

**Speech of Mr. Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary
at the plenary meeting of the Conference of Community and European Affairs
Committees of Parliaments of the European Union¹**

Budapest, 30 May 2011

At the plenary meeting of Committees on European Affairs Mr. Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary delivered a speech on the results of the Hungarian EU Presidency.

“The European Union that I left as a Prime Minister in 2002 was a very optimistic European Union,” Viktor Orbán said at the start of his speech, recalling that at that time Europe’s reunification and the introduction of the euro gave grounds for optimism, and the competitiveness objectives of the 2000 Lisbon Strategy also seemed realistic.

“Now, when I returned to the Council in 2010, I saw no trace of this optimism,” the Prime Minister continued. EU Member States are plagued by unprecedentedly high debt levels, the employment rate is extremely low also, only 65%, as opposed to 75% in the United States and 85% in China; and the continent is also struggling with serious demographic problems, Viktor Orbán said, when listing the main concerns of Europe.

The Presidency has undertaken difficult tasks

“We have no time to lose,” warned the Head of Government, and this is why the Hungarian Presidency incorporated in its program the hardest issues for all. These include the reform of economic governance; a breakthrough to create a European energy market; the creation of a new European financial regulatory system; the maintenance of the enlargement process; the formulation of a uniform Roma strategy; an honest discussion of demographic issues; and among unexpected events, the management of the impact of the Japanese catastrophe and the popular movements in North Africa.

Viktor Orbán thought that the EU is struggling with the dilemma of responding to these challenges by reverting to a former state that was making better progress. According to the Prime Minister, this duality also applies to the rescue of the euro, the protection of the free movement of people as a fundamental value of the Union, and also to the struggle for maintaining the élan in enlargement.

The key to success: work, cultural identity and good neighbourly relations

As the Prime Minister stated, Member States must accept that Europe will never be again the way it was before the crisis. Viktor Orbán believes that after “warfare society” in the Cold War and “welfare society”, which was typical before the crisis, the Union must work to build, “a workfare society”, i.e. a society and economy based on work. As a key to success in the medium term, he mentioned the increase of the EU’s average employment rate to at least 75%, the establishment of national self-respect and secures cultural identity, and the cultivation of good neighbourly relations.

¹ Source: Website of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

“Cooperation schemes are also competing in the world, which imposes on Hungary’s historic task to accomplish the best neighbourly relations in Central Europe, i.e. specifically between Slovakia, Serbia, Romania and Croatia, in the next 15 to 20 years,” emphasised Mr Orbán.

Stronger relations with Russia

The Prime Minister said it is one of the most important tasks of the Union, to establish a strategically settled relationship between Brussels and Moscow in the foreseeable future. The Head of Government also focused on the interests of Central Europe, in this regard, he pointed out that in the future relations of the EU and Russia, this region must certainly receive economic guarantees, and he also highlighted the importance of building north-south energy corridors.

Debates are necessary

Viktor Orbán answered at length to MPs’ questions and comments. “I would consider a Presidency without debates a failure,” he said, after being reminded that Hungary took over the EU Presidency from Belgium amid fierce debates on its new media law. The Prime Minister declared, “The Presidency is not a fashion show; a lack of debate would conflict with the principles of politics”. Nevertheless, he added that he dislikes “If party-affiliation matters more than arguments in intense debates. The Hungarian Presidency’s term began with debates, and I will not wave a white handkerchief either when it is concluded at the European Parliament in July,” Viktor Orbán said, as a final remark to the topic.

Fighting public debt

The Prime Minister expressed hope at the meeting that an agreement will be reached over the package of six legislative proposals in the next 2-3 weeks. Parliament has submitted more than two thousand amendment proposals, so lots of negotiations are ahead of us,” he added.

The Prime Minister praised Portugal’s efforts to stabilising its economy. He said Hungary knows exactly how difficult this is, because the first EU Member State in need of help was not Greece, “The first country to collapse in 2008 was Hungary.” The Prime Minister stressed that Hungary is grateful to the IMF and the EU for their support, but the country should recover by itself as soon as possible. In this context, Mr Orbán pointed out that Europe’s biggest problem is excessive public debt.

According to him, the other mistake that resulted in the current uncertain economic situation in Europe was the lack of strong states. “If the state is weak, society becomes disintegrated,” Mr Orbán said, adding that the state has to prevent problems such as the expansion of grey and black market.

Stabilising the Balkans

The Hungarian Presidency believes that the EU’s trustworthiness depends on the success of the enlargement process, Viktor Orbán said in response to MPs. “The European Commission has an enlargement strategy, which is slowly but surely making progress; and there is only one point where the results were unexpected: the case of Macedonia,” the Prime Minister said, referring to a delicate matter. Viktor Orbán said he would appreciate if Member States

not exercise their rights to veto; allowing accession negotiations to start. “This way, Macedonia will remain a blocked country, which is no good,” Viktor Orbán said.

The Prime Minister touched on the issue of Croatia, as well. “Some believe that the accession process of Croatia should be slowed, which is an erroneous idea. Everybody denies this would be the case, but I think they are acting this way,” he said. According to the Prime Minister, if Croatia’s accession delays, it can have serious consequences. “If no result is achieved, which could keep Balkan countries on the European track, and then we will be risking the region’s stability. If we cannot offer a real perspective, we will lose face,” Mr Orbán said. The Presidency’s objective is to conclude accession negotiations in June, and as Prime Minister he stressed that Hungary “will do everything” to achieve this.

Romania and Bulgaria performed well

According to Viktor Orbán, the Schengen accession of either Romania and Bulgaria cannot wait any longer. He reminded that Hungary has always expressly supported the process. He also stressed that the two countries’ performance will be on the agenda of the meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers, on 9 June. “I think Bulgaria and Romania will meet the requirements of the agreement,” he said, adding that he would not like to see other political aspects to influence the decision, concerning the two countries.

Danube Strategy: funds needed

In his speech, Viktor Orbán also evaluated the Danube Strategy, “So far, this is merely an intellectual and professional success.” According to the Prime Minister, the question is whether the strategy can be backed by financial resources, “The question whether the Danube Strategy remains an intellectual adventure, will depend on whether it will be backed by funds. If there is going to be money, it will become an actual policy, if not, it will remain an exciting adventure”.