

CONTRIBUTION BY PRIME MINISTER GYULA HORN TO THE DEBATE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN THE HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENT ON FEBRUARY 22, 1995

On the government side we are delighted that this day's debate has occurred because the members of the parties represented here in Parliament have put over the authentic views of their party groups.

Now there were many questions we did not agree on in the last Parliament, but if you remember, the government and opposition in the last Parliament did agree that the Republic of Hungary should submit its application for admission to the European Union (EU). And we were perhaps united on a good many other foreign-policy questions which served the good of the country.

I do not wish to react to a good many speeches, heard mainly earlier on, but I would like to mention one, concerning the smiles offensive, the statement that the government's representatives are carrying out a smiles offensive on our neighbours.

Now I have seen the pictures taken when the leaders of the three Hungarian opposition parties met with Prime Minister Meciar of Slovakia. I did not find they had burst into tears. It is clear that we have to negotiate with the neighbouring countries, and we have to deal above all with the questions which are the most important to this country's interests.

Now you might argue here about the importance of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration organizations, or about what conditions they are imposing upon us, but one thing is indisputable: Hungary faces a historic chance. We face a historic chance in the sense that we will now, for the first time, have an opportunity to join up in an institutional way with the advanced democracies, that is the EU and NATO.

What does this signify specifically for Hungary, for the Hungarian nation? First of all, it certainly signifies a chance, an opportunity to catch up with the developed economic systems. So it could mean that we can make up in a few years or decades a lag of a century, or several centuries.

Secondly it signifies that we can join as an equal partner in deciding European issues, in deciding the decisive issues for the destiny of European nations. We can be in the current, and that applies to capital, ideas, people, and cultural and material values alike. No united Europe can be conceived of without this. This accession can provide Hungary with security guarantees, guarantees it has not possessed for centuries. And last but not least, admission to these organizations signifies that we will be able to create with our neighbours permeable borders and a meeting of 15 million Hungarians, a united Europe.

That is the stake. And the Hungarian government, guided by the responsibility invested in them by the voters, views this stake in the most serious manner and wants to subordinate to it the decisive majority of its activity. We estimate that a large part of the domestic conditions for accession are already fulfilled. Parliamentary democracy and constitutionalism exist, human rights are assured and the market economy developing. Still ahead – and this constitutes a big task – is full-scale development of the system of institutions for the market economy, and to this I would add something else: preparation of a modernization programme, concerning whose substance and strategy we would like by

the end of April to submit a draft position to Parliament, so that in cooperation with the EU we can frame by the end of the year the elements of our accession to the EU and a modernization programme.

There is full acknowledgement among our international partners, above all in Brussels, of the fact that what is happening in today's Hungary in the field of legal and political harmonization, for instance, places us in the forefront of the neighbouring countries in terms of meeting the conditions for admission to the EU. There is also agreement – and this is of fundamental importance – that there should be constant dialogue among the political forces on the questions of accession to the EU and to NATO. This I would like to underline because I consider it absolutely necessary for the government to call for the opinion of the opposition parties when devising the means and contents of the ensuing negotiations. So I would like to request you, honourable opposition members, to continue taking part as you have done so far in the ex-change of views on the issues of accession to the EU and NATO.

As far as the external conditions are concerned, the willingness of these integration organizations in connection with Hungary's admission has been plainly expressed, not only at the Essen summit, but most recently in Brussels as well. Indeed, I can go further than that. Work has already begun in the EU and NATO on devising the system of conditions and requirements connected with admission and membership. In these organizations a kind of internal consultation has started about the questions of structural adaptation. This is extremely important, especially if we consider that the EU and NATO as well are given to a very great extent by internal disputes and dilemmas.

I would underline that there is a chance, a hope that the EU intergovernmental conference starting in June 1996 will decide on a time for commencing negotiations on Hungary's accession to the EU. These, as we know, will presumably take a minimum of three years. We would like to shorten this period.

Having said this I doubt that anyone can have grounds for saying we are chasing any illusions about the chances of joining the EU or NATO. There is no question of that. This is tangible reality, which the other prime ministers expressed at Essen by saying that the process into which we have entered is irreversible and leads to membership.

