HUNGARY IN NATO:
A SOLID BOND OF COMMON VALUES AND SHARED INTERESTS

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While other pressing challenges are bound to divert international attention to other regions and problems, we in Central Europe believe that NATO and its enlargement process continue to play an essential role in the stability of our old continent. It is therefore of pivotal importance that we not neglect this objective and make every effort to get it right.

A Sense of Belonging

Hungary is a country that was haunted for almost half a millennium by failed foreign policy aspirations and foreign domination of various kinds. As a result, we can appreciate the value of belonging to where we have always felt our rightful place under the sun is: to the community of like-minded Western nations sharing similar aspirations and the same fundamental values.

To better understand our relationship with the West and NATO, it is indeed worthwhile taking a quick look at my country's 1000-year old history. The first 500 years of settled existence in the heart of Europe and of Central European great power status were ended by a fatal blow to our sovereignty in the early 16th century, initiating a seemingly never-ending streak of misfortunes and misjudgment that pushed Hungary to the margins of Europe. While the late 19th century had provided the glimmers of hope for breaking the curse, the 20th century was not much kinder to us. Following the tragedies of two world wars, the fateful Churchill-Stalin pact in Moscow in October 1944 and international reaction to our 1956 revolution only reinforced the hopelessness of our situation.

It is against this backdrop that the significance of our accession to NATO can be properly understood. Many Hungarians remember the tearful experience of listening to Secretary Albright on March 12, 1999 when she stated: "Never again will your fates be tossed around like poker chips on a bargaining table. You are truly allies; you are truly home." This powerful statement had a tremendous impact in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, nations that know a thing or two about "poker chip treatment." The referendum held in Hungary in 1997 with its 85% approval of our NATO membership is solid testimony to the popularity of and our commitment to the idea of resuming our place on the happier side of history. The ceremony at the Truman Library three years ago affirmed our countries' final arrival in the Euro-Atlantic community of shared values. This is our natural habitat, from which we were artificially excluded by alien authoritarian rule and Soviet occupation.

Hungary's so-called Euro-Atlantic orientation is a natural part and consequence of the profound transition process that has placed our society on a new value foundation in the past decade. NATO membership therefore does not constitute an end, but rather serves to accelerate the process of making Hungary a full-fledged Western democracy. The decision to admit the applicant countries, and the acceptance by the new members of the obligations arising from membership, make this transition irreversible. NATO and EU enlargement are conducive to cementing Western values inside, marginalizing political extremism, cultivating constructive neighborly relations, and adopting a responsible international behavior.

The choice made by Central and Eastern European nations to apply for NATO membership has obviously also been shaped by the transformation of the international landscape. The turn of the millennium has been characterized by American global leadership and the emergence of medium-power multipolarity. It would have been rash to ignore, on the one hand, Europe's current inability to take decisive action, partially caused by diverging aspirations and differing views about Europe's future, and on the other hand, the consequent indispensability of American engagement. NATO, under U.S. leadership, has answered the call of the times and strengthened its positions by repeatedly revising its Strategic Concept, pushing forward with the enlargement process, and developing an extensive network of cooperation with partner nations. The admission of traditionally Atlanticist Central European nations reinforces the transatlantic link and helps to keep the United States engaged in European affairs.

The Experience of NATO Membership

By the time the new millennium arrived, Hungary's security was already guaranteed by the most successful military alliance in history. The first three years of membership, especially the Kosovo experience, have reinforced our choice. In the past 35 months or so, we have been trying to live up to the expectation that every new member become a net contributor to the security of the Alliance. I hope that our records will not disappoint those who have believed in us and will quiet those who want to slow down or even stop enlargement on the grounds of dissatisfaction with the performance of the three new members.

It was only 12 days after the joyful ceremony in Independence, Missouri, that NATO became involved in its first military operation. The allied action in Kosovo understandably sent nervous shock waves through both the Hungarian government and our public as the Alliance that we had just joined launched a military campaign against one of our neighbors with Hungary assisting strikes whose targets included areas populated by ethnic Hungarians. It was indeed reassuring to see that our public understood what was at stake and extended its steady support for the alliance's efforts to stop ethnic cleansing, prevent genocide, and restore faith in the strength of values that must lead us into the third millennium.

