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Speech by Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt in Lisbon on the occasion of the Lisbon Treaty's entry into force, 1 December 2009

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Today marks a new page in the history of European cooperation. We turn the page towards a more effective, more transparent and more modern European Union. We turn the page towards a European Union that can better cope with the challenges ahead of us. And we turn the page away from the mists of vagueness and uncertainty that for too long were allowed to dominate the European agenda.

Among many other things, the Lisbon Treaty will increase transparency. Strengthen citizens' rights. The elected European Parliament and the national parliaments in the Member States will have more say. At the same time, it will become easier to reach decisions on a range of issues. And we will be able to strengthen Europe's voice in the world.

This is indeed a significant day for Europe. To be back here in Lisbon, where the Treaty was signed in December 2007. To mark the start of our new common European framework. It fills me with a feeling of accomplishment, but also obligation.

The Lisbon Treaty is a commitment on the part of all 27 Member States of the European Union. It is a commitment, not towards the Union, but towards all the citizens of Europe. A commitment to see people's needs. To address their concerns and their hopes. And to do so by delivering on the issues that matter most to them.

In our work towards deepened European cooperation and integration, we have often used history as an argument. We have emphasised the significance of European cooperation. Bringing European peoples and countries closer together. We have stressed the importance of uniting Europe politically and economically - to prevent future wars on our continent.

This will also remain an important part of our present and future.

History is important. But at the same time we must remember, that to maintain our legitimacy we must take on the new challenges facing Europe. A new generation is emerging today that has not been marked by war. That cannot accept the idea of a Europe that stays the same.

People demand to know what we - in our countries and within the framework of European cooperation - can do to make their everyday lives easier. They want to believe that cooperation has a purpose. Not merely a historical purpose, but one for the future. This is what our common challenge for the future must be about.

With the Lisbon Treaty in place we have an answer to this. But it also raises the question of how the EU should be used in the future. This means it is time to take the next step in our approach to Europe. In this way, the Lisbon Treaty is to be seen more as the toolbox than as a solution in itself.

Before of us we have an EU which in many ways is a permanent construction site. This construction site is also multifaceted. There are many tools and many building blocks. Not all of them are usable, and some are frankly hard to put together. Yet this is one of the strengths of our European Union.

We now have the toolbox and we have common work to do. To secure financial recovery and economic growth. To combat unemployment and social exclusion. To make the investments in education, innovation and research needed in our globalised world. And to make Europe the world's pathfinder on the road towards sustainable development so as to tackle climate change.

Our obligations to the people of Europe are all of these. And at the same time we need to safeguard the principles of a free and open Europe – a Europe that acts and takes responsibility in the world.

With the Lisbon Treaty in place there are no longer any excuses. And I am relieved to be able to say that. Now we have been given the toolbox, it is up to us how we use it. Let us use the tools given us to take on the challenges of the future. And to do so together.

Let us make the first of December the first day of a new beginning. A new beginning in the history of European cooperation. Where we clearly state that we will carry out our future work in the best interests of our citizens. And I am sure the European journey ahead of us will be filled with progress and success.

Thank you.