



Speech by Jacques CHIRAC, President of the French Republic, to the Hungarian Parliament (Budapest)

BUDAPEST HUNGARY

TUESDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2004

President, Prime Minister, Vice-President of the National Assembly, Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Seven years ago, I had the exceptional privilege of addressing your Parliament, this magnificent symbol of democracy and the Hungarian nation. Today, as our two countries prepare to round a new milestone in the European adventure together, hand in hand, I am delighted to be here with you once more. I take this as a sign of the friendship between our two peoples, the friendship of the people of Hungary towards the people of France, and vice versa. France is honoured by your welcome.

My presence here today is an illustration of the thousand-year long relationship that binds our two nations. It is an illustration of that attraction, of that mutual understanding that has so often drawn our two peoples to each other, all through the history of European artistic creation and thought.

Even when Europe's periodic upheavals have kept us apart, this spirit has never been entirely broken. Hungarians faced with oppression, have often found refuge in France, in Paris. In 1956, the freedom-loving people of Hungary massively and courageously defied the intolerable logic of blocs. Later, they were the first to tear down the iron curtain. To grasp the full meaning of the European project, it is essential to keep alive the memory of the tragedies of the century past, that we might better build our future, a future we are now able to share once more.

In 1997, I saw for myself your country's eagerness to regain its rightful place in Europe. I promised then that France would support Hungary's accession to both the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance. Today, our common aims have become a reality.

What a long way we have come! Divisions are a thing of the past. Now our destinies have converged. Think of Kossuth's visionary project of a federation of nationalities at the heart of Europe. Think of the prediction made by his contemporary, Victor Hugo, to whom he was bound by so many affinities: "there will come a day when (...) all of you, nations of the Continent, will merge



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together closely into a higher unit, without losing your distinctive qualities and your glorious individuality, and you will forge the brotherhood of Europe." That day has dawned.

What courage and determination the peoples of Central Europe, yours first and foremost, have displayed! Please allow me to salute the spirit of reform that has inspired Hungary, and the unremitting determination of its leaders in their outstanding achievement of recent years.

Over the past fifteen years, Hungary has overcome all of the challenges facing it. It has successfully cleared the hurdles set by the Union. And their massive "Yes" vote in the referendum on membership was a clear expression of the Hungarians' enthusiasm and desire to be part of Europe!

From May 1st there will be twenty five of us, and we need to harness all our energies to keep this great European adventure moving forward.

In this often awkward and crisis-ridden adventure, we can count on the spirit of Mitteleuropa, on that art of mingling cultures, traditions and religions, on that taste for encounters with others, for discussion and consensus. Hungary will be one of those mediators Europe needs in order to bridge the gap between national interests, defuse distrust and overcome divergences.

With enlargement, Europe is at one with itself, at last. Together, we must be the standard bearers for a project for the Europe of tomorrow. A project that will allow our Union, its institutions renewed, to respond more effectively to the demands of its peoples and make its voice heard more loudly on the world scene.

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This new Europe must be a Europe on the move, forging ahead with its integration. Which is why it is essential to renew Europe's institutions if we want the enlarged Union to function efficiently, democratically and harmoniously. At the Convention on the future of Europe, the representatives of the political forces in the countries of the Union have made a major and ambitious contribution in presenting a draft European Constitution. I want to pay tribute to the active involvement of Hungary's Parliament and Government in this great undertaking.

We are now at a crossroads. Our Europe stands in need of a new political project. Let us adopt the Constitution as soon as possible in 2004. We can rely entirely on the Irish Presidency to present us with a fair assessment of the situation at the European Council next month, and to initiate the necessary steps if, in its view, the conditions for success have been met between now and the end of June.

Naturally, everyone's concerns must be taken into account. I am thinking in particular of the question of national minorities, on which you rightly place



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such a high priority. For though our approaches differ, by virtue of our history and legal traditions, our two countries share a common desire to see the protection of members of minorities enshrined as one of the fundamental values of the Union, while respecting national sovereignties and frontiers. I am convinced that the agreement reached on this point, and on which we are of one mind, will be confirmed to your satisfaction.

While remaining attentive to each others' concerns, we should avoid upsetting the balance struck by the Convention. We must make it easier for the Council to reach its decisions, based on a system that is clear, democratic and efficient, as is the one proposed by the Convention. We must wherever possible replace the rule of unanimity a source of paralysis by qualified majority voting, for more Europe, and a better Europe. We must keep the European Commission to a reasonable size, in order to preserve its traditional and indispensable role as the guardian of the general interest in the face of the interests of individual States, which are expressed in the Council.

