

*Part II*

**Pushing to Join the West**



## Chapter 5

# NATO Enlargement: Anchor in a Safe Harbor

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“It is not good for man to be alone,” says the Holy Bible. While it is a phrase usually quoted in marriage ceremonies, it is also true in politics. On November 16, 1997, when a binding referendum was held in Hungary on accession to NATO, 85.33 per cent of those who cared to vote understood that it was in the interest of the security, welfare and brighter future of the nation to join the political and military alliance that united most of the world’s economically and militarily strongest democracies.<sup>1</sup> NATO enlargement was of great historical and political significance not only for Hungary but for all Central Europe, indeed for the whole world.

### Overcoming Misfortune and Misjudgments

The vast area between the two largest European nations, the Germans and the Russians, home to at least twenty national groups, was traditionally the object of fights for influence and control by the two neighboring great powers, occasionally joined by the Ottoman Empire and even Sweden. When the smaller countries (in what some have called *Zwischeneuropa*) were independent, they did their best to fight off invaders, but were often also involved in armed conflicts with neighbors over territorial and/or dynastic issues.

In the early modern age, at the 1878 Congress of Berlin, four empires—the Habsburg, Ottoman, Russian and Prussian-German—ruled over Central and Southeastern Europe. The First World War led to the break-up of those empires and to the independence of most of their subdued nationalities. Border disputes and the treatment of thirty million people belonging to national minorities made the region easy prey for Hitler and Stalin. The United States and the West European democracies did very little to prevent World War II, which led to the horrors carried out by the Nazis and later by the Bolsheviks. The spread of

Soviet communism to the West was blocked seventy years ago by the creation of NATO.

The basic principle of NATO, common defense, is not new in the heart of Europe. The idea to stand up jointly to aggression and to defend the land and the people against invaders is very old there. It is enough to refer to the common struggles against the Ottoman onslaught from the 14th to the 18th century, to the mutual sympathy and support by volunteers in the various uprisings and wars for national independence in Poland, Hungary and Italy in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and above all to the solidarity shown in all the Central European countries for the efforts to get rid of the inhuman and irrational dictatorship imposed upon them by the Soviet Union after the end of the Second World War. Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland several times but particularly in 1980-81 underscored the strong attachment people in the eastern half of Europe felt towards freedom and democracy, the cornerstones of Euro-Atlantic values and principles.

Ever since the adoption of Christianity more than a thousand years ago, the three nations that signed the Washington Treaty in 1999 have followed a Western political, cultural and religious alignment. They adopted the Latin (rather than the Cyrillic) alphabet, had feudal Diets, and also a Reformation. In Hungary (including today's Slovakia) the final delivery from Turkish (Ottoman) rule in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century was the result of a huge international army liberating Buda and pushing on to Belgrade, then an Ottoman stronghold.

Later, educated Central Europeans were deeply impressed by the Enlightenment, the American Revolution, and by the material progress the West achieved in the early 19th century. In 1848 Hungary attempted to introduce the liberal political principles that were beginning to guide countries on the two sides of the Atlantic, only to be suppressed by the joint military forces of the Habsburg and the Russian Emperors. Hungary's leader, Lajos Kossuth (in exile) advocated the close association of the United States and the liberal States of Europe, becoming one of the first Atlanticists, and also proposed a confederation of the smaller Danubian countries.

As a historian I have always seen two tendencies or symptoms which were responsible for the many tragedies that had befallen upon the peoples of what the British historian Hugh Seton-Watson called "the

sick heart of Europe.” One was what I call the “invasion and partition” syndrome: neighboring great powers threatening, invading, subduing the smaller nations and imposing upon them foreign domination and usually also a backward social and political system. The Tsarist (later Soviet) and the Ottoman Empires were the most obvious examples. This misfortune was clearly a running theme in the history of Central and Eastern Europe. Another sad feature was what might be called the “ganging up against your neighbor” phenomenon: quarrels over borders and the treatment of national minorities (due to overlapping national territories), and the effort to enlist the support of the great powers in the internecine conflicts. That was more the result of misjudgment than misfortune, because in the long run all the Central Europeans were bound to pay a high price for being caught in the crossfire and becoming cannon-fodder in the wars of the giants.

However, one can also see misjudgment in the policy pursued by the Great Powers towards Central Europe as well. The peace treaties ending the First World War produced “an apple of Eris” for Central Europe, giving rise to discord and territorial disputes among the peoples of the region. Appeasement of Hitler and later of Stalin was a fatal and avoidable mistake. The lofty ideals expressed in the Atlantic Charter and the Yalta Declaration on Liberated Europe were perceived as a pledge that Central Europe would not be given up to the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, mainly for military reasons, the United States did not prevent the Soviet Union from turning every country under the control of the Soviet Army into a satellite of the Soviet Union by 1949.

All through the years of communism, the vast majority of Central Europeans looked at the West and NATO as the ultimate hope that one day freedom would be restored to them. It is a sad story to recall how the hopes of the Hungarians and others were dashed, how in 1956 Soviet leaders turned down U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s promise not to seek new allies in Central Europe but in exchange to allow Hungary and its neighbors to become free. 1956, 1968 and 1971 were all misfortunes for Central Europe, helped by the mistakes committed by the West.

## Potential Conflicts in the Post-Cold War Security Vacuum

It is evident (but seldom mentioned nowadays) that the existence and strength of NATO saved peace during the Cold War. The important role NATO played in the post-communist era in Central Europe, in the former Soviet satellites, is even less noticed. The aim to join NATO was a major incentive to consolidate democracy (as well as the market economy) and to overcome national antagonisms.

The collapse of communism was received with relief and joy in the West, but there was an understandable fear that old passions, prejudices and grievances would be released from the deep-freezer of Communism, and ethnic strife and national conflicts might re-emerge between peoples in the post-communist countries. Those premonitions proved right where it was least expected, in the former Yugoslavia, but such conflicts did not occur elsewhere in Central Europe, certainly not in a way threatening peace. Why? Because the foremost aim of all post-communist societies was prosperity (valued even more than independence and democracy), and Euro-Atlantic integration was seen as the best way to achieve that.

During the Cold War NATO was the official enemy of the Soviet Union and its satellites, who were rightly called “the captive nations.” Yet Americans were never and nowhere as popular as in those countries who found themselves on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain. Several attempts by Central Europeans to regain their freedom and independence were foiled by the Soviet Union. Finally, in 1989 Central European countries were able to become free and independent, even though most were still members of that alliance of the unwilling, the Warsaw Pact, and Soviet forces were still stationed on their territories.

The main foreign policy objectives of the reborn, democratic Hungary were set forth in the government program, presented after the free elections held in Spring 1990: the development of a relationship of trust with the Western democracies, participation in European integration, good relations with all of its neighbors, and support for the rights of national minorities.

The first task was the termination of the Warsaw Pact and the withdrawal of the Soviet occupation forces, to reduce the danger of a return to Soviet Communism. The second was cordial relationships with

Hungary's neighbors. We anti-communist leaders hoped that on the basis of the common suffering under the dictatorships, and the common acceptance of Western, Atlantic values, a new solidarity would emerge between the "new democracies," and the former communist countries would follow the example of post-World War II Western Europe by putting aside all quarrels, and would concentrate on political, economic, environmental and cultural recovery. The third aim of Hungary's foreign policy was the protection of the Hungarian and other national minorities, who were victims of a kind of double oppression under communism. The Helsinki process, with its emphasis on human rights, was most promising in that respect.

