

PRESENTATION BY MR. LÁSZLÓ KOVÁCS, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY AT THE MEETING OF ROMANIAN AMBASSADORS AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF ROMANIA (BUCHAREST, SEPTEMBER 5, 2002)

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to present a short overview of the goals and essential elements of Hungarian foreign policy to senior representatives of Romanian foreign policy. This is the first ever invitation of this kind extended to a Hungarian Foreign Minister, and I believe it symbolises the fact that success in regional co-operation is the key to successful participation in the Euro-Atlantic organisations. My view is – and the impressions I gathered at a similar recent conference in Warsaw have confirmed this view – that it is the non-theoretical, non-ideological and practical approach to both international and bilateral relations, which is so characteristic of us diplomats that provides a good basis for mutual understanding and for the identification of common interests and positions.

The foreign policy goals of the new government

The new Hungarian Socialist-Liberal Government sees its historic mission:

- in accomplishing Hungary's Euro-Atlantic integration by becoming member of the European Union,
- in enhancing stability in Central Europe through maintaining and developing good relations with our neighbours,
- and in strengthening the self-awareness of Hungarians living in neighbouring countries as well as their relations with their kin state.

Hungary will need to realise these goals in an international environment that has undergone major changes during the past decade. Against this new international background rethinking our foreign policy has become a necessity.

The program of the Hungarian Government identifies the following elements of such a comprehensive policy-renewal:

- The foreign policy needs to be free of party-political and ideological considerations and be based on a broad social consensus.
- We must maintain balance among the various priorities of the Hungarian foreign policy.
- We ought to promote the twin-track processes of internal adaptation and enlargement of NATO.
- Hungary's EU-accession is a national goal that points well beyond the boundaries of foreign policy. It is vital that Hungarian national interests are asserted in an integrated way throughout our EU-accession and in the decision-making process of the enlarged Union.
- We also need to assume a constructive, at the same time critical approach to the opportunities and challenges of globalisation.

The internal development and enlargement of the European Union

By the turn of the century, the history of European integration has entered a new and decisive phase. We stand at the threshold of reuniting Europe, for the first time in history by peaceful means. The new continent will comprise all European states willing and able to accede – exercising their free choice. Our task today is nothing less than to make the enlarged Europe a success. In order to accomplish this goal we will have to build on the best ever prepared accession and overcome the remaining psychological barriers too.

We believe that the success of the enlarged EU is also intertwined with our ability to achieve a higher and sustainable economic growth rate, while preserving and enhancing social cohesion in both current and prospective member countries. The vision expressed by the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 is rather close to the heart of the Hungarian centre-left government since we would like to see Europe and Hungary sharing the social democratic values of social justice, solidarity and equal opportunities.

There is an intensive debate taking place in the member countries of the EU on the future of integration. Particularly how further deepening of the Union could be harmonised with the forthcoming enlargement, and whether the European integration should take a looser or federal shape. The Laeken Declaration adopted in December 2001 has identified a set of open, interrelated questions regarding the Future of Europe. These include better division of competencies, simplification of EU treaties and instruments, improving the effectiveness of decision-making and the possibility of a European constitution, as well as the future international role of the Union.

We are hopeful that the Convention and subsequently the institutional Intergovernmental Conference will table proposals leading to a clearer vision for the future of Europe. We also consider important for the Convention and the IGC to deal not only with institutional issues but also facilitate the further development of community and union policies. Among them CESDP and Justice and Home Affairs will be prime targets for advancement. The Convention is the forerunner of the enlarged Union, since member states and candidates can contribute to its work on an equal footing. The Hungarian Government greatly values this opportunity, since it is the best way of planning a common house for the future EU28.

In the debate on the Future of Europe special attention is given to the issue of permanently redefining the balance between European and national identities. The enlargement of the Union will further enhance the national, ethnic and cultural diversity within the organisation. Rather than being in contradiction, national and European identities complement each other. Hungary's history – in many respects quite similarly to the Romanian – has been characterised by a constant struggle in defence of our sovereignty and national identity. Hence we are for a European Union where each and every nation is able to preserve its identity. In the everyday management of the integration this idea has to be translated into bigger and smaller countries both playing their full role in the decision-making process of the EU.

The enlargement of the European Union is an issue of strategic importance from the point of view of accomplishing the goals of the EU. Candidate countries from Central and Eastern Europe may well provide greater dynamism for the development of the European project. Ever more people in Europe begin to realise that the admission of our countries

does not constitute a risk for the Union but much rather new market, investment, and employment opportunities.

