

**Visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary
His Excellency Laszlo Kovacs**

Report

The newly appointed Hungarian Foreign Minister, His Excellency Laszlo Kovacs led a senior level roundtable discussion at CSIS on July 23. During the discussion three foreign policy priorities of the new Hungarian government were addressed. The new government seeks to further the Euro-Atlantic integration of Hungary, to contribute to stability in the region, and to support the Hungarian minority outside of Hungary. Minister Kovacs stressed the balance and harmony of these priorities saying that one cannot be subordinated to the other two.

Highlights from the Minister's Remarks

Kovacs suggested that these foreign policy priorities are not new, but changes need to be made. In terms of Euro-Atlantic integration Hungary has a lot to do to meet conditions and fulfill promises made during the accession period to NATO. One of the main issues is to improve progress in defense reform. Hungary hopes to close all the chapters on EU accession by the end of this year, and join the EU in 2004.

In order to contribute to the stability in the region the government is revitalizing the Visegrad cooperation as evidenced by the recent summit in Esztergom. The government will also take further steps to ensure regional stability that are expected of a NATO member.

The new government plans to support the Hungarian minority outside of Hungary by contributing to the good life of the minorities in their home country, helping them maintain their cultural identity, and facilitating their enjoyment of minority rights in compliance with European standards.

Minister Kovacs offered the plan for resolving the contentious status law as a case study for the balanced priorities of the new government. Consultations are taking place with neighboring countries to reach a solution that must meet four criteria:

1. It must maintain the original intent of the bill
2. The solution must be in the interest of Hungary and the Hungarian minority
3. It must be in compliance with European standards
4. It must be acceptable to governments of neighboring countries

In closing the Minister also mentioned that he highly values the CSIS Euro-Atlantic security project's regional roundtable discussions.

Discussion Points

Washington policy experts expressed the desire to see Hungary take on more regional leadership, as well as develop capabilities to face trans-national threats in the region. In the mid-nineties Hungary signed agreements with Romania and Slovakia which resolved conflicts on a bi-lateral level building an expectation for Hungarian regional leadership. Participants agreed that Hungary had not lived up to expectations of regional leadership following NATO accession. Nationalism, the disputed "status law", and populism have all hampered Hungary's regional efforts. With the change in government and the expected NATO expansion participants expressed hope that Hungary could take on a leadership role helping new NATO members and extending regional stability.

Both the Minister and Washington policy experts agreed that Hungary must continue to develop the capability to contribute to the war on terrorism and to face broader threats to European security.