

Summit meeting between Benelux and the Visegrad Group (Luxembourg, 5 December 2001)

Caption: On 5 December 2001, the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of Benelux and the Visegrad Group meet at the Kirchberg Conference Centre in Luxembourg to discuss the future of Europe in general and to consider in particular the strengthening of cooperation between the two regional groups.

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Summit Meeting between Benelux and the Visegrad Group: Press statement

Luxembourg, 5th December 2001

The Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Benelux and the Visegrad Group held their first informal meeting between the two fora of cooperation in Luxembourg on December 5th. This event paves the way for a promising collaboration destined to bring participating countries closer. Thus, this cooperation fits harmoniously into the historical progress of unification of the European continent whose cornerstone is the enlargement of the European Union and NATO.

The future of Europe has been chosen as the main topic of this first meeting between Benelux and the Visegrad Group. Participants have presented their visions and ideas on the following subjects: the development of the common foreign, security and defence policy of the European Union, the process of constitutionalisation of the Union, the future role of national parliaments in Community affairs, the question whether it is advisable to make the Charter of fundamental rights legally binding, as well as the dialogue between Governments and citizens on European issues. The discussion on these different points has shown much common ground among participants' views.

Participants confirmed the need to fully involve the Visegrad countries in the discussion on the future of Europe and in the work of the Convention that will draw up options on different subjects on the agenda of the next intergovernmental conference of the Union.

Participants have vowed their attachment to those values that underlie European construction and shape European identity. They have expressed their support for a gradual constitutionalisation of the Union as well as the emergence of a Union establishing itself more distinctly as an entity in international relations in the fields of politics, economics and security.

Participants recognized that inspiring a greater interest of their citizens in the European effort represents an important challenge to be taken up by Governments. They undertook to reflect together on the ways and means to improve this situation. While acknowledging the usefulness of explaining to people the *raison d'être* and the functioning of the Union, participants are convinced that Governments have to demonstrate that the current and the enlarged European Union takes into account the expectations of citizens. In this context, the achievement of the European social model as well as of the area of freedom, security and justice is especially important.

Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Benelux and the Visegrad Group agreed to continue an informal and regular exchange of views on subjects of common interest and to deepen political dialogue on the level of Ministers and civil servants, with the aim of bringing positions closer on foreign policy and security issues and on questions related to the future of Europe.

The first Summit between Benelux and the Visegrad Group has convened an expert meeting in the course of 2002 in order to identify those fields in which closer collaboration between the countries of Benelux and those of the Visegrad Group could be initiated. The two fora of cooperation will in particular work together on the way to associate the countries of the Visegrad Group with the implementation of decisions taken in the framework of the Lisbon process. Another potential field of cooperation is fight against terrorism: the question is how the countries of the Visegrad Group can participate in the implementation of certain elements of the action plan on the fight against terrorism that was adopted during the extraordinary European Council meeting of September 21st.

Participants have also agreed to cooperate in implementing initiatives undertaken on other European fora with respect to the fight against terrorism.

Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Benelux and the Visegrad Group countries have agreed that bringing about a successful conclusion of the process of EU enlargement is a vital ingredient of designing a future European Union. They pledged their support to the Gothenborg "road map", to the

objective of completing accession negotiations by the end of 2002 and to the principles of differentiation and own merits. In line with the conclusions of the European Council of Gothenborg, they confirm the objective that those candidates that are ready will participate in the European Parliament elections of 2004 as members. Moreover, according to what has been agreed in the Declaration on the future of the Union at the European Council of Nice, participants reiterate that those candidate countries which have concluded accession negotiations with the Union will be invited to participate in the next Intergovernmental Conference.