

ADDRESS BY LÁSZLÓ KOVÁCS, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY AT THE MEETING OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL HELD AT BRUSSELS, 16 DEC. 1997

Mr. Secretary General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel deeply honoured and privileged to represent my country today at this meeting of historic significance which will mark yet another outstanding moment in the process of the accession of the Republic of Hungary to the North Atlantic Alliance. This meeting is a milestone both in the process of Hungary's Euro-Atlantic integration and in the enlargement of NATO that greatly contributes to the emergence of a new democratic Europe, united and free.

After successful negotiations with the Alliance, the signing of the accession protocols will further pave the way for Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic to become full members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. This is the clearest proof that the Sixteen do consider Hungary and the other two invited countries to be mature for membership. These countries are able and willing to contribute to the common efforts of the Alliance, to the enhanced security and stability of the whole Euro-Atlantic region.

Hungary considers the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation as a historic step that will expand the zone of stability and security to the benefit of all the countries of the Euro-Atlantic region. Many times, history has been unkind to us. In 1956, our quest for freedom was crushed. But the Hungarian people never gave up the ideals of democracy, freedom and liberty. Since Hungary cut through the Iron Curtain along its Western border and the consequent fall of the Berlin wall, we have come a long way. In a historically short period of time we have established and consolidated multi-party democracy, the rule of law and the legal and institutional framework of a properly functioning market economy.

All these changes have made us eligible for NATO membership, thus offering a unique opportunity for my country to anchor itself, once and for all, in the community of democratic nations sharing the same values, interests and objectives. Hungary's accession to NATO is firmly based on the consensus among all political parties represented in our Parliament and enjoys the overwhelming support of the Hungarian people. It was manifested in the outstanding result of the referendum held on November 16 where more than 85% of the turnout voted in favour of our membership. This result has been the most convincing expression of the strong commitment of the Hungarian people to Euro-Atlantic integration.

Mr. Secretary General, distinguished Colleagues,

I am pleased to announce that Hungary has on its part complied with all internal requirements and conditions of the first phase of the accession process. May I avail myself of this opportunity to thank all those, civilians and military alike, who have helped us with dedication and high level of professionalism throughout the entire process.

As it was stated in the letter of intent I sent to you, Mr. Secretary General, it is my country's firm intention to provide for its own security and contribute to the security of all the Allies within the framework of a cohesive, strong and committed NATO, based on solidarity among the Allied countries on both sides of the Atlantic. Hungary fully accepts all obligations and wishes to enjoy all rights stemming from membership.

I would also like to underline that Hungary accepts the broad approach to security and defence as outlined in NATO's Strategic Concept. We are committed to full participation in the Integrated Military Structure of the Alliance. May I take this opportunity to welcome the decision by NATO on the new command structure. My country will commit the bulk of its armed forces to collective defence and is ready to commit forces, as necessary, to other NATO missions as well. Hungary will allocate, as appropriate, adequate budgetary resources in order to be able to comply with these commitments upon accession to the Alliance. The country's sustainable economic growth and the planned increase of defence expenditure will provide a solid foundation for fulfilling this commitment.

And last but certainly not least, I would like to emphasise my country's strong support for the open-ended and inclusive nature of NATO's enlargement as stated in the Madrid Declaration. We have a strong interest in seeing all countries of Central and Eastern Europe become members of the Alliance once they fulfil the criteria of membership. We remain committed to supporting their efforts, to sharing our experiences obtained in the process of our own accession.

All these favourable developments which have culminated in today's event do not mean that we can sit back and relax. On the contrary: much of the work is yet to be done. I therefore very much welcome NATO's readiness to open its bodies and structures for participation by invited countries. It will greatly help in our preparation for membership. Conveying our sincerest thanks for the valuable assistance from the member countries, let me express our hope that we can rely on the continuation of this support.

My Government hopes that the signing of the Accession Protocol will be followed by fruitful discussions in the Parliaments of member countries which will reflect the same constructive approach that has characterised all the different phases of the enlargement process so far and which will result in the early ratification of the Accession Protocols. In that process, legislators in both current member and invited countries are facing the historic challenge of taking a decision that will shape the future of the continent for a long time to come. It is up to us all to make sure that this historic chance will be used.

Thank you very much.

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