The program was put into practice with a speed unexpected in over-cautious Western capitals. Hungary took the lead in dismantling the Warsaw Pact. In what turned out to be the last meeting of the leaders of that body in Moscow on June 7, 1990 Hungarian Prime Minister Antall declared:

Here I would like to emphasize that Hungary welcomes the new Soviet stance acknowledging the importance of American military commitments in Europe. We believe the military presence of the United States to be a stabilizing factor that will continue to have a definitive positive influence even after German reunification. During the process of forging European unity, it is expedient to rely on stable Atlantic co-operation, which proved in the course of two world wars that Europe and North America are inseparable. We do not wish to exclude the peoples of the Soviet Union from the unified Europe. We oppose merely shifting the line that divides Europe eastwards. The only credible alternative is the complete elimination of such divisions.<sup>2</sup>

He proposed the radical revision of the Pact, called for the immediate liquidation of its military organization, and proposed talks "to review the nature, the function and the activities of the Warsaw Treaty." President Gorbachev still hoped that both military-political alliances could be dissolved, but Antall contradicted him: "During the process of forging European unity, it is expedient to rely on stable Atlantic cooperation." He added that "the Soviet Union must be part of the process of European integration."<sup>3</sup>

Gradually Hungary enlisted the agreement to that program all the former satellites, and the Warsaw Pact was formally dissolved on July 1, 1991. By that date the last Soviet soldier had already left Hungary.

In my role as Hungary's Foreign Minister, I already visited NATO in Brussels on June 28-29, 1990. I found a sympathetic friend in Secretary-General Manfred Wörner, whom we invited to visit Hungary. Prime Minister Antall then had most cordial talks with Wörner at NATO Headquarters on July 17-18, 1990.

All the leaders of the new, non-communist governments wanted to guarantee that the great political and economic changes were irreversible. The failed coup in Moscow on August 19-20, 1991 was an ominous warning. Although on August 21 the North Atlantic Council came out with a statement in support of democracy, reform and independence in Central and Eastern Europe, and President Bush as well as Secretary-General Wörner placed encouraging phone calls to Antall and myself respectively, we knew that if the coup had succeeded and Moscow had sent back its troops, NATO would have found it difficult to do more than protest.

The Visegrád Cooperation, established among Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland upon the initiative of Antall on February 15, 1991, greatly facilitated the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. Having achieved that with Gorbachev's agreement, we were convinced that the fundamental political changes of 1989/90 could be guaranteed and made irreversible only by entering the European Community and membership in NATO. The latter aim was not publicized, however, until the Prague Summit of the Visegrád 3 in May 1992.

At that time NATO was still far from being ready to endorse the idea; instead it created the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), which brought together the members of NATO and of the dissolved Warsaw Pact.

What was needed was a strong campaign, primarily in the United States, to convince its leaders and the public that it was in the interest of NATO to expand eastward, and that post-Soviet Russia's likely opposition to the idea should not prevent its realization.

That aim was far from being shared by all in the West. John Matlock, U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1987-91, wrote a retrospective

opinion article in the *Washington Post* on March 16, 2014 deploring the fact that NATO had admitted members of the former Soviet bloc. By doing so, Matlock argued, NATO had violated “the understanding that the United States would not take advantage of the Soviet retreat from Eastern Europe.”

Fortunately, eventually most American decision-makers, from President Clinton to Members the U.S. Senate, respected the desire and determination of the Central Europeans to join the foremost Western security organization. The late Ron Asmus (who left us painfully early), Steve Larrabee and others played a most important role in convincing leaders and public opinion in the United States about the wisdom of enlargement. The ongoing crisis in the Balkans acted as a catalyst for seeing enlargement as the best way to stabilize Central and Eastern Europe. (The present crisis in Ukraine has likewise reinforced the view of NATO as a force for stability.) According to Asmus, “the purpose of NATO enlargement was to help lock in a new peace order in Europe following communism’s collapse and the end of the Cold War. We wanted to promote a process of pan-European integration and reconciliation that would make the prospect of armed conflict as inconceivable in the eastern half of the continent as it had become in the western half. ...it was also our hope that new allies from Central and Eastern Europe, having fought hard to regain their freedom and independence, would also bring fresh blood, ideas and enthusiasm to NATO and help us transform it for a new era.”<sup>4</sup>

If a free Central Europe had been left in the no-man’s land between NATO and the Russian Federation, tensions over national minorities between Poland and Lithuania, Romania and Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia (and probably Turkey, too), not to mention Hungary and three of its neighbors, might have engulfed the whole area.

Following the experts meeting of the CSCE in Geneva in July 1991, it became obvious that the recommendations of that body adopted in June 1990 in Copenhagen were not being carried out by the countries having large national minorities. Fortunately, the strict observation of human rights, including the rights of national minorities, was declared a prerequisite for NATO as well as for EU membership.

The prospect of joining the two Euro-Atlantic institutions proved a strong incentive for proper behavior in the applicant countries. It

helped them reach important bilateral accords, like the treaties Poland, Hungary and Romania signed with their neighbors between 1991 and 1996. (I find it most regrettable that later on NATO, like the EU, paid little attention to the strict observation of the rights of minorities, or honoring CSCE and Council of Europe commitments.)

### **First Steps: Coming Out of the Cold**

All the members of the erstwhile Soviet bloc welcomed the new strategic concept of NATO, adopted in November 1991 in Rome, which expressed a willingness to cooperate with them. But this was still a far cry from membership in the cozy club.

Prime Minister Antall addressed the Atlantic Council on October 28, 1991 and expressed his gratitude for NATO: “We knew that if Western Europe could not remain stable, if the North American presence would cease in Europe, then there wouldn’t be any solid ground left for us to base our hopes upon.” He also emphasized that Central Europe represented a strategically very important space, a link towards the southern arm of the Alliance and an essential hinterland. Antall called for an active role in solving the crisis in Yugoslavia—which was only emerging then.<sup>5</sup>

We were fortunate in having in Manfred Wörner a man as Secretary-General who not only sympathized with the nations emerging from Soviet captivity but had an intimate knowledge of their concerns. Formerly the Minister of Defense in the Federal Republic of Germany, Wörner made a great contribution to NATO rising to the challenges of the post-communist world. Central Europeans should preserve his memory most fondly.

Hungary became a very active member of the NACC, which was set up on December 20, 1991. In my contributions to the meeting of the Foreign Ministers I proposed several measures to deepen the ties between the two halves of Europe, e.g. bilateral consultations especially in conflict managements, devoting special attention to the democratization of the newly independent states (former Soviet republics), and the “human conversion” of the large officer corps of the former Warsaw Pact.<sup>6</sup> December 21, the last day of the NACC meeting was Stalin’s

birthday. It was also the day that the Soviet Union formally dissolved, as announced by the Soviet Ambassador during the NACC conference.

Together with its Visegrád partners Hungary decided to push for early membership in NATO – not as an alternative to the much hoped for membership in the European Community, but as a complement. This intention was announced publicly at the Prague summit of the Visegrád states on May 6, 1992. From that day until my last day in office, and after that as a member of the Opposition in Hungary's Parliament, also as President of the Hungarian Atlantic Council (1995-1998), I worked relentlessly for Hungary's accession. Prime Minister Antall used his considerable international reputation and influence for the same aim until his early death in December 1993.

During this time the two of us were careful not to appear as anti-Russian. We shared the view, held primarily by the United States and Germany, that it was highly desirable to help the Russian Federation become a strong and prosperous democracy, and to bring it as close to NATO as possible. Therefore, we did not bang on the door at Brussels for immediate admission.

