

**Prime Ministerial Conference:
“Towards a Wider Europe: The New Agenda”**

ENGLISH only

**Joint Statement
Bratislava, Slovakia
March 19, 2004**

We, the leaders of democratic countries from throughout Europe, have met today in Bratislava, Slovakia together with leaders from Europe and the United States on the eve of the historic enlargements of both the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to consider the responsibilities of our larger European community and to address the challenges of a Wider Europe.

Since our gathering in Vilnius, Lithuania four years ago, we have witnessed the acceleration of the fundamental transformation of our continent. Our commitment to shared values, determination to continuous reforms, solidarity and support from European and transatlantic allies have facilitated these changes. Historic enlargements of NATO and the EU will make Europe stronger and more secure. Together, we have taken a giant step towards a Europe that is whole and free, democratic and dynamic.

But our vision of Europe does not end with our accession to Euro-Atlantic institutions. We are, at best, halfway towards realizing our vision of a Europe truly coming together to secure the peace and promote economic prosperity for generations to come. Today, we welcome the achievements and encourage further progress towards Euro-Atlantic standards and integration taking place in the Western Balkans, South Caucasus and Black Sea Region, Ukraine and Turkey. We will actively support their democratic ambitions, share our experience, and work within the European Union and NATO to make sure that no European democracy is left outside Europe's institutions. The OSCE, as the largest pan-European organization, also plays an important role in achieving these common goals.

We call upon NATO allies to recognize the achievements of the Adriatic Charter countries – Albania, Croatia and Macedonia - and, during their upcoming Summit in Istanbul, take concrete steps toward their invitation to full membership in NATO. We believe that NATO allies should extend invitations to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro to join the Partnership for Peace at the Istanbul Summit.

We welcome the decision of the European Union to consider the South Caucasus democracies in the context of the European Neighborhood Policy. We believe that the development of a constructive strategy for the greater Black Sea region is the first great challenge of a Wider Europe. We will encourage the European Union, NATO and the United States to make this region a priority, to create ever closer relationships, and to open institutions and markets to Black Sea democracies as the momentum of their reforms takes hold.

We are committed to developing a closer relationship with Ukraine, reflecting its European vocation and encourage Ukraine to pursue significant political reforms. We stand ready to welcome a democratic Ukraine into the Euro-Atlantic community. We believe that Europe has a critical role to play in fostering a new and enduring partnership with a democratic Ukraine in which individual freedoms, the rule of law, and constitutional order are respected.

We urge the Belarusian government to hold free, fair, and internationally monitored parliamentary elections this October in which international monitors are able to freely assess both the pre-election environment and the elections themselves. We call for a new dialogue in Europe on how we can work together to support political reform and democracy in Belarus.

We believe that Turkey is an integral part of Europe and a critical contributor to European security and stability. We believe Turkey has faithfully served as the keystone of NATO and will become the cornerstone of an enlarged Europe. We welcome Turkey's demonstrated commitment to meeting the Copenhagen criteria, regarding democratic and human rights reforms, and to resolving the Cyprus conflict. We firmly support Turkey's aspiration to begin accession negotiations with the European Union.

While we have become part of a Europe whole, free and at peace, we are also conscious of our responsibility in helping address the most significant challenge to transatlantic democracy at the dawn of this century: the lethal nexus of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, dictatorships, failed states, poverty, and violent extremism. Many of these threats have their roots in wider Middle East.

To fight these challenges, we have joined or supported our Allies in the United States and Europe in fighting terrorism at home and in Afghanistan, and in ending a brutal dictatorship and building democracy and stability in Iraq. We confirm today our contributions to peace operations in these countries and seek a larger role there through international organizations that we are about to enter. Yet military action, however necessary, will not by itself address these long-term challenges. Only through the growth of freedom, democracy, economic opportunity, and security will we turn the tide on the resentment and fear at the heart of these troubles.

Our own experience in overcoming the burden of repressive ideology and stagnant state bureaucracy is relevant in supporting the efforts of reformers in the wider Middle East. We will work with governments and civil society in the region, and with our European and American partners, to give new hope to the people of the Greater Middle East. The G8, US-EU, and NATO Summits in June 2004 must give a vital impulse to these efforts.

After the tragic events in Madrid, we stand united with the Spanish people and resolved to continue our fight against terrorism. We will increase cooperation among our police, intelligence and judicial agencies and coordinate these activities within the European Union.

In this critical period of history, we must not lose sight of our longer-term responsibilities and the great opportunities before us.

Albania: Fatos Nano, Prime Minister
Bulgaria: Simeon Saxe-Coburg Gotha, Prime Minister
Croatia: Ivo Sanader, Prime Minister
Estonia: Juhan Parts, Prime Minister
Latvia: Indulis Emsis, Prime Minister
Lithuania: Algirdas Brazauskas, Prime Minister
Macedonia: Branko Crvenkovski, Prime Minister
Romania: Adrian Nastase, Prime Minister
Slovakia: Mikulas Dzurinda, Prime Minister