

Speech at Conference Organised by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Entitled 50 Years of the Treaties of Rome and the Future of the Western Balkans

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you on this beautiful day and on this topic.

Today is Friday the thirteenth. For the realists among us, this date has no special significance. The superstitious, by contrast, would not consider it to be an especially auspicious day.

Just over 50 years ago, neither realists nor the superstitious would have seen anything auspicious in 25 March 1957, the day that the six founding members of today's European Union signed the Treaty of Rome, establishing the European Economic Community.

In retrospect, the success of the European Union may appear to have been historically pre-ordained. But it was not. It was, and remains, a remarkable story of triumph being extracted from adversity.

Back in 1957, the prevailing mood in Europe was gloomy.

Essential items were still rationed; medical and social services were basic; poverty was endemic; and citizens lived in fear that the end of the Second World War in 1945 had been a remission in rather than a conclusion to the continent's recurring instability and conflict.

My country, Germany, was divided. Europe was divided into two heavily armed military blocks. And just four months earlier, Soviet tanks had crushed the Hungarian uprising to restore communist authority in that country.

I know. I was a young man beginning to make my way in the world and remember well both the attitudes of these times and the conditions in which we lived.

Half a century on, I have no doubt that the signatories of the Treaty of Rome would be amazed by the success of their initiative.

The Treaty of Rome is significant for many reasons. Above all, however, it is significant because it heralded a break with the past.

Twelve years after the greatest conflict in the history of humankind, former belligerents chose to put aside their differences for the future of the next generation.

That decision transformed the prospects of an entire continent, not only the fortunes of the six founding members.

And that decision continues to have the potential to transform those parts of Europe that remain outside the European Union.

The European Union is not an exclusive club. It is an inclusive community of nations that have overcome, and continue to overcome, enormous obstacles in order to build prosperous and democratic societies.

In the course of 50 years, it has grown from a community of six nations to one of 27. In the process, it has helped unify what had been a divided continent, bringing in countries from what used to be known as Eastern Europe, including Slovenia in 2004 and Bulgaria and Romania at the beginning of this year.

The European Union now stretches from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Moreover, it completely surrounds the Western Balkans, which are geographically, culturally, politically, economically and socially clearly within the European family.

In the coming years, the European Union will inevitably play an ever greater role in all the countries of the Western

Balkans, in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

The European Union has already and repeatedly made a commitment to all countries of the region that they too can look forward to the prospect of full integration into its structures, if and when they meet key political and economic conditions.

In the form of the Stabilisation and Association Process, the European Union has also drawn up a road map to assist the countries of the Western Balkans reach their destination, that is to integrate themselves in the European Union.

In spite of a certain enlargement fatigue in some member states in recent years, the European Union's commitment to the Western Balkans remains strong. After all, the issue is not so much that of EU enlargement as of a filling out of the European Union.

Indeed, Croatia should be a member of the European Union within a couple of years and is already present in the European Council's Political and Security Committee, that is the body to which I answer as EU Special Representative.

Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are also now travelling down the road to membership. And Montenegro, too, independent for less than a year, is clearly heading in the same direction.

Only Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are yet to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement and, therefore, lack a formal, contractual relationship with the European Union.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Union has evolved in part as a result of war, as well as economic and social breakdown.

This fact has a direct bearing on the efforts of the peoples of the Western Balkans to draw closer to the European Union and in due course to become members.

The message should also be clear to everyone in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Twelve years after the end of the conflict here, the citizens and leaders of this country face many of the challenges and choices faced by the citizens of Europe in 1957 – twelve years after the end of the Second World War.

Some people seem to believe that the country is not up to integrating itself in Europe because of continuing disagreements, distrust and recrimination that are a by-product of war.

These people are probably too young to remember the distrust and recrimination in the rest of Europe after the war of 1939 to 1945. I'm not. As I have already made clear, I was a young man in 1957 and remember well how Europe still suffered from the bitterness and dislocation spawned by the Second World War.

Despite this, the statesmen who launched the European Union half a century ago were able to see beyond their immediate difficulties to the prospect of a prosperous and secure future.

That's what the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina have to do today.

Since it's Friday the thirteenth, I'm not going to make any predictions. I'm just going to lay out the facts as they relate to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The prospects of this country will be considerably better the day that a Stabilisation and Association Agreement is signed.

A lot of good work has already been done, including by several of today's participants from the Directorate for European Integration.

The major obstacle – though not the only obstacle – to the signing of that Agreement is the issue of police restructuring.

Indeed, the European Union only agreed to launch negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina as a result of the October 2005 Agreement on Police Reform that must be implemented before this country can sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

There is a deal on police restructuring on the table that conforms with the three EU principles that was very nearly accepted by the key leaders last month.

And the opportunity presented by that deal needs to be seized.

Something else is probably also on the table at this very moment, namely lunch.

Thank you for your attention, therefore, and *Guten Appetit*.