In that spirit, at the second meeting of the NACC on March 10, 1992, I welcomed all the independent successor states of the former Soviet Union. "Apart from the CSCE this body has become the second institution to embrace the newly independent states and to offer them partnership, cooperation and a stabilizing fabric of international relations and interlocking institutions, they could hardly find elsewhere than in the Euro-Atlantic community of shared values and objectives."<sup>7</sup>

The brutal war first in Croatia and then in Bosnia, the frequent violations of Hungarian airspace by Yugoslav planes, and the danger of ethnic cleansing spreading to the Hungarian communities of Vojvodina, a formerly autonomous province of Yugoslavia (before 1919 an integral part of Hungary), compelled Hungary to be very active in urging the international community to stop the bloodshed and to prevent it from spreading further. With that purpose in mind, on October 31, 1992 Hungary opened its airspace for NATO's AWACS planes to monitor the military activities in the Balkans. It was followed by angry reactions from Belgrade. Milošević and his media continuously used threatening language towards Hungary and the large Hungarian minority in the Vojvodina, holding it as hostage.

We knew that even rump Yugoslavia was a formidable military power and was eager to draw Hungary into a military confrontation. NATO understood our predicament. In response to a letter by Prime Minister Antall, Wörner expressed what could be interpreted as a verbal guarantee: in carrying out international obligations under the U.N. sanctions and in making airspace available for AWACS planes monitoring the observance of U.N. resolutions, Hungary could count on the support of the Alliance.<sup>8</sup>

Germany was an early advocate of the recognition of Croatia's and Slovenia's independence. While Chancellor Kohl, grateful to Russia/USSR for allowing and accepting German unification and membership in NATO, did not want to antagonize Russia in any way, his Minister of Defense, Volker Rühle, was eager to help the new democracies of the East by welcoming their inclusion in NATO.

The French were at best lukewarm about the idea, as they did not like the idea of NATO becoming larger and stronger. They proposed other European models (excluding the United States), such as a "European Confederation" or strengthening the West European Union. The United Kingdom, influenced mainly by military considerations, thought that the British were not ready to die for Warsaw.

The ultimate decision, however, clearly rested with the United States. There the expansion (the term was soon changed to the more innocent sounding enlargement) of NATO was a subject of heated discussions under the new Clinton Administration. The details, meticulously recounted by several authors, make exciting reading even today.<sup>9</sup>

Many Americans, some of them fellow authors in this volume, played a most important role in convincing the leaders and public opinion in the United States about the wisdom of enlargement. On the Republican side they were given strong support by Senator Richard Lugar, Republican from Indiana, while the Secretary of State, Warren Christopher (not exactly a sanguine person) was for long at best undecided. Other officials and experts (Steve Oxman, Strobe Talbott) appeared to be skeptical, fearing that Russia would be alienated by the Alliance approaching its borders.

On the other hand, we, Polish, Czech and Hungarian politicians were increasingly vociferous in the counter-arguments. Clinton, im-

pressed by the heroes of Central Europe's anti-communist revolutions, was inclined to agree with us, but he did not want to go down in history as the President "who lost Russia," alienating Yeltsin, the man who was instrumental in the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Although we were aware of the misgivings most NATO members had about diluting the Alliance and admitting officers who had been trained in the Soviet Union into their ranks, we thought that even a campaign for membership would increase our security, and we should persist in our efforts to convince the skeptics that an enlarged NATO would guarantee the peace and stability of Europe.

A very emphatic expression of our wish was the first NATO "political-military workshop" held in a former Warsaw Pact country, in Budapest, on June 3, 1993. It was attended by many high-ranking NATO officers and officials, and offered an opportunity to articulate our arguments in favor of enlargement.

Prime Minister Antall opened the meeting in the impressive chamber of the Upper House of Parliament with a forceful address. He put cooperation between Hungary and NATO in an historical perspective, highlighting the deep roots Atlantic ideals had in Hungarian political thought, and recounting how Walter Lippmann and others had appeased Stalin. Hungary's prime minister also assured his audience that "we are supporters of the renewal of Russia, supporters of Russian reformist endeavors." With remarkable foresight Antall envisaged for NATO a new function in a volatile world, where "social and political fundamentalism may in the North-South conflict manifest itself and assail the world as the Bolshevism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century." Finally, the Prime Minister emphasized that in international politics, too, prevention should replace reactive behavior.<sup>10</sup>

In my own contribution I listed the many difficulties and dangers Central Europe was facing at the time, and pointed out that the present security institutions (NATO, CSCE, West European Union) were incapable of handling the existing and potential conflicts and crises. My conclusion was that "the Western democracies must play their part in establishing the security of this region, far more seriously than they have done so far. The reason for this is not simply a moral obligation, but their self-interest."<sup>11</sup>

The message was obvious: NATO must open its ranks. A week later I flew to Athens for the next NACC meeting, but it was preoccupied with Bosnia, and Christopher put enlargement on hold by preferring to plan a Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) to deal with other unexpected crises.

The conference was followed by a morning cruise on June 12. With Hungary's Ambassador in Brussels, Granasztói, we managed to sit on the deck besides Wörner—to the exasperation of Romanian Foreign Minister Melescanu, who was keen only that Hungary should not become a member of NATO before Romania.

Despite his strong sympathy for Hungary, Wörner's main concern was the survival of NATO *per se*, when many people predicted its termination as an old instrument of the Cold War. He listened carefully to our reasoning that the stability and success of the new democracies required the West to include them formally in its institutions, and that a consolidated NATO could largely take over the role of the CSCE and the rather inefficient U.N. Security Council.

### **V3 Pressure, Washington's Pondering, and Yeltsin Acquiescing**

In Washington the debate in 1993 narrowed down between the Pentagon (Les Aspin) accepting enlargement only in the distant future (provided Russia agreed), and the State Department, which gradually endorsed the view that the West must rise to the unique opportunity and accept Central and Eastern Europe as its partner.

On August 25, 1993 the world could hardly believe the news that on his visit to Warsaw, after a late evening discussion with President Wałęsa, President Yeltsin accepted that it was Poland's sovereign decision to join NATO, and that it did not hurt Russia's interests. "Yeltsin must have been drunk," was and still is the general explanation, but Asmus shows rather convincingly that the Russian leader accepted Wałęsa's arguments for a common Western orientation. In the coming months he increasingly came to like the prospect that Russia, too, might join the Western Alliance. Although his advisors and—even more—most Russian politicians were opposed to this turnaround, for

Yeltsin it was enough if the Visegrád countries were not given preference over Russia.

Antall, the foremost advocate of Central Europe's membership, was already seriously ill with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. While under special treatment in Cologne he continued to advance our drive for NATO membership. On October 4, 1993, in the wake of the dramatic collision between Yeltsin and the anti-reformist, anti-Western Russian politicians in the Russian Duma, Antall reminded President Clinton in a letter of Hungary's standing in the Gulf War, throughout the Balkans and now the Russian crisis. That and the overall performance of Hungary warranted speeding up its integration into NATO.

