

Address given by Eduard Kukan on the Slovak Republic's accession to the EU (25 November 1999)

Caption: On 25 November 1999, Eduard Kukan, Slovak Foreign Minister, delivers an address at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Brussels on the process for Slovakia's accession to the European Union.

Source: Address of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the SR Eduard Kukan "Slovak Republic on its Way to the EU" Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Brussels, 25 November 1999. [ON-LINE]. [Bratislava]: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, [10.06.2005]. Disponible sur http://www.foreign.gov.sk/En/files/eu_kukan99_brus_ang.html.

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**Address of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the SR Eduard Kukan
"Slovak Republic on its Way to the EU" Konrad Adenauer Foundation, (Brussels, 25
November 1999)**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is becoming a tradition that the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Brussels invites Slovak state representatives to give a speech on its floor. In spring it was my State Secretary Mr Jan Figel who presented you the milestones on Slovakia's road to the EU. Since the transition process in our country neither paused nor came to an end I would like to give an account of Slovakia's course of travel in recent months.

The span of time between the publishing of Commission's regular reports on the candidate countries in October and the EU Helsinki summit on 10-11 December is a very important period of enlargement process for the "pre-ins". These regular reports will serve the EU Member States as a basis for making decisions about the next steps on the path to enlargement. On this occasion I would like to present you the Slovak view on the overall enlargement process as well as Slovakia's position and achievements in its integration efforts.

We have received the 1999 Regular report from the Commission on Slovakia's progress towards accession with satisfaction. We welcome particularly the Commission's recommendation to open accession negotiations with the Slovak Republic in the year 2000. We regard this step as recognition of the course Slovakia took since the new government is in office and acknowledgement of all its efforts to perform a clear and unequivocal policy of integration.

We expect that European Council in Helsinki takes the decision to start accession negotiations with Slovakia in early spring next year. These expectations of the Slovak Republic are derived from the conclusions of the 1997 Luxembourg Council which defined the EU enlargement as a comprehensive, inclusive and continual process in which each candidate country would proceed at its own pace and according to its own merits. Our belief that the negotiations with Slovakia will start at the Helsinki Summit is based on four reasons: Slovakia's preparedness for the opening of negotiations; the need of strengthening internal political development and democracy in Slovakia; the need of strengthening regional co-operation and stability in Central Europe; and the actual materialisation of the process of Union's widening which will simultaneously enhance its deepening.

The period beginning after the parliamentary elections in September 1998 can be characterised as the start of an intensive political dialogue of higher quality between Slovakia and the EU, in which the atmosphere of mutual contacts substantially changed. Slovakia made important steps in order to stabilise political system and functioning of democracy. The last regular report of the European Commission clearly confirmed the fulfilment of political criteria by the Slovak Republic. This positive evaluation is an achievement not only in the light of Slovakia's preparation for accession but especially in view of the needs and expectations of our citizens.

Concerning economic criteria, the government inherited a situation of deep imbalance which is the result of the economic policy of recent years. The government tries to solve this situation by implementing economic measures aimed at tackling macroeconomic imbalances and increasing the competitiveness of Slovak economy. Results of these measures is the stabilisation of the macro-economic situation and a stable currency development. Crucial progress on structural reforms and privatisation has also been achieved especially in the area of banking and enterprise restructuring.

It needs to be underlined that the Slovak economy is today in better condition than one year ago even if some macro-economic indicators are less positive. Important thing is that the government has undertaken several measures which can ensure long-term development and increase in functioning and transparency of the market economy. We are determined to further follow this line also in the future and to gear our economic policy towards a thoroughly functioning market economy.

Very sensitive issue in our discussions with the Union is nuclear energy. Together with the Commission we discussed the main aspects of our nuclear energy strategy as well as the plan for creating conditions for closure of nuclear power plant Bohunice V-1 and the development of appropriate financing schemes. Meanwhile, the government took a decision to close two units of Bohunice V-1 in years 2006 and 2008 respectively. This decision should be regarded as a compromise between our internal economic needs and our European integration policy. We are pleased to note that the Commission has qualified the government's decision concerning the timetable for the closure of these two units as a forward-looking, courageous and adopted in the spirit of European integration.

Crucial goal of our integration strategy is to open the Accession Conference in a way that will enable Slovakia to join the Union among first candidate countries. In this respect we closely follow the current debate about the renewal of the regatta model of negotiations which allows all candidates to proceed according to their own merits. Besides the political declaration at the Helsinki summit, the actual opening of the Accession Conference and a credible mechanism of negotiations are even more important to Slovakia.

In our view the negotiation mechanism should above all respect the principle of inclusiveness and openness of the accession process as declared at the 1997 Luxembourg Summit. The decision in Helsinki should neither preserve the actual division of candidates into two groups nor create new subgroups. On the contrary, it should enable the "pre-ins" to catch-up with the "ins" and reflect the real state of preparedness of each single candidate.

It is our conviction that at the beginning of 2000 Slovakia will objectively do better than the first-group-candidates did at the start of negotiations in 1998. When we look at the next stage of the negotiation process to be launched in 2000, I believe that we will be ready to stand up to this challenge. On one hand we have finished our bilateral screening which presents a comprehensive assessment of our situation. At the opening of the Accession Conference Slovakia will be ready to present position papers in 15 chapters. In this connection we also make use of the experiences of our neighbours who are already in the negotiation process. On the other hand the Union has now more experiences with the new candidate countries too. Taking all these facts into account there should be favourable conditions for the opening of negotiations with Slovakia in such a number of chapters that we will have a real chance to catch up with our neighbours.

Despite the fact that Slovakia is the smallest country in the region, thanks to its geographical position, it can serve as a linking element. The cohesion of this region should be enhanced by giving us a chance to enter the Union simultaneously with our neighbours. Therefore, we foster our co-operation within the V-4 framework as well as in a wider scale of candidate countries. An example of this kind of activities was also the Second Meeting of High Representatives of EU Associated Countries Responsible for European Integration in Bratislava on 5 November 1999. The keynote of this event was Commission's new concept of negotiation process presented by Mr Nikolaus van der Pas, Director General of the Enlargement DG. On this occasion delegates of the 12 candidate countries exchanged their views on the accession process, confronted them with the position of the Finish Presidency and the Commission and discussed the questions arising from the new concept of negotiations.

When assessing the positions of different European agents - EU members and candidates or Commission officials - we can summarise that it is not only in the interest of Slovakia to bridge the gap in the accession process between its position and the one of the remaining Visegrád members. A joint accession of Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia brings along advantages not only for these four countries but also for the EU itself. These positive elements are derived from the overall economic, geographic and historic integrity of this region. Therefore it is for us the utmost priority to keep up the intensity of the accession process when the actual negotiations start and maintain such a pace which will enable us to attain the set end - a joint entry of the V-4 in the EU.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European integration process strengthens the position of Europe in the world and promotes peace, freedom and prosperity on the European continent. It creates a transparent system of close co-operation that takes into consideration the interests of its members with the aim of achieving satisfaction on all sides. The

EU enlargement is the most effective means for spreading throughout the continent those common values which are cherished in all developed democracies. Stability ensuring the rule of law and respect for human rights all over Europe is the best guarantee of peace and prosperity. We are convinced that by means of an intensive dialogue between Slovakia on one side and the EU and its members on the other side, by means of co-operation with other EU candidates and by collaboration of all concerned sectors of our society, we will be able to sustain the speed of the accession process and join the EU together with our neighbours.

Thank you for your attention.