

Prime Minister
Gro Harlem Brundtland

Welcome address for Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky

Parkveien, 3 April 1991

Dear Chancellor Vranitzky, dear friends,

Looking around this dinner table there can be no doubt about the agenda for your short visit to Oslo. All of us present here tonight have one thing in common; we devote much of our time to concluding the negotiations on a European Economic Area.

We are not wasting our time. We have no time to lose. Although the details are many - and as we know the devil lies in the details - we have definitively made progress since we met with our EFTA colleagues at Holmenkollen in March 1989. At that time Norway had the privilege of initiating the EEA process. Now, the Austrian chairmanship will have the privilege of concluding it. Your visit to Oslo and the other EFTA capitals demonstrates that this is your goal. For this we are grateful. A hearty welcome to you and your delegation.

The European Economic Area will add an important dimension to European integration. We are creating a common legal framework for trade among the 19 countries of Western Europe. We are expanding our political cooperation. The EEA will serve our interests today. And it may serve the interests of new European democracies tomorrow. We are demonstrating the very essence of cooperation by joining forces. We are increasing our influence by being able to speak with one voice.

Speaking with one voice has been the virtue of EFTA. And we have managed it well. Some suggested at the outset that the internal differences in EFTA were too great, that the perspectives of the Nordic and the Alpine countries could not be reconciled.

We have proved them to be wrong.

According to the Bible, the apostles at Whitsun all began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance; but everyone listening heard them speak the same language.

That has been our approach. In EFTA we have had the right spirit, and we have made our message clear. We have defined common interests - and we have learned to respect those which differ. You have learnt a lot about fish, and we have become well versed in transit through the Alps. No doubt our project is a comprehensive one!