On October 19 the Prime Minister turned again to the American President. Seven weeks before his death he pleaded in a letter for the upcoming NATO summit to make preparations for the Visegrád Group's accession to NATO. "I remain convinced that this would also assist the reform forces in Russia, as I mentioned in my letter of September 14 to President Yeltsin." The rest of the letter set forth why that was the time to act, arguments which have been proven true by subsequent events, including a reference that an enlarged NATO could help Turkey "as a counter-balance to pan-Islamic, fundamentalist (Shiite), and should occasion arise, Russian imperial endeavors."<sup>12</sup>

The answer was a long phone call placed by Secretary Christopher to Antall from the plane which took him on a visit to Budapest and Moscow. I gave a lunch in the Budapest Hilton in honor of the Secretary of State; it was followed by a walk by the two of us on Fishermen's Bastion. Having taken note of Hungary's specific reasons for NATO membership, Christopher assured me that the Partnership for Peace (PfP) would take all the new democracies much closer to NATO and would ensure their security. In a joint press conference, where PfP was formally announced, my guest told reporters: "I assure you we would never disregard or in any way underrate the significance of these countries." One of his top aides told reporters that the Administration wanted to "open the door" to the eventual expansion of NATO that could eventually include Russia and other countries of the former Soviet bloc.<sup>13</sup>

I decided not to show any disappointment: "We welcome the U.S. proposal for a partnership in peace. It accepts the idea of expanding

NATO and it *prepares* participating countries for military collaboration,” I told the correspondent of the *Washington Post*. The paper later explained that “For Hungary in particular, the threat from the south is more than hypothetical. At the start of the Balkan war in mid-1991, Serbian warplanes violated Hungarian airspace repeatedly and even dropped a cluster bomb on the border town of Barcs. Hungary had no way to respond, because Moscow took away Hungary’s air defense system when its troops departed in 1991.” I was quoted that since membership in the European Community (by now the post-Maastricht European Union) proved to be still far away, “NATO came forward as an alternative [. . .] as a shortcut to anchoring us into the Western world.” Asked whether a closer relationship with NATO did not involve substantial risks, I said Hungary’s experience has been just the opposite: after we agreed to allow NATO AWACS surveillance planes to monitor the traffic over Serbian-dominated Bosnia from Hungarian airspace, Serbia became less aggressive.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike the Poles, who did not hide their disappointment, I really perceived PFP as an important step towards enlargement. On that basis the Hungarian government publicly welcomed the concept.

In the coming weeks and months, I used every possible opportunity, bilateral meetings, articles, interviews and speeches in NATO countries (France, Britain, five locations in Germany) to win over hesitant politicians and the public. The gist of my argument was that the West must “make hay while the sun is shining,” should admit the Visegrád Three *before* Russian opposition to it would harden. My motto was the Latin wisdom *vincere scis, Hannibal, victoriam uti nescis*: “you know how to win, Hannibal, you do not know how to use victory.” The West needed to use of its victory in the Cold War.

I also expressed confidence in Yeltsin. He (unlike Milošević) “never said that all Russians must be kept within Russia, and by this a most terrible war was averted.” I argued that the expansion of the area of stability and security in what the Russians somewhat alarmingly liked to call the “near abroad” would not harm Russian interests; on the contrary, it would help to make the Western border zone of Russia safe. But Central Europe should not be required to wait for Russia to develop into a stable democracy – a very lengthy undertaking at best, a fraught, stillborn venture at worst.

I reiterated those arguments at a conference organized by the Hungarian-born financier George Soros in Budapest on November 12, adding that in my opinion his idea of a “Grand Alliance” between NATO and Russia was only a distant possibility, and it should never be created above the heads of the Central Europeans. My conclusion was that “Central Europe today is a no-man’s-land and there is a tendency for any vacuum to be filled. If the West does not fill it there will be others to put in a claim.”<sup>15</sup>

### **The Decisive Meeting in Prague**

In preparation for the NATO summit to be held in Brussels in January 1994, I wrote a non-paper in October 1993 and sent it to all NATO foreign ministers. Its main message:

We understand that the Alliance is now in the process of redefining its role and responsibilities so as to be able to meet the new challenges in Europe. This redefinition should take into consideration the security needs of the whole continent. It means that NATO should find practical ways to gradually extend its sphere of influence as well as sphere of activity to the Central and Eastern parts of the continent. Hungary believes that this task cannot be accomplished without embracing the idea of extending the Alliance to the democratically most mature states of these regions. We understand that such a decision could be realized only gradually, as a process, in which the first concrete steps should be already taken by the coming NATO Summit. We consider those principles very important, because in the process of the extension nobody should be allowed to feel to be left out, isolated or interpret it as a step directed against its security interest. Therefore, while extending the membership to the most advanced and stable countries of the region it is necessary to create cooperative mechanisms to satisfy the security needs of those countries which are not—yet—mature enough for more intensive cooperation. This means that the legitimate security interests of Russia, Ukraine and others must be taken into account and taken care of in the form of enhanced cooperation and coordination, in order to avoid that any—irrational—feeling of isolation should prevail. Extension of NATO should be carried out in a way which strengthens the security of present members of the Alliance as well as its internal cohesion.

That is why we are in favor of gaining membership for the Visegrád countries, since we are convinced that the membership of these countries would significantly contribute to NATO's security by stabilizing & securing Central Europe. There is no danger of introducing internal disputes in the Alliance. These countries have made significant progress in the transformation of their societies and economies and have no problems relating to their borders.

In order to calm down the opponents of enlargement I raised the possibility of a transitional status:

We can envisage NATO to establish a new status, that of association, which in the interim period would provide us a possibility to participate in the political mechanism of the Alliance, while gradually preparing our military capabilities to obtain the necessary level of compatibility. During this period the ties of cooperation could grow constantly in every field, which would render mutual benefits, and the advantages of the extension could be seen more clearly for all sides. We strongly believe that NATO's decision on the extension of the Alliance would be a very important step projecting stability in itself, stimulating countries in this part of our continent to strive even more decisively to stabilize the direction of their development based on the values of the present members of NATO.<sup>16</sup>

On November 18, 1993, I addressed the Strauss Symposium in Munich. I pointed out that now we had the opportunity to realize Franz Josef Strauss' vision of a free and independent belt between Russia and Western Europe by NATO accession. I was confident that "Once the norms and attitudes that emerged in Western Europe after World War II come to prevail in Central and Eastern Europe, if they permeate the political elites, the young generations and the armed forces, existing tensions are likely to be significantly reduced."<sup>17</sup> Secretary General Wörner privately told me at the Symposium that he would gladly accept Hungary immediately in NATO; the problem was that there were eleven applicants, and obviously all of them could not be accepted at once or possible at all.

At the NACC meeting in Brussels on December 3, in a partly impromptu speech, I gave a very positive interpretation of PfP. Having made a reference to the famous Cold War novel *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, I said that

We in Central and Eastern Europe have also come in from the cold, from the Cold War, from the wrong side. We were given a hero's welcome, but later, when the party was over, the air started to cool. Now, after the announcement of Partnership for Peace and the many contributions heard today, and having read and studied carefully the speech made yesterday by the Secretary of State, Mr. Warren Christopher, all this has had a warming effect on us. His words show that our thoughts have indeed been given careful consideration. These statements serve to reassure Hungary that the position which we already took when we were still in opposition at the end of 1989 has been a right one. We were calling for a continued strong American presence in Europe and for partnership for us in NATO. The Secretary of State's speech recognized the existence of a security vacuum and the need to fill it with the concerted action of free nations. That readiness to expand the Alliance is something which has long been advocated by the Central Europeans. Hungary's contribution in the military field will be both intellectual and in a modest way practical, consisting especially in providing support services for peacekeeping, as we are already doing through our help to the UNPROFOR mission in former Yugoslavia.

I assured my colleagues that

The extension of the area of stability and security to Central Europe cannot do harm to Russian interests, let alone pose a threat to that country or to any other. On the contrary, it will make the Western border zone of Russia safer. A stable and eventually prosperous Central Europe will improve the economic chances of Russia and Ukraine, and encourage their democratic forces, because Central Europe has long been seen by them as a testing ground, as a model within their reach. The democracies and the democrats of Central and Eastern Europe are the friends and supporters of democracy in Russia. They can best support the latter by their own rapid success. But for that we need rapid accession to the Western institutions.

