

## **The European Union's Summit in Corfu (1994) from the Municipality of Corfu's point of view**

By Chrysanthos Sarlis, Mayor of Corfu at the time of the Summit

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The announcement, in spring of 1993, that Corfu would be the seat of the European Union's Summit Conference, during the Hellenic presidency in the first semester of 1994, was received with great enthusiasm by the people of Corfu.

At the same time, the expectations from this important event meant that the Municipality of Corfu had to face a significant, unprecedented up to then mission, which it would have to plan, prepare and execute in the next 14 -15 months, up to the time of the Summit Conference (24-25 June).

Based on the facts of the time, the enormous prestige of the European Union, the justified high hopes that came from the decisions taken during Jacques Delors' presidency, resulting in important inter-regional initiatives, Communal programs as well as the European aura that prevailed throughout the Union, brought the Corfiots to believe that in the years to come our island, already present in European history for three millenniums, would become a landmark as one of the important stages on the road to European unification.

The decision for the European Union's Summit Conference to convene in Corfu was addressed to Prime Minister Constantinos Mitsotakis' government (1990-1993).

The people of Corfu immediately felt highly honored by that decision that was a result of the continuous contribution of Corfu to European

history, from Homer's time, through classical Ancient Greece and the Peloponnesian War to the actual times, as well as the Corfiots' great sacrifices for the cause of liberty during the last world war.

In the months that followed, the Hellenic State and the Municipality of Corfu coordinated their efforts to prepare Corfu and the necessary venues and facilities for the important event of the Summit Conference.

The various venues for the Conference were renovated, as the town's Old Palace, built around 1820, **the Ionian Academy**, the former Barracks in the Old Fortress that housed the Press Center together with the modern Main Conference Hall under the bridge and also the Achilleion palace. Special attention was given to the necessary updating of the telecommunications' and road networks, the International Airport and the Port, the town's Hospital and the hotels. At the same time a considerable part of the town's historic center was refurbished. Corfu's cultural potential was mobilized in an ambitious program of special events that covered the first semester of 1994.

Corfu and especially its town lived through a 15 month period unique in its history; there were consecutive stages of pleasant surprise and enthusiasm from the announcement about the Summit, followed by the consideration of the possibilities and awareness of the considerable responsibility, the long organizing and implementation process, the feverish and agonizing peak of the last weeks and days, the emotions from the event itself and its parallel festivities, down to the sudden relaxation that followed the Summit's end.

The Municipality of Corfu organized itself accordingly, mainly its Technical and Financial departments but also the cleaning, parks and infrastructure services, and also its Development company (ANEDK) that

was in charge of important duties for interventions in the old town, organization of the historic sites for hosting the various events and with general programming and coordination duties. As a result a whole system of multi-layered efforts and actions was developed, that transformed the town of Corfu to an impressive worksite in view of the European Summit Conference of June 1994.

I feel certain that, in the post-war years, there was hardly any instance in Greece of showing such an important development of actions and interventions on many aspects of a town

The Corfu Summit acted as a magnet for many cultural and scientific seminars that chose the town of Corfu as their site during the first semester of 1994 but also in the following months. There were also an important number of cultural and artistic events, concerts, recitals, theater and dance performances, art, history, painting, books, and photography exhibitions that took place at the Municipal Theater and in other historical sites of the town like the Old and the New Fortresses, the Municipality square, the St Nicholas site and the Venetian Arsenal.

The Summit Conference of June 1994 in Corfu had even more importance because of the presence of political leaders like François Mitterand, President of France since 1981, Helmut Kohl, the German Republic's Chancellor since 1982 and consecutively of unified Germany, Felipe Gonzales, Spain's Prime Minister since 1982, Andreas Papandreu, Greece's Prime Minister since 1981 and Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission since 1985. All of them had already been through a major part of their political career in their high offices and had contributed considerably in the European Idea and the cause of the European Union.

The presence in Corfu of the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, for the duration of the Summit Conference and his participation to the Conference's official ceremony in the presence of the European Union members' leaders at the St George's former church in the Old Fortress, gave the Corfu Summit an unprecedented dimension. The Conference was sealed by the resolution of enlargement of the Union by the admittance of Austria, Finland and Sweden. The conditions for the incorporation of the three States to the European family were validated at this Conference.

During this Conference, Greece promoted the project for enlargement of the European Union to the South and East, so as to ensure the stability and the cooperation conditions in that area. We can say that the decisions that were taken then determined the future and changed the flow of the European Union.

The role of the Prime Minister of Greece, Andreas G. Papandreou, was important as he contributed in a major part to the success of the Summit's workings, while he contributed additionally and effectively to Finland's integration. We should also note the contribution of the Foreign Minister at the time, responsible for European matters, Theodoros Pangalos. From the first moment of the Hellenic Presidency he set as a first priority the success of the Conference, undertook concerted efforts for this cause in close cooperation with our town's Municipal authority.

The organization of the Corfu Summit Conference of 1994 was crowned with absolute success. An impressive Corfu with its wonderful summer weather welcomed the European leaders, the representatives of the European Governments, the thousands of members of the Press and the other official visitors, all of whom were literally delighted by the beauty,

the particular atmosphere, the serenity that Corfu is exuding and the nobility of the town's historical center, a result of the passage and presence of almost all the great European historical periods.

There was also an impressive parade, in the morning of the Conference's first day, June 24<sup>th</sup>, by a band of 500 joint members from the town's three historic Philharmonics, at the Spianada square, opposite the Old Palace, official seat of the Summit. They played among other themes the European Union's Anthem.

The Municipality of Corfu had the historic honor of the visit and official reception ceremony at our Municipality's seat for the President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, as well as the corresponding visit and ceremony for the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin.

A quarter of a century after the Corfu Summit Conference, the memory for our birthplace remains alive and its citizens consider it a great event of historical importance that brightens Corfu's image and is since then part of the long historic route of our island.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I have the obligation to convey my thanks to the "Albert Cohen Corfu" Association, its president Spiros Giourgas and its members, for their initiative to organize today's conference in due commemoration of an event that has become part of the long history of our island. I would like to add my sincere congratulations and my wish for them to continue their benevolent efforts in this useful field.

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