

Address by Jean Rey at the signature of the association agreement between Greece and the EEC (9 July 1961)

Caption: On 9 July 1961, Jean Rey, European Commissioner and principle negotiator of the accession agreement between Greece and the European Economic Community (EEC), describes the agreement signed that same day in Athens as a decisive stage in the process of European unification.

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Here we are at the end of a perfect day, perfect in the nobility of the surroundings in which it has been spent, perfect in the setting which the Greek Government has given to it, perfect in its deep significance.

First of all I want to thank the Greek Government for their friendly welcome and for the flattering attention of which they have made us the object.

Mr Prime Minister, you have been good enough to pay tribute to the efforts of those who have been negotiating on behalf of the Community: now it is my turn to acclaim the work of our partners and friends — Mr Pesmazoglou, your distinguished representative in Brussels, Mr Christidis, Ambassador Sgourdeos, Mr Komitsas, Mr Gazis and Mr Dyriazides, who have, with such notable skill, ability and tenacity — sometimes too much tenacity — defended the interests of your country. Mr Prime Minister, Sir, you are better placed than I am to appreciate the importance of this day for Greece. What I want to tell you is how important it is for our Community.

First and foremost, it is important because it has demonstrated the vigour of the Community's Institutions. Between the Council, which decides, the Parliament, which discusses, and the Commission, which prepares and negotiates, close co-operation has developed which has enabled us to achieve today's result.

Next it is important because it has proved that our Community is not closed, that the words of the Treaty which say that it is open are not a dead letter and that on the contrary, the Community is anxious to extend itself to other European States. Once again this evening we can affirm that it is our generation which will put an end to a state of affairs by which for centuries Europe has been divided into warring States, and that our generation will bring unity to Europe. We learnt in the schoolroom that the fifteenth century was the century of the unification of France, and the nineteenth that of the unification of Germany and Italy: it is our duty and our resolve to act in such a way that in their turn our grandchildren will say that the years from 1950 to 1975 were those of the unification of Europe.

Lastly, this is a great day because it has shown our Community has no desire to remain selfishly closed in on itself and that the relatively rich industrial States of which it is made up are anxious to help the less fortunate to take advantage of our economic expansion and to raise their standards of living.

What country other than Greece, what people other than the Hellenic people was more worthy to become the first associate of the Community? Greece, Athens, the sound of these noble names, the sight of your sea, your islands, your skies, your hills clad in stately pines, stir in our hearts a deep response to the culture which was your gift to us.

You also taught us democracy, political freedom, and the rules of a system based on free discussion and the responsibility of the citizen.

Lastly, you have set us the example of valour. Full five and twenty centuries ago, down there on the plain beyond the mountains or hard by among the islands, you fought off an invader from the East. Today, too, you are willing with us to maintain and if need be to fight for the West and its concept of the freedom of man.

Tomorrow we bid you farewell, but this does not mean that we shall be going our separate ways, it means that we shall begin our life together. I hope it will be a happy one, that it will fulfil your aspirations, and that as the years go by 9 July 1961 will stand out more and more sharply as a great day in the history of Greece, a great day in the history of Europe, a great day in the history of the West and a great day in the history of freedom.