Hungarian society has in general grasped the benefits that security brought us, the way it contributed to our dynamic economic development, increased our international standing, and proved conducive to creating conditions that can accelerate the country's social and economic development. Simultaneously, our participation in allied decision-making increased our foreign policy's international and national responsibilities. Such new responsibilities are also tangible in Hungary's internal adaptation and military modernization. In defense of NATO's common positions, we were willing to accept the temporary breakdown in our relations with Moscow as well.

The past three years have confirmed that the "poker chips" analogy has lost its validity. We deeply appreciate that our considerations and aspirations are no longer ignored. Not only can we realize our national interests more efficiently, but now we also have a say in matters of European security and can indirectly shape general European trends.

In our assessment of the European security situation, continuing volatility in the Balkans with all the questions about the region's future still unanswered, and the uncertainty surrounding the post-Soviet region constitute the two most serious sources of instability and threats. Southeastern Europe is still a turbulent region. A temporary measure, the Dayton agreement was successful in stopping the killing in the Balkans, but it did not address the fundamental problems. In our assessment, the solution that can produce success is the very opposite of the “cure all” or “one for all” type. We should instead go one by one, stabilizing country by country, "tearing" off country after country from the zone of instability.

A) As various pronouncements and actual steps by the Hungarian governments testify, Hungary's primary role has always been understood to be in projecting stability in our region. In other words, we are ready to accept the role as a conduit in projecting Western values to places that still need to be stabilized. Hungary, therefore, does not aspire to become a safe island, but part of a safe region characterized by security, cooperation and prosperity. In a way, after many centuries of being the outermost bastion of Europe, this is a return to the idea of our founding father, Saint Stephen, of a Hungary that is a gateway to Central and Eastern Europe.

(1) To this end, we have taken part in NATO's actions through Hungarian contingents in both SFOR and KFOR. The Hungarian Engineering Contingent of over 400 troops had actually begun its operations well before our NATO membership materialized. We also sent a 330-man strong contingent to the KFOR mission and participated with 32 troops in Task Force Harvest in Macedonia.
(2) Apart from playing an active role in the Stability Pact, with the so-called Szeged Process, Hungary has tried to develop an environment for the Serbian democratic forces where they could increase their chances of overcoming an autocratic regime in Belgrade.

(3) Hungarian ethnic minorities in neighboring countries are also active in helping to enhance stability in the region. They formed democratic parties and developed constitutional and legal ways to promote democracy in their respective countries. In the past ten years, Hungarian ethnic minorities have demonstrated that they are not part of the problem, but much more an instrument for the solution leading to full and operational democracy.

Hungary's membership in NATO has promoted the country's political and military cooperation with other Central European nations that also aspire to join the Alliance. We have done our best to share our experience, which has helped our neighbors make more efficient use of the MAP program, performance in which is predicted to be a major factor in NATO's next enlargement decision.

B) While trying to contribute to NATO's security in ways described above, we have also shared with our new allies our knowledge and experience about Central and Eastern Europe. In so doing, we want to enhance the Alliance's understanding of our region's particular problems and contribute to deepening NATO's relations with both Russia and the Ukraine.

It was, however, in the time of greatest danger that the new members' loyalty dispersed whatever doubts could have lingered on after March 12, 1999. Hungary and the other two Central European nations stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the old allies in their determination to invoke Article 5 provisions for the United States after the hideous terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. In fact, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was the first allied leader to call for NATO's collective defense response on September 11. Besides fully complying with Washington's requests in an allied manner, we followed up this declaration of solidarity with a decision to quickly contribute to the international humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan and offer a medical team for the Alliance's purposes.

C) It is in this context that I also need to touch upon the fundamentals of military reform in Hungary. For more than a decade, Hungarian governments have been grappling with the immense task of transforming an oversized mass army into a streamlined, but much more effective modern one. Since 1997, military budgets have been raised annually to reach 1.81 % of our GDP last year (allocating approximately $1.05 billion for defense in 2002) and certain necessary constitutional changes have been made to enable the Hungarian military to participate in NATO operations. Yet, the results have been rather mixed. Our NATO experience has, nevertheless, proved to further the creation of a capabilities-based, modern, sustainable and effective defense force.

