

ADDRESS
BY PAT COX, PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
AT THE CEREMONY OF THE SIGNATURE OF THE TREATY OF ACCESSION

One week ago when we concluded our overwhelmingly positive votes in the European Parliament on the assent procedure for the ten accession states who have signed the treaty of accession here today, there was a palpable sense of the rendezvous with Europe's history to which we as a privileged generation of elected European representatives were called to vote and bear witness.

Today, here in Athens, in returning to this cradle of European democracy, we mark a decisive step forward on our common journey to a European Union and continent which is whole and complete.

We are challenged through the convention on the future of Europe and our policy making process to make the most of our new continental-scale possibilities.

Through a commitment to a Europe of values we are united in a common ideal.

That ideal is symbolised by the European flag. The clock-like circle of twelve gold stars on a blue background represents the ideal of an evolving Europe over time.

Heraldry teaches that the circle symbolises perfection and entirety, encapsulating the European ideal of unity and harmony.

The twelve stars relate to the hours of the day and the months of the year and thus recall progress and forward momentum over time.

The circle is open and not closed and so reminds us not just of what has been accomplished but also of what remains to be achieved.

Speaking in Strasbourg in 1990, Vaclav Havel remarked; "to me, the twelve stars in your emblem do not express the proud conviction that Europe will build heaven on this earth. There will never be heaven on this earth. I see these twelve stars as a reminder that the world could become a better place, if from time to time, we had the courage to look up to the stars".

Today, of all days, it is my privilege on behalf of the European Parliament to suggest to you that in the lifetime of our old continent, as we consign our fractured past to the history books, this is a moment to look to the stars, to contemplate a better future - together.