Mr Speaker, Friends of Europe, dear colleagues.

I have lived three turbulent months since my arrival in Seoul, since reconnecting with Korea.

I have seen a vibrant democracy at work, leading to a presidential election on May 9, the real Europe Day, and I happily ceded the date for the election of President Moon and changed the reception day for today.

I thank the Speaker, Mr [Chung Sye-kyun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chung_Sye-kyun), the representative of parliamentary democracy for having accepted for the first time to attend a national day and to address us.

I take this as another sign of the deepening of the strategic partnership between the Republic of Korea and the European Union. Only a few days ago, there was another first: Prof Cho Yoon-je was the first presidential envoy to travel to Brussels and Berlin and he met with President Tusk, the EU foreign policy chief Mogherini and the secretary general of the European diplomatic service, Ms Schmid.

In another first I saw off recently in Busan the Korean destroyer Daejoyoungham which participates in the EU lead anti-piracy operation ATALANTA off the coast of Somalia. We work there together to keep the lines of communication save and open, in the interest of the international community.

We need this i.a. for trade. The EU stands for open trade, we value the Free Trade Agreement with Korea, we are open for business as a two-way street and we shall strengthen together the rule based international order as well as the trading system.

This is the tradition of the EU. We celebrated recently the 60th birthday, the signing of the Treaty of Rome. In six decades the EU has turned from a small community of six, determined to overcome the legacies of the past, into the largest trader, investor and donor of public aid worldwide.

Another anniversary is significant: 30 years of the Erasmus scholarship program allowed 2 mio young people to study abroad, to get to know different cultures, to broaden their horizons. I am glad that more and more Koreans participate and study European matters – I happy that Jean Monnet professors from HUFES, Seoul and Korea University with some of their students joined us this evening as well as high school students from Yeodo High school with whom I met as part of the 2EU Goes To School" project.

Coming to Korea allowed me to connect with many longstanding friends of diplomatic and academic life. Among them I would like to thank in particular President Park In-kook who hosts us today in his splendid hall of the Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies, as well as Vice Minister Ahn whom I befriended already in Brussels.

I am looking forward working with you and hopefully report in a year's time that we have made further progress; that the European Union could have made a contribution to stabilising the situation on the Korean Peninsula. We know that the security and prosperity of the EU and Asia, the EU and Korea are intertwined and depend on each other. One of the major achievements of the EU is that we used to fight, now we talk – a relevant message for the region which we like to share.