I would very much like to underline, as a response or reaction to the question of speed and other demands, that the Hungarian government is working to bring in a good few things as soon as possible. This is not a question, as certain people interpret it, of our having set times that are out of joint with reality. We have set as a goal, both for the basic treaties and thereafter for accession, the meeting of a deadline, and the realization of tasks within that deadline, that makes membership possible.

That is why we expressed ourselves on the basis of the latest talks in Brussels by saying there is a chance of Hungary entering NATO in 1996, or of substantive negotiations taking place on membership. Similarly there is a possibility, a real chance, that there will at last be a time in 1996, a deadline for the commencement of negotiations with the EU.

I would like to emphasize that there is a variety of expert work going on, of expert materials being prepared on the cases of the outsiders, the countries aspiring to membership. But my belief is that there will ultimately be a political decision taken in the EU and in NATO. Such a political decision in the EU on the chances of accession for the

six associate members and the content, essence and course of such a political decision are of fundamental importance to us.

I have to say without self-praise of any kind that Hungary, the Hungarian government was alone at the Essen summit in putting forward some kind of a programme for defining and scheduling the prospect of accession to the EU and the specific tasks to be accomplished on the way. No other associated country possesses such a programme or has put such a programme forward. This is a very important advance, and this is appreciated very strongly by the leaders of the EU in Brussels.

The other thing I would like to underline is that so far as I know, there is no European state that would oppose Hungary's membership of either the EU or NATO. Certainly no state in the neighbourhood would. There can hardly be a more promising circumstance than that for taking this great step, making and achieving this great change.

And I would underline something the foreign minister mentioned as well: there is also agreement with our neighbours that we should indeed join these two organizations. And I would add something more: it will be to the good of the Republic of Hungary if our neighbours, either with us or separately, either sooner or later, can enter the EU or NATO. It would reinforce Hungary's security and stability if this process ends successfully.

What is it the EU and NATO are expressing as a requirement of us? (Here they are not looking at what composition of government is in power in Hungary; their demands are on the Hungarian government of the time.) They state very firmly that we should settle our relations with our neighbours. The EU and NATO are simply not willing to accept states which have out-standing disputed border questions or unsettled minority problems and contentions, and so on. On this all 15 EU member-states and all 16 NATO member-states agree – the member-states and their organizations.

I think it is important to underline this, because when we agreed with Prime Minister Meciar in January on aiming to finalize a basic treaty before the Paris Stability Agreement, this intention was generally welcomed, and this welcome was reconfirmed most recently in Brussels as well.

I would like to stress in this respect that we did not say, none of us government representatives said we insisted on finalizing the basic treaty by March 20. What we said was, there is an opportunity, but no guarantee. We want to seize this opportunity, which in the main consists of and can be attributed to the fact that our partner is also prepared to finalize the basic treaty, for well-founded national and international reasons.

And if the subject has come up, for almost everyone without exception had something to say on it, let me too add something. No basic treaty is capable of fulfilling every desire. It would be quite unrealistic to demand, or presume anything of the kind about a basic treaty. I would also like to stress that basic treaties cannot deal, are incapable of dealing – and we would not allow them to deal – with criticism or analysis of the government programmes of neighbouring countries. That is not the subject-matter of a basic treaty. That constitutes the internal affair of the country concerned, whether that should be the neighbouring country or the Republic of Hungary.

And I quite agree with what my fellow Member of Parliament László Surján had to say, for this is the government's intention as well: we cannot include in the basic treaty anything, any requirements or demands that go beyond those set in the international documents.

I would like to emphasize in this context that it is quite untrue to say the existing, operating Hungarian parties and movements in the neighbouring countries reject the idea of a basic treaty. There is no question of that. In fact I would add that it was precisely the Hungarian parties in Slovakia which most recently expressed their agreement with the Hungarian draft of the Hungarian-Slovak basic treaty. So I do not know where some of my fellow members have gained the opposite impression from. Anyway let me say something: there will be another meeting probably next week with the representatives of the Hungarian parties existing and operating in the neighbourhood. And they also agree we should express in a basic treaty the possibility of concluding agreements that assist the rise of the middle class among Hungarians in neighbouring countries. This is extremely important. And this government has taken a good many steps that will promote the prosperity of the Hungarian community in the neighbourhood in the economic field. The foundation is now taking place of the first banks with Hungarian cooperation, which marks a most important step from the point of view not only of Hungarian-Romanian relations, but of the situation of the Hungarian community. And I would add that if we conclude a basic treaty which rests, as we intend, on a network of other bilateral agreements, that will simultaneously allow agreements and cooperation to emerge on the level and within the framework of civil associations of the most various kinds.