In the fall of 1999, largely prompted by the experience of the Kosovo operation, the Hungarian government ordered a bottom-up strategic review of the Hungarian Defense Forces whose recommendations are meant to serve as the basis for our three-stage military reform that outlines a ten-year plan.

(1) In the first phase lasting until 2003, re-posturing and rebuilding of our armed forces are given priority, with an emphasis on improving the living and working conditions for the men in uniform.
(2) This will be followed by a 4-year period devoted largely to increasing material and unit readiness by improving the levels of training and procuring the most needed military equipment. The currently largely threat-based military will be transformed into a capabilities-based one, while we will come closer to fulfilling NATO's capability requirements as well.
(3) For the final stage, technical modernization and the procurement of major weapons systems have been foreseen. Nonetheless, in areas where modernization simply could not be put off any further without risking fundamental national security interests and undermining our commitments to NATO, procurement had to begin ahead of schedule.

Looking Ahead: The Future of the Transatlantic Relationship

With its accession to NATO, Hungary, along with Poland and the Czech Republic, has been placed into a peculiar Euro-Atlantic space of various forces and different ambitions. Traditionally staunch Atlanticists trying to escape the old geopolitical dilemma that has plagued Central Europe for many centuries, the three countries have already achieved one crucial objective of their post-1989 foreign policy strategy by becoming members of NATO. At the same time, they have not yet been able to fulfill their ambition of EU accession. As the past three years have demonstrated, this situation presents peculiar dilemmas, occasionally falsely stated choices, and quite serious challenges for the three new NATO members.

To complicate matters, ours is a period of renewed rivalries, the return of old and the emergence of new disputes, as well as the recurring theme of the "whither NATO?" debate. As a result of the post-9.11 developments and of the way the anti-terrorist campaign has been conducted, NATO's relevance has yet again been called into doubt. Some believe that with the disappearance of an opposing military block, the glue is gone and the Alliance's value foundation has been seriously shaken. Alarmed by signs of differing threat perceptions and conspicuous disagreements that suggest dangerous divergences in our respective values, Hungary, nonetheless, stands with those allies and partners to whom NATO and its missions are just as relevant today as they were to the founding fathers in 1949. To us, the values represented, defended and spread by NATO appear strong and, indeed, reinforced by the terrorist attacks.

As new members, we try our best to make sense out of the cacophony of currently fashionable doomsday predictions. To keep our optimism, we can probably take heart from the history of the Alliance. Please listen to what President Nixon, for instance, had to say in 1974: "[E]uropean politics [has] changed completely. We [have] to accept the fact that fear of communism [is] no longer a practical motivation for NATO; if NATO were to survive, it would need other binding motives to keep it together."[1] As we all know, NATO has fortunately survived this and other serious endurance tests. Despite

[1] Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, Grosset & Dunlap: New York, 1978, p. 1027.

many alarming prognoses, NATO remained relevant and vigorous even after the collapse of its major adversary, the Warsaw Pact. Of course, past success in overcoming our troubles would not guarantee the Alliance's survival this time around. We are, nevertheless, of the conviction that NATO's proposed transformation coupled with the creation of adequate European capabilities and a certain division of labor between the United States acting on a global scale and the other allies in charge of taking care of business in Europe will silence the skeptics and reaffirm NATO's central position in transatlantic security. NATO's next enlargement would reap considerable benefits in this respect as well, since it would add countries that firmly believe in the strength of the transatlantic relationship and are ready to contribute towards that goal.

Now I have to return to the issue of ESDP for a moment. Rejecting some pressures trying to force us to choose between Washington and EU headquarters in Brussels, Hungary does not look at transatlantic and European security as alternatives. We refuse to see a contradiction between these two pillars of Euro-Atlantic security. Since the very beginning, we have been in support of the creation of a European Security and Defense Policy, provided it will strengthen the transatlantic link. ESDP, therefore, should be done in a fashion that will prevent the emergence of a parallel security system rivaling that of NATO, the ultimate depository of collective security. In our interpretation, an effective ESDP will instead complement NATO's collective defense commitments and prove Europe's ability and willingness to assume a larger international role and share with the United States the burdens of preventing and managing European conflicts. This is by no means a zero sum game. We agree with both the American "3 Ds" and Lord Robertson's "3 Is" because:

(1) we consider close cooperation between NATO and the European Union imperative,
(2) as prospective EU members, we want to be involved in the creation and functioning of this new European security mechanism, and
(3) believe that resources must be spent wisely.