[...] Partnership for Peace marks a good start. But its expansion, in my view, can only be gradual, and the countries that are more ready for membership should be given the green light first, for the time being by applying Article 4 of the Washington Treaty. I see no danger in this kind of differentiation, because it will encourage

others to follow the democratic model of the Central Europeans and increase the incentive to conform to the standards of smoothly functioning democracies. [...]

In conclusion, I would state that democracy, prosperity and stability are interdependent, and like the European Union and NATO, they can only spread eastward gradually. It is like the old Western frontier in 19th century America. Once it started to move westward, democracy, the rule of law, stability and prosperity spread, and eventually reached the shores of the Pacific. One day the new Eastern frontier will pass by Moscow, reach Siberia and end up in Vladivostok and the Western coast of the Pacific. Once we will have won the Wild East we will be able to deal seriously with global problems, like how to bridge the North-South divide, or the threat of fundamentalist intolerance. So Partnership for Peace is not an end, it's only a means to prepare for the tasks of the coming years.<sup>18</sup>

After Brussels I flew to London, and had talks among others with Defense Secretary Malcom Rifkind. He listened politely to my words but I saw that he remained skeptical.

I expanded on the subject more fully in my talk on December 6, 1993 at the University of London's School of Slavonic and East European Studies, the institution where I spent much time in 1975 while doing research for my book on the British image of Hungary. I spoke about the lessons of appeasing Hitler in the 1930s and Stalin in the first half of the 1940s: Central Europe was then recognized by the Western democracies as of special interest first for Germany and then for the Soviet Union. By resolute and timely action both the Second World War and the Cold War could have been averted. At present I saw dangerous tendencies, not in Yeltsin's policies, but in those of his hardline opponents. My argument was that by admitting the Visegrád countries into NATO we could ensure that the no-man's-land between Germany and Russia would no longer be an attractive and obtainable prize for the Russian red-brown nationalists.<sup>19</sup>

Since Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd was not in London during my visit, I sent him a memo on NATO enlargement. My emphasis was on Russia, warning that the larger the space its nationalists see available, "the more likely it is that Russian imperialism will re-emerge." I

asked the British Government to “pay more attention to accommodating the legitimate concerns of the Central European countries,” and to “send an encouraging signal” to them.<sup>20</sup>

I was aware that several NATO countries were less ready to offer security guarantees to former Soviet satellites than the United States, therefore I was eager to put forward my arguments in their media, too. In a long interview with Per Nyholm of *Jyllands-Posten*, the leading Danish newspaper, I explained why the Central Europeans were pressing for membership in NATO. We feared not Yeltsin’s Russia but the possibility of a new, neo-imperialist Russian Great Power (if Yeltsin failed), to whom Central Europe may be abandoned just as had happened under Hitler, and later under Stalin. I argued that as NATO got closer to Russia, stability and prosperity was going to spread towards it.<sup>21</sup>

In my interview to a French newspaper I repeated the above argument, adding that Hungary was let down in 1956, too, but at least the best intellectuals of France then showed their solidarity. While NATO was not an institution for solving national and ethnic conflicts, it was an excellent school for collaboration between armies and politicians coming from different nations.<sup>22</sup>

Polish leaders did not hide their disappointment that despite Yeltsin’s go-ahead the United States offered only PfP instead of membership in NATO. President Clinton sent the Czech-born U.N. Ambassador Albright, the Polish-born General Shalikashvili and Hungarian-born State Department adviser Charles Gati to pacify the Poles and to enlist Hungarian support.

On January 7, 1994 they had very hard talks in Warsaw. President Wałęsa told them that PfP only fed Russian imperialist designs, “in order to tame the bear it must be put in a cage and not allowed to roam in the woods.” Foreign Minister Olechowski said a full presidential library could be filled by Western promises. What Poland needed was a timetable with fixed dates.<sup>23</sup>

The American team flew on to Budapest. My tactics differed from that of the Poles. I trusted in the force of our arguments and knew that in Washington a strong lobby of emigrants from Central Europe was also pressing the Administration. Albright and Gati assured me that the

arguments of our late Prime Minister had reached their target. President Clinton endorsed the idea of eventual enlargement, the question was only “when and how.”

Those words enabled me to say at the press conference at the Atrium Hyatt Hotel on January 8 that “since the very moment Secretary Christopher laid out the main principles of PfP to us in Budapest in October, the Hungarian Government has fully and articulately supported it. This program will, we trust, help prepare us for fulfilling the various responsibilities that arise from being a full member of NATO. [...] I am convinced that one day, I hope soon, we will become full members of the organization. It is not a matter of *if*, but a matter of *when*. [...] instead of regarding this [PfP] as *something* given instead of *everything*, we regard this as *something* given instead of *nothing*.”<sup>24</sup>

The American guests welcomed Hungary’s position and they were the first to make the soon famous statement that NATO enlargement was no longer in doubt, “the only question is when and how.”

All of this allowed me to be cautiously optimistic in another long interview, this time on January 10 for the Polish weekly paper *Polytika*. I said that a year earlier most NATO countries did not accept the idea of admitting new members, since then we had made substantial progress. In Prague we would be able to argue how important Central Europe was and that the U.S. should not focus only on Russia. I rejected that the present situation could be regarded as our having been let down, let alone betrayed. We were simply being left too long in a waiting room. A stable Central Europe would set a good example for the other transition countries by showing them it is worth their while to carry out political and economic measures similar to ours.<sup>25</sup>

President Clinton was very forthcoming at the NATO Summit in Brussels on January 9–10. Speaking to the Allied leaders he referred to responsibility before history: he condemned U.S. isolationism; the time had come to incorporate the newcomers from the East. He promised that Partnership for Peace would start a process leading to the enlargement of NATO—but not in the immediate future. That would leave time for accommodating Russia.

The final communiqué sounded encouraging: “We expect and would welcome NATO expansion that would reach to democratic states to

our East, as part of an evolutionary process, taking into account political and security developments in the whole of Europe.<sup>26</sup>

Upon receiving the news in Budapest I called a press conference. I pointed out that the last few weeks demonstrated the fallacy of the view that Central and Eastern Europe had been written off by the West. Prime Minister Antall's frequent warnings that the West was unprepared for the collapse of communism were at last beginning to be heeded; now, certainly from our perspective, the right answers were emerging. President Clinton declared that the security and the future of the area between NATO and Russia were regarded to fall within the interests of the United States. Sixteen NATO members accepted the principle of widening the Alliance. I was satisfied that the idea was not to push the Iron Curtain somewhat to the East, so that Hungary would become a frontier zone, perhaps a battlefield—but that Russia, too, was becoming a partner. That would be far more comforting than its *raison d'être* as a revived rival superpower. Far from being a sell-out, Pfp was a self-selecting process that rewarded those who took the lead, but it also encouraged those who lagged behind. The Brussels decisions were also good news for Ukraine, as they offered a perspective towards the West. We regarded Pfp as a straight line leading towards NATO. Hungary was going to utilize all the possibilities for political, diplomatic, military and logistical consultation and collaboration, so that within a few years we would meet all the requirements for NATO membership. We were ready to bear all the costs for our security.<sup>27</sup>

I spoke in the same vein to the Hungarian program of the Voice of America. Answering the question about the difference between the Polish and the Hungarian reaction to Pfp, I pointed out that Poland's past, having been partitioned four times in history, and the role played in them by Russia, made Polish worries fully understandable. In that interview I expressed my gratitude to the Hungarian-American Coalition and to those Hungarian-Americans who helped our case in Washington, coordinating with the Government of Hungary.<sup>28</sup>

The U.S. President and his entourage arrived in Prague on January 11, 1994 to meet the leaders of the by now four Visegrád countries, following Czechoslovakia's velvet divorce in 1993. Meeting President Havel in the afternoon, Clinton made it clear that Pfp left time both for NATO and the applicants to prepare, while not alienating Russia

and Ukraine. If a new threat from the East would emerge the answer would be immediate enlargement. Havel accepted the logic but asked for a public statement along it.

