

Declaration by Leopold Figl on the admission of Austria to the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 16 April 1956)

Caption: On 16 April 1956, at the 18th session of the Committee of Ministers, Leopold Figl, Austrian Foreign Minister, welcomes Austria's accession to the Council of Europe and emphasises his country's wish to participate in the reconstruction of a Europe now at peace.

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"Mr. Chairman, allow me first of all to thank you for the cordial welcome you have given the Austrian Delegation and your friendly references to myself and the country I have the honour to represent.

It is for me a very great privilege and pleasure on this solemn occasion to announce Austria's formal accession to the Council of Europe. Our country's entry into this organisation is the realisation of a long-standing desire not only of the Austrian Government but also of the whole people of Austria.

Austria belongs to Western culture by virtue both of its intellectual tradition and historical development. In the course of our history we have, on several occasions, been the outpost defending the common values and the ideals which are dear to us all. The feeling of European unity is deeply rooted in Austria. We therefore regard our co-operation within the Council of Europe as an act of faith in the European idea.

For some years now we have been contributing to European economic co-operation in O.E.E.C. Our part in the work of the Council of Europe will be a significant addition to our efforts to achieve economic prosperity and peace in Europe.

The conclusion of the Austrian State Treaty undoubtedly reflected the fact that the international atmosphere had improved; and I think I can say without exaggeration that it was upon this that all the subsequent steps taken to bring about better relations between East and West were conditional. Up to that time the front of the cold war lay across Austria. During the last six years we became fully aware of the danger that this situation represented for our country. The withdrawal of the armies of occupation from Austria has banished this danger and eliminated a factor of uncertainty for European peace.

The restoration of a fully independent Austria has made it possible for us, for the first time in nearly eighteen years, to play a full part in international co-operation. Technical progress has reduced distances and brought the nations closer together. Today we know that only international co-operation can ensure the prosperity and security of peoples. It is for this reason that Austria, after declaring its permanent neutrality, has decided to play an active part in the work of intergovernmental and interparliamentary organisations of a non-military character.

In this connection we regard our accession to the Council of Europe as a milestone along the road which began with the welcome conclusion of the State Treaty.

May I, Sir, once more express my sincere thanks to you for your invitation and solemnly declare on behalf of the whole of my country that Austria will do its utmost to contribute, in the spirit of our common tradition, to the building of a united and peaceful Europe."

The meeting continued in private.