

Address given by Mikuláš Dzurinda on accession to the EU (Prague, 24 July 1999)

Caption: On 24 July 1999, in an address given at Charles University in Prague, Mikuláš Dzurinda, Slovak Prime Minister, reviews his Government's European policy.

Source: Slovak Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda's Speech at the Charles University (Prague, July 24, 1999). [ON-LINE]. [Bratislava]: The Slovak Republic Government Office, [10.06.2005]. Available on http://www.vlada.gov.sk/english/aktuality_zoznam.php3?id_stranky=16&vlada=1&id_typ=3&id_lang=1&id_akcie=.

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Slovak Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda's Speech at the Charles University (Prague, July 24, 1999)

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear students,

[...]

Ladies and gentlemen, the Slovak present is not only a historical turning point in the sense of an institutionally functioning democracy or respect for the rule of law, but also in the sense of a courageous attempt to establish a new atmosphere in society - the atmosphere that we sometimes describe as the spirit of democracy. By this I mean openness of politics and the decision-making process to the public, support for the development of a civil society and respect for the rights of minorities. This is a new element in our political life, which I firmly believe will help to introduce a new, more tolerant political culture in Slovakia after years of the artificial separation of society into good and bad Slovaks. Slovakia has lost a lot of time over the last four years, which, however, could just mean that we need to accelerate our conceptual work to catch up on what we have missed.

In this context, let me inform you about the Slovak Republics pre-accession preparation in the process of integration into the European Union. On the basis of a clear mandate from last years parliamentary elections, the Government of the Slovak Republic clearly defined its priorities in all spheres of the countrys political, economic and social life and laid them down in its Policy Statement. The Policy Statement shows the importance of the Slovak Republics integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. We want to utilise the opportunity to receive an invitation to open negotiations on accession to the Union at the December EU Summit in Helsinki. Therefore, we are doing our utmost to meet the integration criteria. A positive evaluation of our country in the Regular Report from the European Commission, which reflects the real progress made in meeting the short- and medium-term criteria arising from the Accession Partnership, is a prerequisite for our efforts. In February this year, the Government adopted the Action Plan for Intensification of the Process of the Slovak Republics Integration into the European Union in 1999, which is based on the Governments Policy Statement and states the latest tasks for this year. The Action Plan outlines the priorities of Slovakias Euro-integration policy that need to be focused on in the forthcoming period so that in its Regular Report the European Commission recommends to the December European Council in Helsinki that negotiations on the Slovak Republics accession to the EU be started.

The material is structured into seven sections:

Institutional framework for the European integration process in the Slovak Republic.

Timetable of Tasks Resulting from the EC Regular Report on Slovakias Progress Towards Accession to the Union of 4th November 1998.

Concept for Training of Civil Servants Within the Framework of the Integration Process.

The Governments Communication Strategy in the Area of European Integration.

Strengthening Co-ordination and Increasing the Effectiveness of the Use of Phare Programme Funds.

Update of the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis Communautaire.

Proposal for Diplomatic Activities and Measures to Support Slovakias Integration into the EU in 1999.

The institutional framework for the European integration process in the Slovak Republic was secured through the creation of the post of Deputy Prime Minister for Integration. The post of a state secretary responsible for the European integration process was created at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the same time, it was decided that for this year the Slovak embassies in the countries of the EU three would be strengthened by so-called Euro-ambassadors. Through a governmental resolution from December last year,

the Ministerial Council for European Integration was set up, together with a Working Committee as an inter-ministerial working body and a Consulting Committee as an institution for transferring the integration process to the non-governmental level.

The financial instrument for the implementation of pre-accession strategy is the Phare Programme, within which activities are aimed at reinforcing the co-ordination of its preparation and implementation this year. In this connection, the Guidelines for the Preparation and Implementation of Phare Programming in Slovakia for the 2000-2006 Period were prepared. The 1998 Report on the Use of Phare Funds was submitted to a governmental session and the 1999 Financing Memorandum has already been submitted to the European Commission.

The preparation of state administration and the population for European integration is no less important for the integration process in Slovakia. The Government has approved two concepts: the Concept for Training of Civil Servants and the Concept for the Governments Communication Strategy in the Area of European Integration.

The Timetable of Tasks Resulting from the EC Regular Report on Slovakias Progress Towards Accession to the Union, approved by a governmental resolution on 20th January 1999, was the Slovak Governments reaction to the EC Regular Report. The Timetable contains eighty-six tasks scheduled to be fulfilled by the end of 1999, while reviews are submitted to and approved by the Government quarterly.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very pleased that on 28th May the Slovak Republic presented the European Commission with its updated National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis Communautaire (NPAA), which Slovakia sees as a key document in the process of approaching full membership in the European Union. The revised NPAA in the Slovak Republic is a national document, which comprehensively covers the process of Slovakias integration into the EU, including all of its partial processes. Until 1998, attention was focused on the National Programme for the Internal Market, which pursued approximation in this area. The NPAA cross-sectionally covers the whole *acquis communautaire*. The EU also concentrates on the implementation of laws and set measures that are to ensure that EU law is not only adopted but also enforced. The update centres on eliminating certain weak points of the former NPAA. The revised programme includes short- and medium-term tasks related to the approximation of law and, unlike in the former document from 1998, also includes the issues of implementing already harmonised legal norms, building the necessary institutions and financing. The National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis Communautaire is a new National Programme for the new Slovak Government and will also serve as an indicator of the fulfilment of its Policy Statement, since the National Programme contains priorities until 2002.