In the late afternoon Strobe Talbott invited me to a discussion. I knew his stance, his concerns about keeping Russia a cooperating partner. That was Hungary's position, too, I told him. I set forth my views on where the real threats for Russia were coming from and that NATO enlargement in fact served the interests of Russia. I did not expect an immediate endorsement of my arguments, but Talbott clearly appreciated that Hungary was keen not to push Russia in the direction of the hard-liner nationalists.

The next day, the U.S.–V4 meeting was friendly, albeit a bit formal. There was no heated discussion on a date for admission into NATO. Hungary's new prime minister, Boross, felt somewhat ill at ease among so many glamorous persons talking about issues which concerned him far less than Wałęsa and Havel – and myself. At the much-awaited press conference President Clinton reaffirmed that “while the Partnership is not NATO membership, neither is it a permanent holding room. [...] It changes the entire NATO dialogue so that now the question is no longer whether NATO will take on new members but when and how.” Havel was satisfied as far as saying that he hoped Prague would go down in history as the opposite of Yalta, as the symbol of the re-unification of Europe. Wałęsa agreed to participate in Pfp, adding “We welcome American generals in Europe: General Motors, General Electric...”<sup>29</sup>

Following upon the Prague meeting NATO's Assistant Secretary General Gebhardt von Moltke held consultations in Budapest on February 3-4, 1994 with Deputy State Secretaries Iván Bába and Zoltán Pecze on how to proceed with the Partnership. I signed the Pfp Framework Document in Brussels on February 8, while my deputy, State Secretary János Martonyi, submitted the Pfp Presentation Document to Deputy Secretary General Sergio Balanzino on June 6.

### **How to Win the East: Pushing the Frontier Eastward**

By this point all six political parties represented in the Hungarian Parliament, including the three in opposition, supported the drive for membership in NATO. Although in the Spring 1994 Hungarian elec-

tion campaign both the opposition Free Democrats and the Socialists called for a referendum on NATO membership (while my Hungarian Democratic Forum thought the decision fell within the competence of the Government, subject to parliamentary ratification), the new coalition government elected in May, led by Socialist Gyula Horn, continued close cooperation with NATO and was an active participant in the Partnership for Peace programs.

The whole matter now depended on the United States—how the State Department, the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, and the President, together with his advisers, sorted out their differences and dealt with the issue of membership in NATO. As a member of Parliament now in the opposition, I continued to work for that very end, attended many international conferences, spoke at several American universities and at other fora on the importance of membership for Hungary and its Visegrád partners. My arguments were partly historical, referring to the tragic consequences of appeasement (of Hitler and later of Stalin) and to the success story of the American western frontier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Let me present part of a typical talk of mine.

Central Europe today is a no-man's land and there is a tendency for any vacuum to be filled. With the gradual enlargement of NATO, a strategically most important space would be incorporated into the stable zone of Europe. The admission of the states of Central Europe would establish an important link between the separate areas of NATO. The value of the air space and the territory of the applicants were evident during the Gulf War and even more today with the peace mission in Bosnia. Central European membership is more than enlarging the defense perimeters of NATO; it is the most important step in conflict prevention, in projecting security, in consolidating the newly won frontiers of democracy.

NATO has proved to be an excellent educational institution in bringing together countries with a long tradition of mutual suspicions and even conflicts. A similar role is badly needed in Central and Eastern Europe. Left alone those states, without guidance and help, might again end up not simply in petty quarrels, but being reincorporated in a new sphere of influence, even in a restored military bloc. Plans for such have obviously not died yet, and that must be the real explanation for the growing opposition shown by

Russia to its former satellites acceding to the Washington Treaty. The former members of the Soviet bloc cannot help seeing that opposition as a most serious challenge to their sovereignty. It should not be answered by a policy which shows elements of appeasement.

The question is whether to provide unconditional support to Russia as long as there is at least a faint hope to see there a government basically friendly to the West, if necessary subordinating principles, the interests of the smaller nations that emerged from Soviet captivity, or to link help to more or less strict conditions, both in the field of economic and social policies, thus impressing upon Russia the advantages of continued cooperation with the West. Of course, everybody is aware of the importance of Russia, its nuclear arsenal, its pride and the danger of hurting it. It is difficult not to share the view that all efforts have to be made to avoid a new confrontation between Russia and the West. The question is how to support healthy forces and not offering a new chance for those who think that the best solution for the problems in Russia lies in the restoration of the Soviet Union, perhaps even the Soviet Empire. [...]

In my view in the case of Russia it is appeasement to accept anything that smacks of a veto over expanding NATO eastward. Russian arguments about expansion being a threat to Russia or at least seen by its people as such is a rather flimsy pretext for dictating policy to others, this time utilizing not the strength but the relative weakness of Russia. This argument must be reversed: the expansion of the area of stability and security to Central Europe does not harm Russian interests [...] it will make the Western border zone of Russia stable and safe. That would enable Russia to deal with the real threats to its security, which appear to exist rather in the South and the East. A stable and eventually prosperous Central Europe will be also very advantageous for the countries east of it as it will improve their chances for following suit quickly. It will encourage the democratic forces of Russia and Ukraine because Central Europe has long been seen by them as a testing ground, as a model within reach. Today—as a recent survey shows—the majority of Russians do not consider themselves and their country as part of Europe. If the real Europe, the institutionalized one, moves closer to them, they are more likely to discover the advantages of partnership than while their isolation continues. Today there is a

de facto cordon sanitaire between Russia and the West. Is it in the interest of anyone that it would remain there?

Russia and Ukraine must indeed be offered special partnership by NATO, but not to the detriment of the Central Europeans, not as polite way of delaying their accession, slowing their integration. People in Central and Eastern Europe shudder if they hear anything that reminds them of a deal over their heads. They remember when they were encouraged to seek 'an organic relationship' with the Soviet Union. It would be the biggest blunder of the still ongoing 20th century to repeat what failed miserably in the 1930's and in the 1940's. Reading some articles in the New York Times and quite a few British and American writers brings up memories of the London Times of the 1930's and the other appeasers. The voice of aloofness, expressed by pragmatic realists, should remind us that appeasement was pursued not by die-hard conservatives, or so-called right-wing people, but by moderate, intelligent Realpolitiker, by self-confident professional diplomats and by experienced journalists.

Once there was a westward-moving Frontier in America which greatly contributed to the consolidation and prosperity of a continent. Today there is a kind of eastward moving frontier in Europe, and that can help solving many of the problems of the present and the future. That new frontier must be helped to move quickly, not restrained. The process of enlarging western institutions could have, should have started long ago. By postponing or denying the admission of new members into NATO we are not helping the cause of democracy in Russia but rather the forces of reaction. If the western institutions do not fill the security vacuum in Central Europe there will be others to put in a claim. As a famous, shrewd aggressor once put it: 'there is no space without a master', and even if that notion professed by Hitler no longer holds true, NATO and/or WEU, by expanding eastward and consolidating Central Europe, will exclude any chance for others to try to influence that 'grey zone' against the will of the inhabitants. The democracies and the democrats of Central and Eastern Europe are the friends and supporters of democracy in Russia. They can support the latter best by their own rapid success, but that requires adequate policies by the western world, a conscious break with attitudes which remind people of appeasement.

