

7TH MEETING OF THE PRESIDENTS OF PARLIAMENTS OF THE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

Vienna, 23 to 24 November 2006

Conclusions

Under the chairpersonship of the new President of the Austrian National Council, Barbara Prammer, the presidents of the parliaments of the Regional Partnership countries met for their seventh conference on 23 and 24 November 2006 in Vienna. The conference was attended by: France Cukjati (President of the Slovenian National Assembly), Pavol Paška (President of the Slovak National Council), Maciej Płażyński (Vice-President of the Polish Senate), Přemysl Sobotka (President of the Czech Senate), Janez Sušnik (President of the Slovenian National Council), Katalin Szili (President of the Hungarian National Assembly), Miloslav Vlček (President of the Czech Chamber of Deputies).

1. Cooperation between the parliaments of the Regional Partnership was initiated in the year 2003 with a view to the enlargement of the European Union. Against this backdrop, the presidents of parliaments consider it to be a special mission of the Regional Partnership to ensure the completion of the European Union's enlargement by the Central and Eastern European countries. In this respect, the presidents of parliaments discussed the imminent enlargement of the Schengen area and the euro zone.

2. The participants of the conference acknowledged the closing declaration on the "Threats associated with the possible postponement of the enlargement of the Schengen area" which the presidents of the parliaments of the Visegrad Group countries had adopted at their meeting in Košice on 13 November 2006. The presidents of parliament stated that the conditions for accession to the Schengen area by the planned date of October 2007 must be created both on the part of the European Commission, by taking into operation the required information system (SIS II or an alternative system Schengen I for all), and on the part of the Member States by meeting all requirements of the Schengen acquis.

3. The participants of the conference discussed the state of preparations for accession to the euro zone. They welcomed the fact that Slovenia will join the euro zone as of 1 January 2007 as planned, and welcomed the fact that the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia will also introduce the euro as their currency after meeting the convergence criteria. The participants were in agreement that a common currency constitutes an important step towards European integration and is of great significance for the competitive strength of the

European economy.

4. At the initiative of the Marshal of the Polish Sejm, the presidents of parliaments discussed the foreign policy of the European Union with regard to the energy sector. The presidents of parliaments voiced their support for the priority areas identified in order to ensure sustainable, competitive and secure energy supply: completing the internal European electricity and gas markets, enhancing solidarity between Member States in case of supply shortages, a more sustainable, efficient and diverse energy mix, an integrated approach to tackling climate change by improving energy efficiency and increasing the use of renewable energy sources, a strategic European energy technology plan, and a joint external energy policy.

5. At their previous meeting on 25 and 26 June 2006 in Warsaw, the presidents of parliaments had discussed the participation of national parliaments in EU affairs at length. At the request of the national parliaments and with the support of the European Council, the European Commission has transmitted all important legislative projects directly to the national parliaments since 1 September 2006, so as to give them an opportunity to comment. The national parliaments are called upon to review projects of the European Union in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The presidents of parliaments discussed the preliminary results of these review processes by their parliaments. They arrived at the conclusion that cooperation must be further promoted within COSAC (Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union) so as to be able to develop the participation of the national parliaments in EU affairs accordingly.

6. The presidents of parliaments agreed to hold their eighth conference in April 2007 in Praha.