

'Fifty two countries meet in Paris to promote stability in Eastern Europe' from Le Monde (19 March 1995)

Caption: On 19 March 1995, the French daily newspaper Le Monde sets out the issues surrounding the forthcoming Conference on Stability in Europe, due to be held in Paris for the representatives of the 52 member states of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Source: Le Monde. 19-20.03.1995, n° 15 597; 51e année. Paris: Le Monde. "52 pays réunis à Paris pour promouvoir la stabilité en Europe de l'Est", auteur: Riols, Yves-Michel, p. 2.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/fifty_two_countries_meet_in_paris_to_promote_stability_in_eastern_europe_from_le_monde_19_march_1995-en-c15b3be6-9487-4a36-a09f-6d6fce12676c.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

Fifty-two countries meet in Paris to promote stability in Eastern Europe

On Sunday 19 March, Hungary and Slovakia will sign a basic treaty which is seen as a model to be followed. Along with the Magyar minorities, the question of the delicate relations between Russia and the Baltic states will be the other priority at the Paris Conference

Representatives from the 52 member states of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) will meet in Paris on Monday 20 and Tuesday 21 March for the Conference on Stability in Europe. This attempt at preventive diplomacy, launched by Édouard Balladur and then taken up by the Europe Union (EU), aims to encourage former Communist countries to overcome problems with minorities wherever they arise and strengthen their borders, by concluding treaties of good neighbourliness. These are seen as a prerequisite for future membership of the European Union and NATO.

The French Prime Minister will approach this conference buoyed by the agreement to be signed on Sunday at Matignon by Hungary and Slovakia, two of the countries that, along with Romania, are the most affected by this initiative. The debate surrounding the treatment of the Magyar minority of 600 000 in southern Slovakia has been hampering relations between Budapest and Bratislava since the fall of the 'iron curtain'. On Thursday evening in Bratislava, Gyula Horn and Vladimir Meciar, the Hungarian and Slovakian Heads of Government, finally reached an agreement that had been deadlocked for years.

Those favouring a conference on stability view it as being as much the fruit of political courage on the part of the leaders of the two countries, who are obliged to manoeuvre delicately on extremely symbolic and emotionally-charged issues, as it is the result of pressure from the European Union. This diplomatic breakthrough between Budapest and Bratislava, inconceivable a few months ago after the return to power of Mr Meciar and his nationalist allies in Slovakia, made up for the disappointment caused by the announcement, also on Thursday, of the collapse of talks between Hungary and Romania, which is home to a Magyar minority of around two million in Transylvania.

The new situation created by Gyula Horn, who managed to persuade the Slovaks to accept a principle that used to be anathema, that of 'autonomous status' for Slovakia's Hungarian minorities, as well as the willingness to compromise on the part of Vladimir Meciar, who wanted to regain his position with the West, could also have repercussions for Romania, which finds itself in a de facto position of isolation. A French source is not excluding the possibility of Budapest and Bucharest nevertheless reaching a compromise at the conference. Intense diplomatic consultations between the three Prime Ministers will continue in Paris.

It now becomes more difficult for Romania to reject clauses, already accepted by Slovakia, concerning the protection of minorities, especially given that Hungary has committed itself to removing the other major stumbling block in the dispute by agreeing to have it stated in black and white in the treaty that it has no territorial claims with regard to its neighbours. In a sign of this predicament, the Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs hurried off to Bratislava on Friday.

These Central European countries' haste to reach bilateral treaties is a result of three factors. First is their concern not to be singled out as trouble-makers at the Paris Conference. Then there is their wish not to delay their integration into Europe. 'All those countries that have signed treaties of good neighbourliness will enjoy privileged conditions for joining the European Union,' pointed out Mr Balladur's diplomatic advisor, Bernard de Montferrand. Finally, we must not forget the impact of the efforts being made for almost a year by the new left-wing government in Hungary, more open and conciliatory than its right-wing predecessor.

Alleviating the problem of the Magyar diaspora, scattered across Central Europe since the break-up of Hungary following the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, is one of two priority issues for the conference on stability, along with the delicate issue of Russian-Baltic relations (see separate article). The Paris Conference, taking place during France's Presidency of the EU, could, incidentally, give a boost to Mr Balladur's image, less than one month from the presidential election.

From the outset, the idea of such a conference on stability was welcomed by Hungary, which had always

sought a larger arena in order to escape the deadlock of strictly bilateral talks on minorities. Initially more reticent, Teodor Melescanu, the Romanian Foreign Minister, does note that ‘the process launched in Paris in May 1994 encouraged more substantial dialogue between countries of the region’ in areas where it had often been paralysed by the burden of history.

However, the plan met with barely veiled scepticism from several Eastern European countries, irritated by a ‘catastrophic’ vision of the post-Communist world and the resulting tendency to generalise. ‘We reached the goals laid down in the Stability Pact long before the idea was set out as a diplomatic initiative from the European Union,’ claims Krzysztof Sliwinski, spokesman for the Polish Foreign Ministry, pointing out that Poland has signed treaties with all its neighbours.

In more general terms, the criticism concerns the ‘double standards’ of EU countries in making demands of others that they are unable to impose upon on their own members, which are outside the scope of application of the Pact. The example of Greece, which is suffocating Macedonia and weakening Albania, is frequently cited, as well as that of Italy, which has long vetoed closer relations between tiny Slovenia and the EU because of its dispute with Ljubljana over Istria.

Just as Central European leaders welcome any attempt to avoid ethnic conflicts getting out of hand, so they insist on the need to put the risks into perspective. Tension between Hungary and Romania, as extreme as it may be, cannot be compared with that within the former Yugoslavia. In Tirgu Mures in 1990, according to official figures, these tensions caused the death of six people as a result of fighting that was seen as provocation by the Securitate of former dictator Ceausescu. The figure is far below those for Northern Ireland or the Basque Country.

Stanimir Alexandrov, the Bulgarian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, has a further reservation: ‘The idea that the issue of minorities and borders will be the main source of instability does not apply to all countries in Central and Eastern Europe,’ he says. He blames the European Union for not equipping itself with the tools to address the problems it intends to resolve. ‘For Bulgaria, the main threats to stability are first and foremost linked to the problem of transition to a market economy. We therefore favour a broader approach to the stability issue.’ Otherwise, the conference on stability could choose the wrong target by closing its eyes to the real crises that are ripping the Caucasus and former Yugoslavia apart.

Yves-Michel Riols