In a presentation that I gave last August at Niagara University, I suggested that NATO apply a large dose of pragmatism in its conduct vis-à-vis Russia. Still under the influence of a major speech by Václav Havel, I talked about Russia's painful and still incomplete transition from superpower status and the dangers resulting from its national identity crisis. While still convinced that an honest and straightforward approach is the most effective way to help our Russian partners stop fighting demons and pursuing goals based on illusions and misperceptions, Hungary is also very well aware of the new opportunities that emerged after September 11. Mindful of Russia's international significance, we do agree on seizing the moment and hope for all kinds of breakthroughs. Our history in Central Europe has, however, taught us how to remain very realistic, a synonym for cautious, even under the apparently brightest circumstances. We accept that President Putin's opening to the West rests on the sound recognition that cooperation with the West has no alternative for Russia. We wish he would remain capable of consistently implementing his new approach. At the same time, uncertainty has been a constant for us, Central and Eastern Europeans, which makes us guard against the undesirable turns of

history. No one knows what role Russia is going to assume in the 21st century. As a consequence, Hungary is interested in moving ahead toward a mutually beneficial broadening and deepening of NATO's relations with Russia, but insists that this be done in a way that won't damage the Alliance's most important values and mechanisms. As Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has put it recently at Tufts University, "time is not ripe for making quick decisions without profound preparations, time is not ripe for creating institutions."[2]

Similarly to many other representatives of my country, I would like to stress to you the importance we attach to the adoption of an approach that has the potential to stabilize Ukraine, this essential pillar of European security. On its own and in cooperation with others, Hungary has been pursuing a policy aimed at strengthening the attributes of our Eastern neighbor's newfound statehood. We are of the opinion that a threat to Ukraine's independence would constitute one of the single biggest challenges that the continent's stability can conceivably face. NATO should therefore continue supporting the Ukrainian reform process even if its results are not immediately apparent.

The three new members' rather successful integration into NATO, coupled with their ally-like behavior, demonstrates that enlargement does increase the Alliance's security and therefore prepares the ground for the continuation of the process. This logic of enlargement has been strengthened by September 11 and the Alliance's response to it. On the basis of moral considerations and its national interests, Hungary supports a pretty large number of new invitations that NATO should extend in Prague. No qualified aspirant country should be excluded for geographic or historical reasons. We are convinced that NATO enlargement and reinforced transatlantic cooperation continue to be the best guarantees for European security and prosperity.

As Lord Robertson likes to sound his clarion call when it comes to European defense capabilities, or the lack thereof, let me sound another clarion call for the unfinished business of Europe. We are still in a tumultuous period when priorities seem to be shifting and relationships are apparently being redefined. In the past five months, we have been preoccupied with clearing up the debris of September 11, restoring our sense of justice, and preventing the repetition of the horrific tragedies. These are no doubt legitimate and very important aspirations. In the joint response operation led by the United States, we have been able to welcome the cooperation of many nations whose support would have seemed highly unlikely just half a year ago. These are certainly great achievements. All this does not mean, however, that we should forget about the project that was launched in Madrid in July 1997 to end the division of the continent and unite in a community all those countries that subscribe to the same values and aspirations. The beginning has been encouraging but we are still far from being able to declare victory. Reasons that called for the Madrid decision and factors that have a number of Central and Eastern European countries still standing in line for both NATO and EU membership have not disappeared. We ought to use the Prague Summit this November to take another courageous leap towards the completion of Europe whole and free. To fail to do that in

[2] Viktor Orbán delivered a speech entitled *"Perspectives from Central Europe"* at Tufts University on February 11, 2002 when he was awarded the Fletcher School's honorary doctorate.

the haze of new developments and new realignments whose significance we simply cannot judge as of now would be a fundamental mistake for which we might have to pay very dearly in the future.