Clearly – and I have to agree with such opinions – no basic treaty can solve everything. In fact it fails to solve a sizeable proportion of the issues. That is not its purpose, not its task. It is a matter of a framework agreement, a matter of laying down principles, which cannot be a substitute either for the Council of Europe framework agreement on minority protection or the various other documents of the EU.

And let me add something more again. It is not a cardinal issue to my mind whether this should be a basic treaty, in which we define border and territorial questions and protection of minority rights, or whether we should conclude a separate agreement on minorities. In this respect the government is flexible. It is flexible, and starts out from the premise that a European problem, which this certainly is, can only be solved in a European way, here in this region, on this continent. Attention must be paid to everything that the EU and the other international organizations tell us. And I would like to underline that the Hungarian community – not just those living in the Republic of Hungary, but all the 15-million-strong Hungarian community – has gained an opportunity, and if we miss it, I cannot say when it will recur.

I consider it most important that national and international interests and the universal interests of the Hungarian community should be apparent, as they will be, in the conclusion of the basic treaty and in the steps taken to improve the bilateral relationship. Let me underline something here: I consider it necessary for there to be six-party consultations, and I have pressed for them up to now as well. But I would like respectfully to draw the attention of opposition members to the fact that this government is going to complete the process of accession to the EU and accession to NATO, or creation of the opportunities for this. The government will subordinate everything else to this. At the same time, its policy will be to support and assist by every means at its disposal the interests, efforts and success of the Hungarian community beyond our borders. It is simply not true to say, as the previous speaker put it, that we accept in silence the infringements of their

rights and the crude atrocities suffered by the Hungarian community abroad. That is not true. Kindly consider the performance of our representatives at various international fora – whether in the Council of Europe or anywhere else, or in bilateral negotiations – for we raise these matters everywhere without exception. And we raise these matters also when negotiating with the leaders of the country concerned, whether it be President Iliescu or Prime Minister Meciar or anyone else.

So I reject most decidedly assumptions of the kind that we swallow in silence all the events that are contrary to the principles and practice of democracy and human rights. In my judgement, the Hungarian community, including the entire Hungarian community, has the national capacity to integrate into Europe. Let no one try to weaken this national capacity.

On the subject of NATO I would add only this to what has been said so far: that there have appeared a number of misconceptions and a number of assessments in various guises, purporting to show what great burdens this will place on the country. What NATO basically demands of us is that we should change our way of thinking, which means among other things that we must relate in a different spirit to the army and make our defence spending transparent, that we must ensure parliamentary control over the armed forces and their finances, which is a natural aspiration of this government as well. The financial implications of this in the short term are limited to one thing: that we create the means of communications between the NATO forces and the Hungarian armed forces in the case of membership. The rest will be in the long term, for making armies and armed forces compatible with each other is a long-term business. This is something I wanted to underline, because a wide variety of interpretations have been appearing on the subject.

I cannot agree with those who express the view – and I think this has been heard again here – that the achievement of neutrality is the only road open to us. In an age of mutual dependencies and connections, neutrality is steadily losing significance and value. Look at neighbouring Austria, and the fate of its eternal neutrality in the light of its accession to the EU. The same will come to apply to Switzerland and other traditionally neutral countries.

During international negotiations and bilateral talks, I always underline that the Hungarian Parliament differs from Parliaments in a good many neighbouring countries, for instance, in containing no extremist, nationalist political forces. And I can rightly say so. There are no extreme nationalist forces in this Parliament. This gives us very strong chances of being able to reach agreement on the most important questions fundamental to the country. But I very much request everyone respectfully, appealing to the responsibility of all Members of Parliament, not to stir up people's passions. That will lead us nowhere. We know how much tragedy was inflicted on the Hungarian community when attempts were made to deal with politics through passions. That had very grave consequences for the whole Hungarian community.

I would like to ask that when we come to decide on these issues – for now we are simply holding a day of debate – we should never lose sight of the fact that we face an opportunity that neither we, nor our children or grandchildren would ever forgive us for missing. Thank you very much.

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