My conclusion from this historical and political survey is that there is a very narrow edge between offering genuine friendship (if you like partnership) and inviting disaster by giving too much away without guarantees for proper behavior.

To sum up the lessons of the recent past: we have to be careful. There are dangers which can be avoided, but if the lessons of history are not taken to heart then we may well see our hopes dashed again. Winston Churchill ended his monumental account of The Second World War on a pessimistic note: 'the Great Democracies triumphed and so were able to resume the follies which had so nearly cost them their life.' *Videant consules ...* The leaders should be watchful.<sup>30</sup>

I continued to believe that Russia's real concern should not be NATO enlargement. In the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Hungarian Parliament I told visiting Russian parliamentarians that enlargement would allow Russia to concentrate on the real threats to its security: Islamic fundamentalism in its South, potential rivalry in the Far East, particularly around Siberia and Central Asia, and internal dangers like lack of law and order, economic free fall, infrastructural backwardness, grey economy, corruption and poverty. They did not disagree.

With NATO's decision to intervene in the war in Bosnia in order to bring it to an end, and with the establishment of IFOR to implement the decisions of the Dayton Peace Accords, the strategic importance of Hungary became manifest. The Government, supported by the opposition parties, offered the territory and air space of Hungary for the Bosnia peace mission. Soon Americans learned the name of the small Transdanubian village Taszár and its air base, which became one of the centers of the operation. An engineering corps unit of the Hungarian Army joined the troops in the field in Croatia and Bosnia, and they soon proved their value by building and reconstructing bridges and roads. The Hungarians, especially those who lived near the NATO base, soon directly experienced the difference between the uninvited Soviet Army and the invited U.S. Army. Those Hungarians who had genuine fears about Hungary's involvement could also see the value and significance of Hungarian participation in that unselfish international venture and the advantages accruing for the Hungarian Army of close cooperation with NATO units in the field and in command. When the

Hungarian Parliament voted on participation in SFOR, the yes vote was unanimous.

## **Hungary's Treaties With Its Neighbors**

In the American debates on NATO enlargement it was not self-evident that all the Visegrád countries would be invited to accede to the Washington Treaty. Poland was the strongest candidate due to its history (heroic resistance both to Nazism and communism) and size, also the large Polish-American community. The strongest argument for the Czechs was their geographical location. Slovakia's case was rather weak because of the authoritarian policies of the Mečiar Government. Hungary's strong points were the 1956 uprising, the role in 1989 in the fall of the communist dominoes, and the strong Atlanticism of the Antall Government.

There was one problem for Hungary, however: the fear of tensions and conflicts with its neighbors over Hungarian minorities. The existence of close to three million Hungarians (in speech and identity) in the region of the Carpathian Basin is a consequence of history. They are not immigrants or descendants of colonists; their ancestors lived in the Kingdom of Hungary for over a thousand years. They were cut off from the main body of the Hungarians by the Peace Treaty of Trianon, signed in 1920. Between 1938 and 1941 Hungary regained some of the territories lost in the peace treaty thanks to arbitration by Germany and Italy, only to lose them again in the 1947 Peace Treaty signed in Paris. Since 1945, reinforced by the democratically elected Hungarian governments after 1990, Hungary sought a solution for ensuring the future of the Hungarian communities, not by changing the present borders but by changing their nature, by making them transparent and by advocating measures and policies towards them recommended by the CSCE and the Council of Europe, in order to safeguard their future existence.

Since the early 1990s the Hungarian governments sought to strengthen various international documents on minority rights and to include guarantees for their observation into bilateral agreements with their neighbors.<sup>31</sup> By the end of 1992 Hungary concluded a whole network of bilateral treaties and conventions with a number of European

countries: Italy, France, Germany, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Croatia and Slovenia; all contained clauses on the rights of national minorities.

The Antall Government was also ready to sign treaties with Slovakia and Romania, which had the largest Hungarian minority population, only it insisted on clauses which would have improved their legal and actual status. Contrary to certain assumptions the obstacle was not the so-called territorial clause affirming recognition of the present borders. For fifty years Hungary had never questioned the validity of the peace treaty of 1947 and never voiced any territorial claim against any neighbor. A special article renouncing territorial claims even for the future was included in the treaty between Hungary and Ukraine, concluded on December 6, 1991, immediately after Ukraine became an independent state.

The obstacle in the negotiations with Slovakia and Romania was not the inclusion of such a territorial clause but the intolerant policies shown in those countries towards the Hungarian minorities and the lack of any will to change that. The Antall Government was of the opinion that unless those two countries were ready to change some of their laws, and even more so their practice, it was useless to conclude empty treaties.

The elections of 1994 changed the situation only in one respect: the new government of Gyula Horn was ready to accept considerably less in terms of improvements in the situation of the Hungarians in those two countries. While the international community paid very little attention to the bilateral treaties Hungary signed between 1991 and 1994, there was almost universal acclamation when the socialist-led coalition government signed a so-called "basic treaty" (the term borrowed from the German *Grundvertrag*) with Slovakia on March 19, 1995 and with Romania on September 16, 1996.

Without questioning the good intentions of the politicians and journalists who welcomed these treaties as clearing the last obstacles in the way of Hungary's joining NATO and the European Union, a more detailed analysis shows the flaws of these documents, notably that they do not go far enough in eliminating the real problems. Tensions exist not so much between Hungary and her two neighbors but rather between the majority nation and the Hungarian minority in Slovakia and Roma-

nia respectively. That is why all the controversy around these treaties centered on how the minority issue was being handled.

The two countries had little reason to worry about their borders, but in the new treaties they received a new promise: the Contracting Parties declared that they would respect the inviolability of their common state border and each other's territorial integrity. They confirmed that they had no territorial claims on each other and would not raise such claims in the future (Article 3.1. and Article 4 respectively). According to the Hungarian-Slovak treaty, "The Contracting Parties confirm that their interests and endeavors are identical in relation to integration into the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the West European Union and in relation to the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and they declare they resolve to extend each other support in this respect." The treaty between Hungary and Romania contained a similar clause.

The Hungarian-Slovak treaty confirms that the protection of the national minorities falls within the scope of international cooperation and, therefore, is not an exclusively domestic affair of the states concerned, but constitutes a legitimate concern of the international community (Article 15.1). The Romanian treaty contains no such phrase.

Both treaties confirm that cooperation in the field of national minorities constitutes an important contribution to their integration into the European Union, or (in the case of Romania) into Euro-Atlantic structures (Preamble).

Both treaties contain an Article according to which the Contracting Parties shall strengthen (in the Slovak-Hungarian treaty) or promote (in the Hungarian-Romanian treaty) the climate of tolerance and understanding among their citizens of different ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic origin (Article 14).

The Hungarian-Romanian treaty condemns xenophobia and all kinds of manifestations based on racial, ethnic or religious hatred, discrimination and prejudice, and declares that the parties will take effective measures in order to prevent any such manifestation (Article 14) According to the Romanian treaty, the persons belonging to national minorities shall have, individually or in community with other mem-

bers of their group, the right to freely express, preserve, and develop their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity (Article 15.2).

