

VISEGRÁD GROUP. JOINT STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRMEN OF THE COMMITTEES OF THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, OF THE DEFENCE AND OF THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF THE PARLIAMENTS OF HUNGARY, POLAND, SLOVAKIA AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC, ADOPTED AT THEIR 7TH MEETING, PRAGUE, JUNE 24 - 25, 2001

1. We, the representatives of the Parliaments of the Central European countries, met in Prague to review and assess the achievements of the Visegrád Group parliamentary cooperation within the previous period. We agree that our cooperation and regular consultations are highly beneficial for our common interests regarding the area of the European and the Euro-Atlantic integration as well as the Central European political stability and security. The past ten years have proved the importance of this regional forum. We reaffirm our commitment to foster and develop it further.
2. This year has brought remarkable events in the field of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes. The announcements of the highest representatives of the EU and the NATO regarding a readiness for respective enlargements of both organisations can be considered as an encouraging signal.
3. The Nice European Council declared the EU commitment to accelerate and intensify the accession negotiations with the candidate countries based on the Enlargement Strategy and its „road map“. Our expectations have been largely satisfied thanks to the intensive effort of the Swedish Presidency. We welcome the Gothenburg Presidency Conclusions to accelerate the access negotiation so that the prepared candidates should conclude them before the end of year 2002. The best prepared candidates should take part in the elections to the European Parliament in 2004 as full-fledged members.
4. As the potential new EU members, we pay equal attention to the enlargement as well as to the debate about institutional reform and future shape of the EU. Therefore, we perceive the current debate over the European governance from the point of view of perspective participants of the next Inter-Governmental Conference in 2004. In this regard we hope that the Laeken European Council will also incorporate the candidates' contributions in order to structure and to direct further discussions. In this context we hope for a more equitable distribution of seats in the European Parliament for the candidate countries.
5. We consider free movement of persons including free movement of labour as one of the basic values of Europe. Therefore we appeal to our colleagues in the Parliaments of the EU countries to help us keep the possible transition periods to an absolute minimum.
6. We are convinced that the Visegrád Group as a tool of regional cooperation may in future also serve as a suitable framework for the promotion of common interests inside the EU. We are ready to cooperate with the EU regional groupings.
7. The result of the Irish referendum on the Nice Treaty should not become an obstacle for the enlargement. In this connection a more effective information strategy for the citizens of both the EU member and candidate states is urgently needed.
8. We, as the future EU members welcome the development of the Common European Security and Defence Policy in which we are taking active part. We hope that the CESDP

will further enhance the capabilities of NATO which in our view remains the indispensable guarantee of peace and stability in Europe.

9. We welcome the conclusions of the NATO Special Meeting of June 13, 2001 calling for the next enlargement of the Alliance to be launched at its Prague Summit in November 2002. This clear political message reaffirms the Alliance's commitment to pursue its open-door policy. We expect that Slovakia and all other prepared candidate countries will be invited for the NATO membership at the Prague Summit. To this end, the current NATO members among us are ready to be helpful as much as possible.

10. We also give a close attention to the U.S. - EU relationship. We consider our cooperation as absolutely vital for further strengthening of the Trans-Atlantic bond and responding to current and future challenges. We are not going to be drawn into the discussions as if our destiny is based on a choice between the U.S. and Europe. We regard such way of thinking as harmful to both sides of the Euro-Atlantic community.

11. We are also ready to take part in detailed discussions of new security threats and adequate means of response to them. In this regard we hope that consultations on the U. S. missile defence initiative with European countries will result in a concrete solution benefiting the European security in the foreseeable future.

12. We express our deep concern over the latest developments in Macedonia and reject any attempts to push through political objectives by force. We strongly support broad efforts of the international community, particularly those of the EU and NATO, to restore order and to reach peaceful settlement of all ethnic, religious and national conflicts. We consider to plan to launch the operation „Essential Harvest“ in Macedonia as an important step to restore peace and stability in that country. The international community must not allow another civil war in the region. To this objective, the rapid and effective implementation of the Stability Pact would be of utmost importance.

13. We agree that our next meeting takes place in the autumn 2001 in Hungary.

Prague, 25 June 2001

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Chairman
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National Assembly of the Republic of Hungary

József Szájer
Chairman
Committee on European Integration Affairs
National Assembly of the Republic of Hungary

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Paweł Graś
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Sejm of the Republic of Poland

Wojciech Arkuszewski
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