

**14th Meeting of the President of the European Parliament with the Presidents of the
Parliaments of the Countries Participating in the Enlargement Process
Brussels, 26 November 2002**

JOINT STATEMENT

The enlargement of the European Union is the principal political challenge currently facing the institutions of the EU, the Member States and the candidate countries. The Presidents believe that Enlargement will represent a real and symbolic contribution to world peace, security and prosperity at a time of great international tension.

Looking towards the conclusion of negotiations and the ratification of the Accession Treaty the Presidents drew attention to the need for Parliaments to work together so as to ensure that the European Integration process engages public opinion and parliaments are effectively involved.

The Presidents noted the arrangements whereby observers from the acceding countries would be welcomed into the European Parliament after the signature of the Accession Treaty. Following the enlargement conference in the European Parliament on 19 November and the resolution adopted on 20 November this next step was welcomed as confirmation of the central role of Parliaments in relation to public opinion in the final, decisive stage of the enlargement process.

Since 1989 the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe have achieved irreversible democratic progress. They have also had to deal with the enormous economic, social and environmental burdens of the past. In spite of this, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and the Slovak Republic are now ready for the responsibilities of full membership of the EU. The time has also come for Cyprus and Malta to accede to the Union. Bulgaria and Romania have achieved remarkable progress and deserve support and a commitment to their objective of EU membership on 1 January 2007.

The Presidents welcomed the outcome of the referendum in Ireland on the Nice Treaty and the decisive progress achieved at the European Council meeting in Brussels on 24-25 October.

The Presidents consider that the European Council meeting beginning in Copenhagen on 12 December must mark the closure of the accession negotiations with the 10 countries named by the European Council in Laeken last December. A successful conclusion of the accession negotiations must reflect a fair distribution of the rights and obligations incumbent on both current and future Member States. The Presidents call upon the member states of the European Union and the candidate countries to respect the principles of equality and solidarity during the final stages of the accession negotiations. Those principles should be applied equally to present and future EU member states. The Presidents also reiterated their view that the outcome of the negotiations on the distribution of seats in the European Parliament should genuinely reflect the principles of equity and proportionality.

Turkey has now begun the difficult process of political reform. The continuation of these efforts will make it possible for accession negotiations to begin once the conditions applied to the 12 other candidate countries have been fulfilled by Turkey.

The strategy paper and reports presented by the Commission on 9 October were welcomed by the 12 countries participating in accession negotiations. The efficiency and commitment shown by the European Commission throughout its term of office was deeply appreciated.

The Presidents welcome the European Parliament's readiness to express its opinion on the outcome of the negotiations so that the Treaty can be signed in Athens in April 2003. They called on the national parliaments of the 15 EU Member States to ratify the Treaty so that the new Member States can achieve full membership at the beginning of 2004.

The Presidents agreed to hold their next meeting in Malta in order to review the momentum of the ratification of the Accession Treaty and to exchange views on the work of the Convention on the Future of Europe.