

Happy birthday, EUrope!

On 25 March 2007, Europe celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome. They laid the groundwork for a unique success story: the European Union.

It was in the midst of the Cold War and the resulting division of Europe, that France, Germany, Italy, and the Benelux countries (Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands) decided to form a „European Economic Community“, which should end centuries of war and suffering, and pave the way for the nations of Europe to enter a new age of peace, stability and prosperity.

Already as early as 9. May 1950, the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman had put forward the integration of the coal and steel industries. His aim was to consolidate peace in Europe by imposing supranational control over key sectors of national economies which, in the past, had been put in the service of warfare. As a result, on 18 April 1951, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, and the Netherlands established the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

Six years later, on 25. March 1957, the European Economic Community was born. It established a customs union among its members based on the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. In 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht turned the European Community into a political European Union. Some years later, the Schengen-Agreement did away with border controls within great parts of the EU. Finally, on 1st January 2002, the Euro was introduced in 12 countries, creating one of the largest monetary areas worldwide with more than 300 million people. Thus

emerged, progressively, the area of freedom, prosperity and security which the founding States had had in mind.

Small wonder that the European experiment, unique in history, appealed to the Union's neighbours. Between 1973 and 2007, several rounds of enlargement took place to the immense benefit of the founding and acceding member-States alike. Nowadays the European Union counts 27 member-States with more than 450 million people. The dream to see Western and Eastern Europe united has finally come true.

Many of these achievements have become routine nowadays. We take peaceful and prosperous life for granted. Who remembers the fear of war and hunger, the yearning for living and raising one's family in peace, for securing our children's future and, perhaps, being able to enjoy life by travelling abroad?

Today, we are confronted with other, new challenges: globalisation, environment, terrorism and organized crime, slackening demographics, the plight of developing countries, conflicts all over the world – none of them can leave us indifferent. They have to be addressed by us, now.

New efforts are necessary to enhance cooperation amongst member-States, for example in the field of Common foreign and security policy, and to strengthen the Union institutionally.

Our birthday wish is that, once again, Europeans will show the will and find the means to rise up to the challenges of the day!.



