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Speech by Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt at Charles University. Prague, 2 March 2004.
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Rector, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very honoured to have this opportunity to speak at Charles University in Prague this evening. Founded in 1348 by the Bohemian king and later Emperor Charles IV, it was the first university in what was then the Holy Roman Empire. Indeed, it is one of the oldest universities in Europe. In my part of the world - the Low Countries - we had to wait nearly one century longer for our first university, which was founded in Leuven in 1425. Charles University even pre-dates Jan Hus, the great Bohemian reformer executed at the Council of Constance in 1415. This clearly says something about Prague's credentials as one of the historical centres of Europe. That is why I am pleased to be here in Prague to explain my view on what will be the greatest enlargement of the European Union to date, an enlargement that will see the Czech Republic welcomed into a new Europe. Here, I am using the term 'new Europe' with a specific purpose. I am not using this term in reference to an unfortunate statement by the US secretary of defence. Instead, I am using the term 'new Europe' because the European history that we have been writing for the last 50 years - a history in which the Czech Republic will now play a part - marks a brand new page in Europe's history. Rector, The Europe of Emperor Charles IV and Jan Hus was tragically great; it disappeared in the bloodshed of countless wars. Unfortunately, the execution of Jan Hus was just the beginning of one of the bloodiest conflicts that Europe has ever known. Evidence of this can be seen in the Hussite wars of the 15th century, the religious wars of the 16th century, and - in particular - the Thirty Years' War, which broke out in Prague in 1618 and lasted until 1648, after the Habsburgs had 'cleansed' the Czech lands of all reformers. The Czech lands were then incorporated into the Holy Roman Empire. The Habsburg era did not end until 1918 - but the biggest showdown was yet to come. Caught between Nazi Germany and the then Soviet Union, the entire 20th century was also lost to the Czech lands. Your country only regained its freedom and independence after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. First as Czechoslovakia, which had been artificially created after the First World War. Then, since 1993, as the independent republic that you have today. This means that the Czech Republic is one of the youngest member states of a free and peaceful Europe. But in actual fact, this free and peaceful Europe is not much older, dating back at most to 1945, when a new Europe was born out of the ruins of the biggest European war of all time. Consequently, we are allies in a process of European renewal that is unprecedented in our long history. For me, this is the essence of the European Union and its ongoing expansion and deepening. Indeed, we could say that 1945 marked the end of a miserable era, which, in a manner of speaking, began in 1415 with the execution of Jan Hus. During this time, Europe approached the edge of the abyss on many occasions. In some ways, it was not a Thirty Years' War, but a 530 Years' War that finally came to an end in 1945. During those five centuries Europe waged more wars than any other continent in the world. We were unable to break this spiral of violence until 1945. In 1952 and 1957 we achieved this by working with the founding fathers of the European Union to create a new Europe, based on the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community and Euratom. I would describe this as a Europe which no longer wages war, but which instead joins hands in peace and freedom in order to build a shared future. Of course, this new Europe was not achieved overnight. It came about gradually, one step at a time. There were breakthroughs and setbacks; some pushed forward while others pulled back; and we experienced rapid progress and unexpected obstacles. While some thought we were moving too slowly, others felt we were moving much too fast. But barely fifty years later, we can look back at all the ground that we have covered since 1952 and how radically our predecessors transformed the European continent. We can also

see what remains to be done if we are to complete the process of European unification in the 21st century. I am very pleased that the Czech Republic, as well as a significant portion of what was formerly Eastern Europe will be joining this process on 1 May 2004. After all, in the 20th century this part of Europe bore the heaviest of burdens. This is where the two World Wars left the deepest scars. It was in this part of Europe that the Nazi horrors hit the hardest. And it was here that Communism and the Cold War - lasting nearly 50 years - left the deepest traces of a world without freedom or peace. That era came to an end just fifteen years ago in 1989. And we Europeans are now prepared to do whatever it takes to work with these new member states so that we can turn the page on a dark time in our shared history. Ladies and Gentlemen, Many people wonder what has happened since 1945 to make Europe head off in a completely different direction. It was not just a question of being tired of war. The fatigue with war was just as great after the Thirty Years' War in 1648, after the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and after the First World War in 1918. In my opinion, what has happened since 1945 and what has changed Europe so profoundly is the introduction and widespread acceptance of political democracy, something which was not so easy to find - even in Europe - prior to 1945. Even after 1945, democracy in Europe had a long path to take until it achieved success in 1989 with the liberation of Central and Eastern Europe. But it was clear right from the start that only a democratic Europe could guarantee a free and peaceful Europe. That became immediately clear with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952 and the European Economic Community and Euratom in 1957. After all, this new Europe had six founding states, including France, Germany and Italy, which were largely involved in the biggest European wars of the last century, and indeed of the last one thousand years in the case of France and Germany. It was this war logic that the European Union did away with right from the start. Through growing economic, monetary and political integration we have pretty much ruled out any chance of EU member states waging war ever again. Europe owes this good fortune to the political system that has been accepted by all EU Member States since 1945. Until 1945, and for half of our continent until as late as 1989, large parts of Europe were ruled by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Naturally, we had the beginnings of democracy, but even in Europe these impulses towards democracy were constantly under threat until 1945. Only then was democracy able to break through, thanks to our American and British allies. On closer inspection, it was not just a matter of political democracy but also the foundation underlying it, namely the separation