The Report on the Slovak Republic's Progress in its Integration into the European Union from August 1998 to June 1999, which will serve as one of the background documents for the preparation of the European Commissions Regular Report, is of great importance for the process of Slovakias integration into the European Union. This detailed review of Slovakias progress in meeting the criteria for accession into the EU was officially submitted on 30th June to extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador of the European Union to the Slovak Republic Walter Rochel. The Reports aim was to review Slovakias progress in meeting the criteria for accession to the EU that were formulated particularly in the European Commission document Accession Partnership and subsequently in the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis. This material, in line with the Commissions requirement, describes the relations between Slovakia and the Union so far. At the same time it analyses the situation with regard to political conditions and assesses our countrys position and prospects with regard to economic capacity. The Report also pays a great deal of attention to Slovakias ability to assume obligations arising from membership and focuses on assessing our administrative capacity to adopt the *acquis*.

For this year, the EC Regular Report set short-term priorities. Today, I can state that we have fulfilled both of the political criteria. We have elected the President of the Slovak Republic and the Parliament passed the Act on the Use of National Minority Languages on 10th July. I firmly believe that Rudolf Schusters taking over as President will above all be of help to our countrys stability, which Slovakia needs so much to apply a

thorough reform policy. The act on the use of national minority languages in official contact was a political compromise, which, after a long time, lays down the rules for the use of national minority languages as prescribed by the Constitution. It will enter into force on 1st September this year.

Short-term priorities also include laws related to the area of the internal market, which are also an extraordinarily important part of Slovakia's pre-accession strategy. The following laws are in the legislative process: the public procurement act, act on technical requirements on products and conformity assessment, state aid act and the act on liability for damage caused by defective products. Their adoption by the Parliament is expected in autumn this year, before the EC Regular Report on Slovakia's Progress towards Accession to the EU is published.

In March this year, the Slovak Republic started to carry out the analytical screening of the acquis. This bilateral part of the screening was closed at the end of June, with the exception of the agriculture chapter which will be on the agenda in autumn. Responsible preparation for screening, as well as the building of corresponding institutional mechanisms have a significant influence on the comprehensive assessment of the situation in the adoption of the acquis in Slovakia. If the decision at the Helsinki Summit is positive, the current situation will enable the Slovak Republic to promptly present its position documents on all negotiation chapters and smoothly begin real negotiations.

The activities of joint European Union and Slovak Republic bodies created within the framework of the Europe Agreement - meetings of the Association Council, Association Committee and Joint Parliamentary Committee - are of extreme importance in the process of preparation for accession to the Union. The meetings that took place this year were marked by the partners' mutual will to jointly address the problems related to integration. At the same time, the results of the Slovak Government's approach towards meeting the Accession Partnership objectives were appreciated and it was clearly signalled that Slovakia could be included among negotiating countries at the December European Council. Upon the European Commission's initiative, the High Level Working Group - an instrument of the Slovak Republic's reinforced pre-accession strategy - was set up in November last year. Four meetings of this group, focusing on the fulfilment of short-term political criteria and economic priorities of the accession process, have taken place so far.

The Slovak Government's Diplomatic Activities to Support Slovakia's Integration into the EU are an instrument for Slovakia's offensive towards the EU and its member and associated countries. Almost immediately after the new Government's entry into office in November last year, the first working visit by a Slovak delegation was paid to Brussels, where we held talks with the highest representatives of the European Commission. It was a clear confirmation of the orientation of Slovak foreign policy. Yet even after half a year the Slovak Government is not reducing its activities. The opposite. In the last few months, meetings took place between the Government's representatives and Vice-President of the European Commission Sir Leon Brittan, Commissioner Hans van den Broek and Commissioner Martin Bangemann. Commissioner for relations with Central and Eastern European countries Hans van den Broek praised our country's progress in preparation for membership in the Union on his visit to Slovakia.

Equally, relations with all European Union member countries have intensified. The most important bilateral visits I have made include those to Austria, Germany, Italy and France. Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Kukan has held talks with his counterparts in France, Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, Greece and Portugal. In Slovakia, Minister Kukan has met his partners from Finland, Austria, Luxembourg and France. The talks held by State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for European Integration Ján Figel' have also formed an important part of these contacts. Extraordinarily active dialogue between the Slovak Republic and member countries is also held at the level of political leaders, experts and diplomatic representatives.

Our co-operation with other associated countries is also of great importance in the integration process. This particularly applies to the exchange of experience from the process of adhesion to the European Union, but also to its co-ordination in the future. Slovakia has intensified its diplomatic relations with all associated countries while placing a great deal of importance on close co-operation with its direct neighbours. Upon a Slovak initiative, the Visegrad Four Prime Ministers met in Bratislava on 14th May. Mutual co-operation

should bring advantages to the whole region, from both an economic and security point of view. The development of mutual relations in various spheres of common interest represent a tangible contribution to European stability and security. Eventually, thanks to the renewed and extended co-operation between Central European countries, they could enter the European Union as one group at the beginning of the next century, which, in our opinion, would not only be beneficial for the Visegrad Four, but also for the stabilisation of the whole Central European region.

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