The adoption of this European Constitution is the priority issue for the coming months, and we must devote all our energies to that task.

I am aware of the misgivings over the capacity of an enlarged Europe to move forward. I also sense some people's fears of a two-speed Europe. I want to state solemnly here that the Europe France wants to build is a 25-member Europe! The enlarged Union must go forward for the benefit of all its members. We want neither a divided Europe nor a paralysed Europe. We want to drive forward the entire Union, respecting each member's individual pace, in an approach that must remain open, concerted and progressive.

The 25-member Europe is the natural setting for our joint efforts. It is within that framework that we will be able to introduce greater adaptability and flexibility, should the need arise. Some countries will be able and willing to move further and faster: let them lead the way. Others are more hesitant: they should be given time to adapt. The most resolute nations should be allowed to form what I have called "pioneer groups," to blaze new trails in certain areas in which greater European integration is possible. It has always been our view that Europe as a whole will benefit, provided the pioneer groups respect the *acquis communautaire*, that goes without saying, under the supervision of the European Commission; and provided, of course, that they leave the door open, without restriction, to all those who wish or are able to join them.

There is nothing new in this approach, and it has already proved its effectiveness and dynamic potential. We have applied it in creating a huge area for the free movement of people and in introducing a single currency. I hope, notably, that Hungary will very shortly be in a position to join the Schengen area and adopt the euro. Tomorrow, we could see cooperation in other areas in the service of the very aims of the Union. Examples include better economic policy coordination within the Eurogroup, the creation of a fully-fledged security and justice area, foreign policy, and defence policy.



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I repeat: the aim is not to divide, but to lead the way by creating new forms of solidarity. This is not about excluding anyone, but about mobilizing people, by showing that we can go further, and that this will spell greater efficiency for our economies, progress for our fellow citizens and the for the ideals that unite us. I hope with all my heart that Hungary will join in this process. Its experience, vitality and enterprise are eagerly awaited. It is welcome, along with all the other member States that share this ambition.

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President,

Prime Minister,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the foundations for the construction of Europe were laid in the aftermath of the War, the original aim was to make the dream of peace come true and to entrench democracy. You yourselves share this dream you in the heart of Europe, who have experienced the great upheavals of the century past in the very depths of your being. You who have found the strength to overcome the legacy of rancour and conflict to forge exemplary relations with your neighbours.

At the dawn of this new century, Europe stands as a model for all those men and women who seek to lay down solid foundations for a new world order based on people's consent, freedom, and respect for their identity. Our common responsibility today is to organize harmonious and peaceful relations between the world's great groupings, around a multilateralism governed by law.

To convey this message of peace, the world needs a Europe capable of making its voice heard on the international scene. But we know too that, to be credible, diplomacy must sometimes be backed by military force.

We have made great strides towards a European defence capability in recent months, with initial operations in Africa and Macedonia. Last December, we made decisions that will strengthen the European Union's autonomous planning and operational capacities, and for the first time we adopted a European security strategy.

We must press forward, committing ourselves still more deeply to building up our defence capabilities, participating in multinational forces and major European equipment programmes.

I want to be perfectly clear: no one is asking Hungary to choose between NATO and a European defence. The United States are our allies. The values that bind the Euro-Atlantic community are stronger than our occasional divergences. After having largely contributed to the success of the NATO operations in the Balkans, France is today fully involved in the renewal of the Alliance, as witnessed by our participation in its Response Force, to which we are the



second largest contributor.

But, for our Alliance to be durably strong and solid, and to ensure that it respects the positions of its members, Europe needs to acquire a real military existence of its own. To work for a European defence capability is to contribute to the vitality of the transatlantic link. It is to safeguard our common future. A stronger Europe spells a stronger Alliance.

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This stronger, more credible Europe could help the world to meet the challenges of our times: the challenges of a controlled globalization on a human scale, one that respects the diversity of the world's cultures, that promotes sustainable development, and that respects our environment. For that, we need to adopt the necessary common rules that will help to bring about this planetary democracy, this global governance which international public opinion is urging us to devise.

More than ever, Europe should extend a brotherly hand to those men and women, around the Mediterranean rim or in the vastness of Africa, who are fighting for peace, and against poverty, hunger, and inequality. Without that peace and prosperity, there can be no prospect of lasting democracy in the world. Europe is fully at one with itself and faithful to its calling when it defends its founding values democracy, peace, progress, and sharing beyond its frontiers.