The past three years have produced a breakthrough in the process of enlargement. Important decisions have been taken on providing for the necessary financial means for the project, adopting a new decision-making formula for the enlarged Union and drawing up a so called road-map for the accession of the future members. The Seville European Council reconfirmed the timetable of enlargement which foresees the possibility of completing the accession negotiations with the best-prepared candidates by the end of this year. It has also pointed at the need to lay out a clear roadmap for those countries who will eventually follow suit later.

Hungary's accession strategy

Hungary's accession negotiations are proceeding successfully in accordance with the so called „road map”. We have been able to close provisionally 26 and a half (counting the veterinary and phytosanitary part of the agricultural chapter) chapters of the Acquis Communautaire. We therefore stand a good chance – along with other candidate countries – to reach final agreement with the Union on the remaining chapters in the coming months.

During the current vital phase of the accession process the negotiating strategy of the new Government is broadly identical with the line taken by previous Hungarian Administrations. In essence, we want to accede to the Union at the earliest date under the best possible conditions. We also expect the EU to respect the timetable of enlargement that it has itself established and confirmed. We are striving for full-fledged membership on the basis of equal treatment, equal rights and equal obligations. Any form of „second-class membership” is inconceivable for us.

Similarly to our Romanian colleagues, we are anticipating the country-report of the EU Commission due this fall as well as a position by the end of this year on identifying the countries to accede. We have no objections to the most likely scenario of admitting several countries at the same time. However due attention should be paid to assessing candidate countries on the basis of their own individual merits. At the same time we support solidarity among the countries of our region with a view to mutually promoting each other's EU-accession.

Our government wishes to accelerate and complete Hungary's EU-preparations by the end of this year, including the process of legal harmonisation, implementation and the institution-building required by membership. It also wishes to start a more intensive social dialogue on various aspects of EU-accession. We recognise the need to prepare the society for being able to take advantage of our membership and cope with the challenges. Equally, we wish to strengthen the role of the Parliament in the entire process of accession. We also believe that financial assistance from the European Union – disbursed on the basis of fair and equal treatment – is essential to the completion of the transition process and our accelerated economic development.

Our policy of maintaining good relations with our neighbours, Hungarians living in neighbouring countries

One of the directions of Hungarian foreign policy, crucial for the stability and development of our region is maintaining cordial relations with neighbouring countries, and states of our broader region. We are linked to our neighbours in a good number of ways: long common borders, economic interdependence, cultural and historic links, the sizeable number of Hungarians living beyond our borders, the national minorities living in Hungary, the common tasks of infrastructural development and environmental protection, as well as our quest for membership in the Euro-Atlantic organisations.

Hungary has a particularly strong interest in the quickest possible accession of its neighbours, as well as of the countries of the broader region to the Euro-Atlantic structures. We envisage a common future for our region within the framework of European integration. Hungary thus wishes to develop bilateral co-operation on the basis of European values, mutual understanding and confidence, taking into account the specific features of the individual partner countries and our relations with them. The Hungarian Government is also aware that the situation of the Hungarians living in neighbouring countries will only be settled in a long-lasting and reassuring manner within the framework of European integration.

The new government wants to use its status acquired in the Euro-Atlantic institutions, the results achieved by Hungary in the process of EU-enlargement and our internationally renowned economic performance to help strengthen stability in Central Europe instead of pursuing regional power ambitions. The Hungarian government supports the further enlargement of NATO, preserving the open-door-policy of the organisation and wishes to integrate our neighbours into the same security system that we belong to. We are therefore actively promoting the forthcoming enlargement of the Alliance while also seek to adopt and extend its partnership programs.

As I said at the beginning, successful regional co-operation is essential in joining the Euro-Atlantic institutions. The same however is also true in the reverse order. The enlargement of NATO and EU will lend further relevance to our relations with the region of Central Europe. Apart from interstate relations, we are encouraging the establishment of co-operating networks among local governments and NGOs. The various subregional activities have already created more than 50 frameworks of cross-border, inter-city and Euro-regional groupings with Hungarian participation.

Hungary welcomes the initiatives by certain EU member states and candidate countries (Austria, Sweden, United Kingdom, Poland, Romania) to establish strategic partnerships among Central-European and South-Eastern European countries with a view to promote the enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic structures. In our opinion, the new geopolitical situation and the enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic organisations create challenges that are best tackled through a renewed regional dialogue and partnership. For this end we must concentrate on taking greater advantage of the existing bi- and multilateral frameworks.