Both treaties contain an Article according to which the Contracting Parties refrain from policies or practices aimed the assimilation of persons belonging to national minorities against their will, shall protect these persons from any action aiming at such assimilation and shall refrain from measures that would alter the proportions of the population in areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities (Article 15.2d in the Hungarian-Slovak treaty, Article 15.9 in the Hungarian-Romanian treaty).

Each treaty was quickly ratified by the Hungarian Parliament. That should have dissipated any worry that the admission of Hungary into NATO would have imported tensions into the Alliance.

### **Nobel Peace Prize for NATO**

My efforts and those of many other people came to fruition at the July 1997 NATO summit held in Madrid: the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary were invited to accede to the Washington Treaty. The Socialist-Free Democrat coalition government of Hungary felt that membership should be endorsed by the people and called for a referendum on the issue. An information campaign on NATO was launched, and non-governmental organizations such as the Hungarian Atlantic Council did their utmost to show the public the importance and value of NATO membership. The result—85 percent voting yes—exceeded even my hopes.

That did not settle the issue, however. All NATO members had to agree, including the United States. The U.S. Senate had to confirm the decision with a two-thirds majority. In talks and by writing to newspapers in the United States, I did my best to help convince the U.S. public and the decision-makers of the advantages of enlargement and Hungary's inclusion. I argued that historically and culturally as well as geographically the three Central European countries were the closest to Western Europe. They were the pioneers of the changes in 1989/90; it would be most unfair to continue keeping them out in the cold. Economically they were doing well; they were on their way to membership in the European Union.

I thought it had also become obvious that the Visegrád Three did not have “a long history of border, ethnic, nationalist, and religious disputes” among them, as was raised by a number of U.S. Senators in a letter they sent to President Clinton on June 25, 1997. But was there really a serious danger that in the future U.S. soldiers would be expected to give their lives for the protection of Warsaw, Prague or Budapest? During the Cold War no Americans died for those three countries, but many cried for them in 1956, 1968 and 1981, and indeed during all those terrible decades when they were subjected to Communist misrule.

I argued that after Central European countries joined NATO, Americans were as unlikely to have to die for them as they had to die for London and other NATO capitals. NATO had proved to be a credible deterrent and would remain so. It would be stronger, not weaker, when the Central Europeans, who had already proved their value among others in the Gulf War and even more in the Bosnia peace mission, would become members as a result of the vote in the U.S. Senate .

It was far from easy to gather the necessary votes, but after thorough discussion the proposal was passed. On March 12, 1999 the Foreign Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland formally acceded to the Washington Treaty at Independence, Missouri, the State of President Harry S. Truman, who initiated NATO. I had the privilege to attend the ceremony as Hungary’s Ambassador to the United States. Hungary’s then and present Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, wrote in his Preface to a volume published on that occasion: “We are proud of our NATO membership. We see it as a recognition of all the achievements that the Hungarians have made in the decade we are leaving behind. [...] We know that participation in one of the most successful alliances of modern history is our best guarantee against known and also yet unknown security threats.”<sup>32</sup>

NATO has indeed brought peace and stability to the eastern half of Europe, including the proverbial Balkan powder keg. That is why I am quite serious in suggesting that NATO deserves the Nobel Peace Prize for having prevented a third World War after 1949, having prevented local tensions and conflicts in Europe after the Cold War, and in general for its contribution to a stable new Europe.

## Notes

1. The first account of Hungary's exciting and rewarding journey to NATO is Lajos Pietsch, *Hungary and NATO* (Budapest: Hungarian Atlantic Council, 1998). Accession was celebrated by a bilingual collection of essays edited by Rudolf Joó: *Hungary: a Member of NATO* (Budapest: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999).

2. For Antall's intervention in Moscow see József Antall, *Selected Speeches and Interviews*. Edited by Géza Jeszenszky (Budapest: József Antall Foundation, 2008). (Hereafter Antall Speeches) pp. 249-56, quote on 252-53.

3. Ibid. Cf. Bennett Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges. The United States and Eastern Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1991) p. 326; Robert L. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War, 1989-1992* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 240.

4. *NATO Review*, Summer 2003.

5. Antall Speeches, p. 275.

6. See my speech in *Magyar Külpolitikai Évkönyv 1991* [Hungarian Yearbook on Foreign Policy], Budapest, 1991, pp. 398-99. My proposals were not taken up. It was called "an opportunity missed" that could have saved lives. See Rob de Wijk, *NATO on the Brink of the New Millennium* (London and Washington: Brassey's, 1997), p. 65.

7. From my own records.

8. J. Antall to M. Wörner, March 8, 1993, and Wörner's answer, March 24, 1993. Copies in my possession.

9. Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) is an authentic and detailed account by one of the major movers. It was published in a Hungarian translation, *A NATO kapunyitása* (Budapest: Zrínyi Kiadó, 2003). My references are to the Hungarian edition. Cf. Gerald B. Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990-1997* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), which does not say much about Hungary, while George W. Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows. NATO Marches East* (New York: University Press of America, 1999) offers a good short version of the story.

10. *Antall Speeches*, p. 332-34.

11. G. Jeszenszky's statement, "Security Issues in Independent Central Europe," June 3, 1993. From my own records.

12. Antall to President Clinton, October 19, 1993. Draft letter in my possession.

13. "Reassuring Eastern Europe, Christopher Praises Hungary's Reforms," *The New York Times*, October 22, 1993.

14. *The Washington Post*, November 17, 1993.
15. Text from my own records. I expressed those ideas, among others, in the Czech *Hospodářské Noviny* (November 11, 1993), and in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (November 18, 1993).
16. Paper in my own records, written in October 1993.
17. The text of my address is among my own records.
18. From my own copy of my intervention delivered on December 3, 1993, also published by the Hungarian Foreign Ministry as *Current Policy* 1993/36. In my talks and articles in the coming years I often used paragraphs of that text.
19. "The Lessons of Appeasement," *The Hungarian Observer* [Budapest], January 1994. A version of that appeared in *BIGIS Papers* 3. 1995, pp. 27-35.
20. Memo by Foreign Minister Géza Jeszenszky for Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, December 16, 1993. In my own records.
21. "Ungarn vil ind i NATO's sikkerhed," *Jyllands-Posten*, January 8, 1994. p.2, Section 2.
22. January 8, 1994, the Hungarian text is among my papers.
23. Asmus, op.cit., pp. 107-110.
24. My opening statement on January 8, 1994, kept in my own records. I am indebted to [present Professor] Enikő Bollobás, then Head of the Atlantic Department at the MFA, who was an invaluable help and adviser in our drive for membership in 1993-94.
25. Based on the report issued by the Polish News Agency PAP, January 10, 1994. The interview appeared on January 15, following the Prague meeting, and it is among my records.
26. Grayson, op.cit., p. 86, Asmus, op.cit., p. 112.
27. My own notes for the press conference.
28. Rádiófigyelő [Radio Observer], January 11, 1994, in my own records.
29. Grayson, op.cit., pp. 86-87. Cf. Asmus, op.cit., p. 113.
30. Géza Jeszenszky, "The New European Frontier," *Society and Economy in Central and Eastern Europe*, 20 (1998/1): 45-57. Cf. my essay "Central Europe and Appeasement," *Uncaptive Minds*, 9 (1996-97). Nos. 1-2, pp. 5-10.
31. Those efforts are summarized in my essay, "Hungary's Bilateral Treaties with the Neighbours," *Ethnos-Nation*, (Köln) 1996. [1997] Nr. 1-2. pp. 123-128.
32. *Hungary: a Member of NATO*, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