Hungary can do much to promote these values and so enrich our common foreign policy. By virtue of its geography and its history, it has an interest in the stability of our continent. France wholeheartedly supports Hungary's initiatives in accompanying and encouraging the democratic and economic reform process in the Balkans and the Ukraine.

Building a Europe at peace also entails devising a new relationship with Russia: this is essential. Like you, we believe it is time to cast aside the reflexes of the past and establish a balanced partnership founded on mutual respect. Let us help Russia to release its boundless energies; let us help it to consolidate the rule of law and successfully implement the reforms it has undertaken. Let us resolutely implement the common spaces we decided to forge recently in Saint Petersburg.

Solidarity, humanism these are values we should be nurturing amongst ourselves also, inside the Union. We must return to growth and see that its fruits are fairly redistributed. Within an enlarged Europe we must safeguard and promote our social model based on justice, dialogue and sharing. This is a model won through hard struggle, to which our fellow citizens are attached, for they also consider it to be an expression of the European idea.

In your country, the necessary economic and social transitions have often been painful. I realise that. The Union has a duty of financial solidarity vis-à-vis the new Member States, as was the case with previous enlargements. While



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France, along with others, has recently issued a reminder of the budgetary discipline by which the Union and each of its Member States are bound, it has no intention, naturally, of questioning this necessary solidarity, for it justifies the very existence of Europe. In a financial framework that cannot be extended infinitely, France will nevertheless see to it that the Union makes its trade-offs in the spirit of solidarity upon which our Union is founded and which you rightly expect from it.

Finally, how can we fail to see that this new Europe, this Union of 450 million citizens, embodies an extraordinary promise of fulfilment for all the talents? Fortified by this new influx of energy and vitality, it must push back the frontiers of the imagination, of artistic creation and thought. For John von Neumann, Fejtő Liszt, Bartok, Vasarely, and Kertesz are a part of our genius and heritage.

For that is the Union's new frontier: the frontier of intelligence, of all our talents united and harnessed in the service of a vision of mankind. I have no doubt that Hungary, with its 13 Nobel prize-winners, will once again stand at the forefront of the drive to conquer these new territories of intelligence and creativity.

Let us unite our efforts in the fields of health, education and research. Let us give our backing to a Europe of universities and laboratories. Let us foster the emergence of new European industrial champions. We need all these drivers of innovation and development. What a tremendous promise of success! Airbus and Ariane are ample proof of what Europeans can do when they combine forces, and when they want to.

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President,

Prime Minister,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I invite you to place this partnership between Hungary and France at the service of this ambition, of this great ambition for Europe.

For more than ten years, now, France has consistently supported Hungary in its efforts to prepare for membership, through twinning between towns and bilateral cooperation ventures.

The ties we have forged, and above all the trust that has grown between our elected representatives, government agencies and economic actors, and among the citizens of our two countries, are the bedrock of our joint action within the Union.



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We enjoy close, confident political contacts. In 2001, Mr. President, it was I who welcomed you to Paris. I have also had the pleasure of welcoming your Prime Minister, Mr. Peter Medgyessy, on several occasions.

Businessmen, industrial leaders, and all those men and women working to promote trade and investment between our two countries have powerfully aided this strengthening of ties. The growth in our trade and the scale of our investment are a sign of the favour with which French businesses view Hungary: because they have confidence; they view it as a major springboard for Central Europe. Increasingly, Hungary is emerging as a pacemaker for research and innovation in Europe.

And how can one fail to mention our cultural affinities, as witnessed by the success of our "seasons": Hungarian in France, and French in Hungary? These affinities have allowed us to stand together in defending the draft Convention on Cultural Diversity at Unesco. That cultural diversity also entails defending linguistic identities. I am delighted that you are to join the Francophone family as an observer, shortly. Moreover, I also support the plan for a French-speaking university in Budapest, federating the entire network of university exchanges, an already very dense network between our two countries.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

This coming May 1st will usher in a new page in the history of our continent. France is proud to join its destiny with that of Hungary. It sees in your great nation not only an essential partner, but also a friend. It firmly believes that, with Hungary, and united once more, Europe is poised to achieve further progress and will spread the European spirit more widely still, standing as a shining example to the world of freedom, solidarity, and progress.

Thank you. |