In this context, special attention should be paid to organizations that include countries from the region at different levels of preparedness for the Euro-Atlantic integration. The best example of this form of co-operation is the Central European Initiative that along with the enlarging EU may play a long-term role in enhancing the internal cohesion of our region. The Central European Free Trade Agreement has already been instrumental in making Central European trade links more dynamic and provided a useful framework for the settlement of trade-related disputes. It is likely to retain its relevance following the forthcoming round of EU enlargement. As an active supporter of the Stability Pact for

South-East Europe, Hungary will continue to play a pivotal role in the process of democratisation and stabilisation of our southern neighbours through the „Szeged Process”.

The Hungarian Government feels responsibility for ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring countries and will keep assisting them to prosper in their homeland. The improvement of their situation, their genuine equality of rights and chances as well as the preservation of their ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity is considered a national cause, therefore the Hungarian Government provides support to achieve these goals. In the course of fulfilling this political and moral obligation, the Hungarian Government is making an effort to conclude agreements that are also acceptable for the neighbouring countries. These accords should also be in harmony with the relevant European norms and standards while promoting the interests of the Hungarians minorities and the aforementioned goals.

Bilateral relations between Hungary and Romania

We attach distinguished importance to Romania and Hungaro-Romanian relations. Romania is an important partner of ours, given our common traditions and shared history, the similarities of economic transition and social transformation and the general coincidence of political interests, goals and orientations. This is reflected in the intensity of high-level contacts and the dynamic development of our economic relations (in 2001 turnover of bilateral trade amounted to more than 1 billion USD, our investments in Romania reached an accrued value of 180 million USD, with the number of joint ventures having increased to 3500).

Our goal is to preserve the current excellent state in our bilateral ties and ensure their further qualitative development. In the context of Hungaro-Romanian relations, we would like to pursue the three basic objectives of Hungarian foreign policy coherently. We are convinced that a friendly bilateral relationship is a prerequisite of settling the problems of Hungarian and Romanian minorities. Again it is true vice-versa, since a positive feeling among the ethnic minorities may also have a positive impact on our relations.

The implementation of the Law on Hungarians living in neighbouring countries is proceeding without problems. With regard to the amendment of this Law, we consider that the four points of principle and potential timetable expressed at the July 6 meeting between Prime Ministers Medgyessy and Nastase (prosperity of minorities in their homelands, an implementation that is in line with the position of the neighbouring countries, European institutional norms, claims of those concerned) provide us with the appropriate guidelines.

We do not wish to narrow our bilateral relations to the issue of the Law on Hungarians living in neighbouring countries. As far as the further development of bilateral relations is concerned, we give priority to areas that will directly improve relations between our peoples (such as trade, encouragement of entrepreneurship, infrastructure, border crossing points, consulates general). We attach great importance to common programs in the fields of environmental protection, water management, agriculture and rural development, tourism. We welcome the Act of the Romanian Parliament on restitution of properties to the Churches and would like to see it being implemented as quickly as

possible. The use of the mother tongue of the Hungarian minority and the development of Hungarian higher education in Romania will remain in the focus of our attention.

In accordance with the EU concept of a „Europe of Regions” we urge the enhancement of Euro-regional and transborder co-operation, including the Carpathian Euro-region that dates back to several years, also the promising Danube-Tisza-Körös-Maros initiative, the evolving relations between the Counties of Hajdú-Bihar and Bihar, between the cities of Debrecen and Oradea, and the synchronised application of EU sources (Phare CBC, Interreg) to that end.

We are ready to review the entire scope of bilateral relations and anticipate genuine progress in all areas of bilateral co-operation. We could also consider reviewing the implementation of the Basic Treaty and other bilateral agreements and documents. We can also support the joint elaboration of a balanced document of substantial nature that would lend political impetus for further progress and define new tasks in the Hungarian-Romanian relations.

Let me reiterate once again, we attach high importance to Romania’s Euro-Atlantic integration. We are supporting Romania’s earliest possible accession to NATO and Romania’s preparation to that end in each and every possible manner. The Hungarian Diplomacy would like the Prague Summit to take a decision in favour of a robust enlargement, that would extend invitations for all countries prepared for membership. We support the principles expressed in the Romanian-Bulgarian-Greek-Turkish declaration adopted in Istanbul last February. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria would surely strengthen the southern flank of the Alliance. Hungary’s security policy is aimed at the establishment of a single security zone stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

We welcome Romania’s efforts for EU-membership. As a partner and a fellow candidate country we appreciate all achievements that Romania has accomplished during the past decade in the process of democratic transformation and creating a functioning market economy. Romania’s performance was also recognised by the EU in its last country report. We also welcome the encouraging results Romania has so far achieved in the process of integration. For instance, in complying with the requirements of EU migration and asylum policies. We are heartened by the decision of the EU to grant visa-free status to Romania. Hungary is ready to exchange information on EU-related matters and share our own accession experience with our Romanian friends.

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