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The Significance of European Integration (February 2, 1996)

In the following speech, Chancellor Helmut Kohl emphasized the important role that European integration would play in the 21st century. He referred to European integration as “a matter of war and peace.” Europe, as Kohl explained, had to assert its weight in the world and needed to be economically competitive. According to the chancellor, this would require progress toward common foreign and security policies and coordinated domestic and legal policies. He argued that the EU needed to reform its decision-making procedures in order to enjoy greater support from citizens.

Speech by Chancellor Helmut Kohl on the Occasion of the Conferral of His Honorary Doctorate by the Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium, February 2, 1996

[. . .]

There is no reasonable alternative to an ever closer bond between the peoples of Europe. We need to build the House of Europe. We all need a united Europe. I would like to mention three reasons that are particularly important to me.

First, the policy of European integration is a matter of war and peace in the 21st century. That is how my late friend François Mitterrand saw it as well. On January 17, 1995, he stood before the European Parliament in Strasbourg and said, “Nationalism means war.” I know that some people don’t like hearing that. My warnings might contain an unpleasant truth. But it doesn’t help to deny this basic question. If we lack the impetus to continue the project of integration, there will not only be stagnation but also regression. We do not want to return to the old version of the nation-state. Let me say this in the language of Thomas Mann from the early 1930s, as he called out to the Germans, “We are German Europeans and European Germans!” The nation-state of the 19th century cannot solve the great problems of the 21st century. Nationalism brought great suffering to our continent – think only of the events of the first half of this century. Four years before the end of this century we should finally grasp that it is time to draw the necessary conclusions.

Second, we need Europe so that our common word carries weight in the world. We can only assert our common interests in an adequate fashion if we speak with a single voice and combine

our strengths. This applies in relation to all our partners and friends, also to those on the other side of the Atlantic. Precisely he who supports Europe's close connection to transatlantic friendship and partnership must also acknowledge his own identity as a European.

And third, we all need Europe in order to remain competitive on the world markets. Only together can we assert ourselves in worldwide competition with the other great economic regions, East Asia and North America – and with the Mercosur trade pact, this includes Latin America as well.
[. . .]

We are now on the eve of the intergovernmental conference that will review the Maastricht Treaty concluded in February 1992. I dare make the following assertion: if we experience a setback now on the path to Europe, then it will be more than a generation before we are given such a chance again. For me, the progress we have made in four areas is particularly significant:

First: Strengthening the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). After the terrible years of war in the former Yugoslavia, it is not necessary to go into detail in justifying this goal. It is precisely because we were not able to establish a CFSP, because we have not yet approved such treaties, that we have embarrassed ourselves so abominably. We should not let further progress be blocked due to the inevitable difficulties regarding certain details.

Second: Cooperation in the areas of domestic and legal policies must be improved. I do not see this as a loss of national sovereignty, as many others regard it to be. In light of the threat of a genuine "general attack" by international organized crime, the Mafia, or terrorists, I think it makes sense for us to work together in many areas. The citizens of the countries of Europe are entitled to security. When we speak of security, we generally speak of external security, but external security is only possible when the internal security of our countries is guaranteed. That is why I insist that we do what is necessary in the negotiations on "Maastricht II."

Third: The European Union must become more efficient and more capable of taking action. Most certainly, this also means that it must become more transparent and easier for citizens to comprehend. Citizens' understanding of political processes and decisions is an essential source of legitimacy.

Finally, it is important for the European Parliament, and the national parliaments as well, to participate more vigorously in the process of European integration. The distribution of competencies among the organs of the European Union and national or regional institutions must follow the principle of subsidiarity more closely than it has up to this point. I am certain that these are not only the priorities of the Germans. From conversations with my European friends, I know that similar views are also held here in Belgium and in our neighboring countries. I am especially certain that the citizens of Europe, above all the young people, see it this way.

On December 15-16 of last year [1995], the European Council in Madrid once again confirmed my convictions. We Germans are very much aware that German unification and European

integration are two sides of the same coin. Of course, this is not an exhaustive explanation of the “European Agenda 2000.” There is no doubt that the Economic and Monetary Union currently poses one of our greatest challenges – also on a psychological level. In connection with all the preparations for the Union, we are going through a phase of uncertainty, yes, even of fundamental critique of the continued progress of European integration. Have Europeans once again become weary of European integration?

I don't think this is really the case. I believe, however, that there are too few people who are capable of sensibly presenting this decisive idea of our time with the requisite passion or the required talent. There is no alternative. The course set by Maastricht means not only great progress but also great effort for all of us and at the same time a major step forward. But I am confident that, in the end, the intergovernmental conference will be of the prevailing view that the European Union will only be able to master the challenges of the next century if the Maastricht Treaty is developed further. No one wants a centralistic super-state. It does not exist and will not exist in the future. [. . .]

Today we once again have a clear view of the values and traditions that connect the peoples and nations of our continent. Václav Havel spoke of a “return to Europe.” This alone shows that arguments based on foreign policy and economics are not the only ones supporting the accession of the states of central and southwestern Europe to the European Union. The enlargement of the EU is essentially a question of what the Treaty of Maastricht calls “Europe's identity.” Prague and Krakow are central European cities! It is inconceivable to me that Poland's western border, for example, should always remain the eastern boundary of the European Union. I would view it as an ominous development if Europe's strength abated with its enlargement. But I think it would be just as ominous if Europe garnered strength only by excluding others. In the coming years we will have to prove that it is also possible to build up a meaningful Europe with fifteen or more member states.

At the same time, however, it cannot be that the slowest ship determines the speed of the entire convoy in the long run. Should individual partners be unwilling or unable to participate in certain steps toward integration, then others should still have the opportunity to move forward and strengthen their cooperation, which is open to participation from all partners. The experiences of the last twenty years have shown that those who hesitated at first eventually came along after all because the power of the facts led them there. [. . .]

Source: Speech by Chancellor Helmut Kohl on the Occasion of the Conferral of His Honorary Doctorate by the Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium, February 2, 1996, in *Bulletin* (Press and Information Office of the Federal Government), no. 12, February 8, 1996, reprinted in *Internationale Politik*, no. 8, 1996, pp. 82-84.

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