissi", who chose the island as her second home. In her journals she praised: "Corfu is an ideal place; climate, walks in endless olive tree shade, good driveways and the agreeable sea air, in addition the marvelous moonshine". The palatial villa she had built on Corfu, the "Achilleion", also takes the character of the island into account by blending rich Greek mythology into the décor of the building.

With Empress Elizabeth, many Austrians have felt a special connection with Corfu, which – together with the Ionian islands - is amongst the top destinations for Austrian tourists in Greece. These people-to-people bonds between Austrian tourists and Greeks especially during the summer months also constitute a strong connection in our bilateral relations: Many Austrians come as tourists, but return as friends, as was the case of Empress Elizabeth.

But there is also a more recent connection between today's Republic of Austria and the island of Corfu which hosted the Corfu Summit of the Heads of State and Government in 1994. On 24 June 1994 the Austrian Federal Chancellor Dr. Franz Vranitzky signed the Treaty of Accession of the Republic of Austria to the European Union on Corfu. The conclusions of the European Council held on Corfu on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1994 indeed recognize the signing of the Treaty of Accession of Austria, Sweden and Finland as an "important new landmark in the history of European integration". As to Austria, the decision to join the European Union had been approved in a referendum on 12 June 1994, with an overwhelming 66,6 % of the Austrian population voting in favor of Austria's integration into the European Union.

In fact, becoming a member of the EU has had an immensely positive effect not only regarding economic growth and on Austrian exports which have tripled since the Austrian EU-accession, but also fostering the feeling of being "European" among Austrian citizens. As a member of the EU, Austria has continued its traditional role as a bridge builder in order to contribute to the unity of the Member States of the European Union. This was also an underlying principle of Austria's recent presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2018.

But ideas need great personalities to take shape. Therefore, I would like to honor an Austrian today, who was instrumental in forming Austria's way into the European Union, then Austrian Minister for foreign affairs Dr. Alois Mock, who saw the accession of Austria to the EU as one of his most important projects. Indeed, the Austrian newspaper "Kurier" once

named him “the inventor of the Austrian EU accession”. He fostered the idea domestically and within Europe, and finally achieved to present the accession application to the French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1989.

Two years later the European Commission issued a positive statement on the accession application and in February 1993 the negotiations began. One of their results proved that Austria’s neutrality and the provisions of its State Treaty could be upheld. The final negotiations, famously conducted over 37 hours non stop were held in February 1994. In fact, the name of Alois Mock is intricately connected to Austria’s accession to the European Union in 1995, which he mediated and negotiated. In the following years, he also fostered the accession of the countries of Central and Southeastern Europe to the EU, thus helping to create European perspectives in other countries.

Beyond his merits in relation to the Austrian EU-accession, Dr. Alois Mock was one of the most relevant Austrian politicians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who was involved in many “defining” historical moments. He was at the peak of his professional career at the times of the fall of the Iron Curtain, the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the development of the European internal market. He received acclaim in Europe and the World for his work as a foreign policy politician and diplomat.

Dr. Mock was also among the first politicians to understand the impact of the fall the Iron Curtain, the 30<sup>th</sup> year commemoration of which we also celebrate this year. The photographs of Alois Mock cutting through the Iron Curtain with his Hungarian counterpart Gyula Horn at the

Austrian Hungarian border near Sopron are images already emblematic of a Europe in the process of growing together. After the fall of the Iron Curtain Alois Mock laid the foundation of the special relation between Austrian and Southeast Europe, a region both important to Austria and Greece, through his many initiatives, for instance through the foundation of Austrian Libraries and the introduction of Austrian lecturers in universities, scholarships and humanitarian help. For Alois Mock, the reestablishment of the relations with the South East European neighbors also signified the basis for a common European future. Dr. Alois Mock set the means of diplomacy in motion to internationalize the conflicts in former Yugoslavia through bringing them before the EC, CSCE and the United Nations. He made it his aim to warn about an escalation in the Balkans, which unfortunately happened nonetheless. He virtuously played on the instruments of international diplomacy. "Too little, too late" was one of his frequent comments on the reactions of the international community. Moreover, he also advocated the speedy recognition of the newly formed states on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, in order to halt further conflict.

Your Excellences, ladies and gentlemen, it is my firm belief that this idea Dr. Alois Mock was convinced of, the common European future, is more than ever relevant for Europe. In times in which the European Union is facing a number of challenges on many fronts, it is important to remember the founding principles of the European Union. Only through cooperation can the individual states and the European Union face the challenges ahead. I therefore thank the "Albert Cohen Corfu"

**Association** for organizing this important commemoration of the anniversary of the Summit of Corfu, which through retrospection also reiterates the great project that is the European Union, and the island of Corfu for hosting the festivities. Let us remember the important personalities like then Foreign Minister Dr. Alois Mock that have so importantly contributed to what started on Corfu in 1994 and has been carried on by the Austrian Foreign Ministers that succeeded him, and erect their spiritual monuments for their decisive contribution to European integration here today. And let them be for us a constant inspiration and motor to contribute ourselves – to our best knowledge and possibilities and guided by the ancient Greek values - to Europe's most successful peace project – our common house of Europe.