

PRESS RELEASE

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**MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
**OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND THE**  
**VISEGRAD COUNTRIES - Joint Statement**

1. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European Community, the Vice-President of the Commission with responsibility for external relations and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad countries held their first joint meeting in Luxembourg on 5 October 1992. They welcomed the occasion as marking a significant development in the process of strengthening dialogue and cooperation between them. They agreed that this process serves their common objective of gradual integration of the Visegrad countries into the Community.
2. The Visegrad countries recalled that in the memorandum - entitled "on strengthening their integration with the European Communities and on the perspective of accession" - which they have submitted to the Commission they had set out a series of proposals relating to this process of progressive integration. The Commission welcomed this memorandum and confirmed that it was studying it as a contribution to the preparation of the Commission's report to the European Council at Edinburgh. The Visegrad countries looked forward to the Community's considered response. In the meantime the Community and the Visegrad countries agreed upon a series of positions reflecting the present stage in their relations.

3. With regard to ratification of the Europe Agreements, the Community and the Visegrad countries stressed the importance of the objective of the entry into force of the Agreements on 1 January 1993. In this respect, the Community reiterated its commitment to do all that it can to ensure the earliest possible ratification by all Community Member States. However, if necessary, pending completion of ratification procedures, the Community is prepared to assure the extension of the Interim Agreements beyond their current expiry date of 31 December 1992 in order to continue the practical implementation of the agreements without disruption.
4. With the Europe Agreement with CSFR in mind, the Community reaffirmed the importance it attaches to the harmonious development of its relations with the Czech and Slovak Republics within the framework of the constitutional arrangements governing the relations between the two Republics. The Community and Representatives of the CSFR and its two Republics are undertaking informal consultations on the modalities of continuing all the mutual commitments and benefits contained in the Europe Agreement, taking into account the implications of the new framework.
5. The Community and the Visegrad countries reaffirmed their view that the implementation of the Europe Agreements should help the latter achieve their final objective, namely accession to the European Union. The Community reaffirmed its willingness to assist the Visegrad countries in this direction. The Community recognised that the Visegrad countries have established democratic political systems which ensure respect for human rights, and made substantial progress in creating economic systems based on competitive markets and private entrepreneurship.

Cooperation under the Europe Agreements will focus on consolidating and extending progress in these fields. As the Community moves ahead towards the European Union, appropriate forms of consultations should be established with the Visegrad countries in this regard.

6. The Community and the Visegrad countries noted with satisfaction that political dialogue has started even before the Europe Agreements have entered into force. They agreed that this

approach should be preserved and that in future, consideration could be given to the extension of this approach to other matters, forms and mechanisms on different levels.

Political dialogue should foster political convergence, a better mutual understanding and enhanced security and stability throughout Europe. They noted that in order to further strengthen this process, the parties will seek to consult each other on matters covered by the European Political Cooperation in harmony with the provisions of the Europe Agreements.

7. The benefits of the Europe Agreements with their dynamic nature should be exploited fully and improved. Improvement in access to Community markets was acknowledged to be one of the most important means of enhancing economic development and strengthening the market economy system of the Visegrad countries. The Community and the Visegrad countries recalled with approval that the Joint Commissions held earlier this year agreed to discuss before the end of the year a further package of specific and balanced measures to improve market access. This would correspond to the acceleration mechanisms foreseen in the Europe Agreements. The principle of asymmetry, as provided for in the Europe Agreements, should be maintained. It was also recalled that the results of the Uruguay Round shall be applied in full between the Parties, except where the provisions of the Europe Agreements are more favourable.
  
8. The Community welcomed progress towards the establishment of a free trade area between EFTA and the Visegrad countries and encouraged the latter to pursue actively the negotiations for the conclusion of a free trade area among themselves. The Community and the Visegrad countries undertook to study the possibility of a wider cumulation of origin between the Community, the Visegrad countries and EFTA as their trade relations develop.

9. The Community reconfirmed its readiness to undertake consultations with the Visegrad countries on major issues related to their respective trade policy with third countries, and particularly when enlargement negotiations with third countries are taking place, in order to ensure that account is taken of their mutual interests.
10. With a view to developing a sense of common European identity between their societies, it was agreed that cultural and social links between the Community and its Member States and the Visegrad countries should be fostered.
11. The Community and the Visegrad countries underlined the importance of early implementation of the provisions of the Europe Agreements on approximation of laws. In this respect, particular emphasis should be placed on assisting the Visegrad countries to adopt the Community's acquis. They welcomed the actual or envisaged establishment of working groups for the approximation of laws. The Community and Visegrad countries further agreed to examine the possibility of initiating a Regional Programme on Approximation of Laws.
12. In considering the areas in which cooperation shall be further developed, particular attention should be given to infrastructure projects of major European interest in areas such as energy, transport and telecommunications.
13. The Community confirmed its commitment to continue financial assistance in the form of grants and loans including EIB loans as foreseen in the Europe Agreements. Among these, PHARE will remain a major instrument of assistance, responsive to the needs of the Visegrad countries, and should evolve as the economic reform proceeds. Following consultations with the Visegrad countries, the Community shall this year examine steps towards a larger flexibility of PHARE in order to correspond to the evolving needs of the Visegrad countries.

14. The Community and the Visegrad countries stressed that regional cooperation represents a major contribution towards stability in Europe. The Community therefore welcomed the Visegrad countries' efforts to foster such cooperation. In this context, Members of Parliament from the Visegrad countries and the European Parliament should be encouraged to intensify their cooperation.
15. The Community informed the Visegrad countries of its intention to conclude similar Europe Agreements with Romania and Bulgaria. The Community intends to develop relations with these countries according to the same principles as, and without prejudice to, those between the Community and the Visegrad countries.
16. The Community and the Visegrad countries welcomed the actual and future realisation of triangular operations under the credit and loan agreements with the Independent States of the former Soviet Union. The Community will examine the possibility of extending, where appropriate, triangular operations for the implementation of EC technical assistance programmes for the former Soviet Union, so as to make better use of the resources of the Visegrad countries.
17. The Community and the Visegrad countries recalled that the Europe Agreements provide for a review during the fifth year of the transitional period. In this context they agreed that, at an appropriate moment in future, consideration might be given to advancing the date of this review.

The Community and the Visegrad countries further agreed to hold an early joint stocktaking of the impact of the Interim Agreements on trade and economic development as a basis for the future evolution of the Europe Agreements.

18. The Community and the Visegrad countries looked forward to the meeting which is to take place at Heads of State or Government level in London on 28th October.