'A NEW MISSION FOR EUROPE' (27/05/02)

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Ladies and Gentlemen.

The preparations for enlargement are already delivering results. UK and Czech officials stopped a major drug-related money laundering operation in 1999. Bulgarian customs officials, with support from EU partners, seized around 2 tonnes of heroin between 1999 and 2001.

Previous experience shows how much the EU has gained from expansion. The evidence shows that enlargement has been of mutual benefit to new and old member states alike. It has delivered political stability, underpinning the reintroduction of democracy in Spain, Portugal and Greece - three countries which, when Joschka Fischer and I were students, were entirely off limits. It has encouraged growth and mutual prosperity. For example, since its accession to the EU in 1986, Spanish trade with the UK has increased by over 400%; and it has led to considerable migration - but more from the old member states to the new, rather than the new to the old. In 1986, when Spain joined the EU, there were 109,000 Spanish workers in France; by 1994 this had fallen to just 35,000. And there are hundreds of thousands of British people living in Spain. Ireland has been similarly transformed since joining the EU from a country of large emigration to a country of net immigration.

Some worry that enlargement will cost money. So it will. So has the first post-Soviet 'enlargement', namely the unification of your country - for which you have paid the cost. But the whole of Europe owes you a debt of gratitude for what has been achieved as a result.

Some worry that enlargement will put the brakes on European economic growth. Another myth. Independent studies suggest that enlargement should create up to 300,000 jobs in the EU. With the prospect of imminent accession, many of the candidate countries are in fact growing faster than the EU: Hungary's economy grew by 5.2% in 2000 compared with 3% in the UK and France. The Czech Republic has one of the most vibrant mobile telecommunications sectors in Europe, with an estimated 65% of Czechs owning mobile phones. In the 1980s, people joked 'why does a Skoda have heated rear windows? To keep your hands warm when you push it.' Today, with Volkswagen's investment, the Skoda Octavia was a car of the year.

Some argue that enlargement will suffocate the EU's ability to reform. That is an insult to the extraordinary changes which the candidates have made in the last decade, guided by the prospect of EU membership. This has been the quiet revolution of Europe, signalled first by the bulldozing of the Wall but since marked by the inexcusable change of citizens' lives. That spirit of renovation and reform will be vital to enable the enlarged EU to tackle the challenges which confront it.

For all EU member states, enlargement should not just be about an historic obligation to those that suffered so long under the Soviet yoke. It is also a matter of enlightened self-interest. If we
want to deliver economic prosperity, a cleaner environment and safer streets for our citizens then we should embrace enlargement, not postpone it.

Our citizens also expect us to deliver European security. I welcome our involvement in the long haul to recovery in South East Europe. The incentive of EU membership is already helping to build peace in these countries, and encourage democracy and economic reform.

This imposes a reciprocal burden on the countries and peoples involved. Countries such as Bosnia, Serbia and even Croatia must give up their indicted war criminals, and state authorities must do more to tackle crime and embrace the opportunities of globalisation. By taking such steps, the countries of the Balkans will set themselves on the path to prosperity and eventual accession to the EU.

We also need to look further east to the EU's new neighbours. We must not create a new dividing line of 'haves and have nots' on the continent. I have recently written to my EU counterparts making the case for new policies towards Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus which offer incentives for reform. I know this is a priority shared by Germany and by the incoming Danish Presidency. We also need to strengthen our relations with President Putin.

The events of 1989 and 1990 provoked one commentator to declare the end of history. Well it certainly marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War. But until the countries of Eastern and Central Europe take their seats at the European Council, the final phase of Europe's century of turmoil will not be complete. The historic nature of this enterprise has provoked much thought and many metaphors. One of my favourites comes from Pope John Paul II: 'Europe has two lungs. It will never breathe easily until it uses both of them.'