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THE ACCESSION OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC, HUNGARY AND POLAND

One of the highlights of the Washington Summit will be the presence, for the first time, of the Heads of State and Government of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. These three countries formally joined the Alliance on 12 March 1999, bringing the number of member countries to 19. The entry of these three democracies into the Alliance, under Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, is part of a continuing process. The door to NATO membership remains open to other European countries which are ready and willing to undertake the commitments and obligations stemming from NATO membership and contribute to security in the Euro-Atlantic area. The admission of new democratic members into NATO is itself part of a wider process of greater integration in Europe involving other European institutions.

In the 50 years of its existence, the Alliance has significantly contributed to the preservation of peace and stability on the territory of its members. The process of enlargement is aimed at extending the zone of security and stability to other European countries.

A number of measures were successfully completed by each of the new members prior to accession, in order to ensure the effectiveness of their future participation in the Alliance. These included measures in the security sphere (e.g. arrangements for receiving, storing and using classified information), as well as in areas such as air defence, infrastructure, force planning and communication and information systems. However, work on the integration of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland did not finish on accession day and each of the new member countries is aware that full integration will require continuing efforts over a longer period.

These are the main stages leading up to the admission of the three new member countries.

- 10 January 1994. At the NATO Summit in Brussels, the 16 Allied leaders said they expected and would welcome NATO enlargement that would reach to democratic states to the East. They reaffirmed that the Alliance, as provided for in Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, was open to membership of other European states in a position to further the principles of the Washington Treaty and to contribute to security in the North Atlantic area.
- September 1995. The Alliance adopted a Study on NATO Enlargement. Although there are no fixed criteria for inviting countries to join, the Study described a number of factors to be taken into account in the enlargement process. It also stipulated that the process should take into account political and security related developments in the whole of Europe. The Study remains the basis for NATO's approach to inviting new members to join.

- During 1996, an intensified dialogue was undertaken individually with 12 interested Partner countries. These sessions improved their understanding of how the Alliance works and gave the Alliance a better understanding of where these countries stood in terms of their internal development as well as the resolution of any disputes with neighbouring countries. The Study identified this as an important precondition for membership.
- 10 December 1996. The NATO Allies began work on drawing up recommendations on which country or countries should be invited to start accession talks, in preparation for a decision to be made at the Madrid Summit of July 1997.
- Early 1997. Intensified individual dialogue meetings took place with 11 Partner countries, at their request. In parallel, NATO military authorities undertook an analysis of relevant military factors concerning countries interested in NATO membership.
- 8 July 1997. Allied leaders, meeting in Madrid, invited the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to start accession talks with the Alliance. They also reaffirmed that NATO remains open to new members under Article 10 of the Washington Treaty.
- September and November 1997. Accession talks were held with each of the three invited countries. At the end of the process, letters of intent were sent by the three countries confirming commitments undertaken during the talks.
- 16 December 1997. NATO Foreign Ministers signed Protocols to the North Atlantic Treaty on the accession of the three countries.
- During 1998, Allied countries ratified the Protocols of Accession according to their national procedures.
- 12 March 1999. After completion of their own national legislative procedures, the Foreign Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland deposited instruments of accession to the North Atlantic Treaty in a ceremony in Independence, Missouri, United States. This marked their formal entry into the Alliance.
- 16 March 1999. The national flags of the three new member states were raised at a ceremony at NATO headquarters, Brussels.

“History will see the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland as a key step towards a Europe of co-operation and integration, towards a Europe without dividing lines”, commented NATO’s Secretary General, Javier Solana.