

Conclusions

of the Meeting of the European Affairs Committees of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic, the National Assembly of the Republic of Hungary, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland and the National Council of the Slovak Republic

Liberec, February 6, 2005

The representatives of the European Affairs Committees of the Visegrad group countries have concluded as follows:

On the free movement of persons,

the participants express concern with the introduction of rules allowing for the greater mobility of non-EU nationals, when restrictions concerning the mobility of EU nationals continue to remain in force. The participants, mindful of the recent efforts to develop a common immigration policy at the European level, including the adoption of common standards for legal workers from third countries, call for the reconsideration of the transitional constraints to the free movement of workers implemented by 12 Member States.

On the free movement of services,

the participants, reaffirming that the creation of a functioning internal market for services in Europe presents a new opportunity for further growth, welcome the new dynamism on the part of the Commission and the Austrian Presidency with regard to the Services Directive. The participants expect that the new proposal by the Commission will be based on the country-of-origin principle and will allow services of general interest to be included within the framework of the Directive. At the same time, the participants express their disapproval to the utilisation of terms such as „wage and social dumping“ in the ongoing political debate at the European Union level.

On the European Neighbourhood Policy,

the participants welcome progress in the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy since the enlargement of the European Union in May 2004, especially the negotiation of seven Action Plans, their implementation and monitoring. On these grounds, the participants express their support for a differentiated approach towards countries involved in the European Neighbourhood Policy with special regard to Ukraine. Conscious of the European Parliament's disapproval of the 2007–2013 Financial Perspective, the participants reiterate the necessity to ensure financing of the European Neighbourhood Policy as part of the 2007-2013 Financial Perspective. The participants confirm that the energy policy has an important impact on European Neighbourhood Policy, especially with regard to the recent problems concerning gas supplies.

On the future tasks of the European Union,

the participants, acknowledging the importance of reaching consensus between European institutions and among Member States on the future of European integration based on a broad public debate, warn that long-lasting uncertainty regarding the further direction of the European Union could threaten citizens' belief in the European project as well as in the forthcoming enlargement. The participants acknowledge the importance of active participation of the National Parliaments in the current reflection over the future of the European Union.

On “Better Regulation”,

the participants, bearing in mind the importance of attaining the goals identified in the re-launched Lisbon Strategy and taking into account the responsibility of the National Parliaments, welcome the European Commission’s “Better regulation” initiative as an important step towards a more transparent, effective and competitive European Union. The participants confirm that it is necessary to further develop an approach to regulation, which ensures that the defence of public interests is achieved in a way that supports economic growth, employment and productivity in the European Union. They state that the “Better regulation” initiative could provide an inspiration to the National Parliaments of the Visegrad group.

On the enlargement process,

the participants, paying attention to the issue of the absorption capacity of the European Union, believe that the enlargement process has so far been one of the most effective external policies of the EU and therefore should not be halted.

The participants support Bulgaria and Romania to become new EU members on 1 January 2007; at the same time they welcome the opening of accession negotiations with Croatia and support its early accession to the EU.

They appreciate the recent opening of accession negotiations with Turkey and recall that negotiations will be based on its merits and the pace will depend on its progress in meeting the requirements for membership.

The participants stress that the future of all countries in the Western Balkans rests in the European Union and that the speed in which they move towards EU membership depends on how quickly they adopt and implement the necessary reforms. In this respect, the participants welcome the Communication of the Commission “The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: Consolidating stability, raising prosperity”. The participants welcome the decision made by the European Council to grant the status of candidate country to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.