of church and state, the separation of powers, the sovereignty of the people, the rule of law and the free market. Those were the underlying principles that were not guaranteed anywhere in Europe prior to 1945, and which only after 1945 were gradually accepted and bolstered over ever larger parts of the continent. This is also the foundation on which the European Union was built, because it is the foundation that brings states and nations together, instead of playing them off against each other. This is the cornerstone of the political acceleration that so rapidly paved the way for the European Union after 1945. What no European statesman was able to achieve in hundreds of years due to a lack of democracy, has happened virtually by itself since that time. What no conqueror could ever unite through force, now looks unstoppable when allowed to grow in freedom. What we bring together in freedom and peace is apparently irresistible. Remember: no European state was ever forced to join the European Union. Only now, when there is no more coercion and no more threat, does virtually every European state want to join the Union. I simply cannot think of any better evidence of the appeal of our democratic ideals and institutions. Ladies and Gentlemen, This is also the secret of European enlargement. The big enlargement on 1 May 2004, exactly 60 days from now, was surely written in the stars. For the new Europe is not a limited, static or exclusive entity. It is global, dynamic and inclusive. The founding fathers never intended to unify Europe solely at the economic or monetary level. Right from the start their aim was to bring the member states closer together in all areas: on the cultural, political and military levels too. The new Europe was not designed by enthusiastic minds with a blueprint to bring everything into being in just one go. On the contrary, it was the brainchild of realists who built up a dynamic Europe one step at a time. The new Europe was aimed right from the start and without exception at all European states. Provided they met the conditions set and accepted the basic principles and roles of Europe, not one European state has ever been excluded on principle. I'm not indulging in some idle wordplay here. The constant expansion of the European Union

bears witness to a purposely dynamic process to remove all European borders and involve increasing numbers of European states in this approach. The approaching enlargement of the European Union from fifteen to twenty-five member states is not as new as some people seem to think. Enlargement has always been a feature of the Union, and in the past such enlargements have often had the same kind of rejuvenating effect we are seen in this one. Just think of the first round of enlargement from six to nine member states in 1973. The newcomers in 1973 were the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark. In 1973 the United Kingdom and Denmark brought Anglican and Protestant sensibilities into an overwhelmingly Catholic Union. The Greeks were the first Orthodox nation to join the EU. The accession of Spain and Portugal in 1986 saw the Iberian peninsula, which had explored half of the world in the 15th and 16th century, return to Europe. The accession of Sweden, Finland and Austria in 1993 was just as revolutionary. Sweden and Finland bolstered Scandinavian Europe, which, since the days of the Vikings, had never been so directly involved with the rest of Europe. Austria was once again the pacesetter for a Central Europe that had been forced into neutrality by the Cold War and that only came to an end with the end of the Cold War. Rector, With each round of enlargement the same objections have been heard. People said that things were moving too fast; that the old and new member states were not 'ready'; that the newcomers would disrupt the old 'balance' between the member states; that a cultural gap would make any rapprochement impossible; that the differences in levels of prosperity were too great to be bridged by the Union; and that the old member states would be literally 'deluged' by the newcomers. But none of this tallied, because the Union's dynamism was strong enough to counter all of these objections and because true integration yields nothing but winners; there are no losers. Of course, the great enlargement of 2004 is a special challenge that will put the strength of the Union to the test. But there is nothing in the candidate member states that gives us cause for despair. On the contrary, these countries will surely bring a dynamism that will also renew the old member states. In fact, this is the very concept around which the whole concept revolves: renewal. Every enlargement brings with it new burdens, but also new challenges and new opportunities for a Europe which does not exclude anyone, but which elevates everyone to unprecedented levels of cooperation. This is only possible if we both expand and deepen the Union. But there is nothing new about that either. In the fifty years' history of the new Europe we have repeatedly expanded and deepened the Union. The choice between enlargement and deepening is based on a false dichotomy. Europe means both. In the history of the Union, enlarging and deepening always go together. Think of the ongoing enlargement of the Union since 1973, which has run in parallel with the deepening of European integration. During these same years, enlargement was accompanied by the Union's evolution from a Coal and Steel Community to an agricultural union, from an agricultural union to an Economic and Monetary Union, and from an Economic and Monetary Union to a political and military union. What barely 50 years ago began as a customs union now stands for the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital. The European Parliament has evolved into a genuine legislative power, and the European Commission into a supranational authority with the power to initiate legislation. Naturally, this does not 'resolve' everything. More specifically, the precise relationship between the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council, as well as the relationship between the member states and the Union, require further 'refinement', especially in light of the ongoing enlargement of the Union. Hence the imperative discussion on a European constitution to define this more clearly. This link between enlarging and deepening the Union is the driving force behind European integration. It is no coincidence that in the 1980s the Union welcomed the southern European countries which had thrown off the yoke of military dictatorships, and that at the same time it approved the Single Act, created the internal market and made the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital its standard. Nor is it a coincidence that in the 1990s the Union saw the accession of countries such as Sweden, Finland and Austria, while at the same time, with the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam, it launched the economic and monetary union and the common foreign and security policy. And it is definitely no coincidence that the preparations for this year's historic enlargement were accompanied by an attempt to draft a European constitution; attempts that were started with the Treaty of Nice and the Laeken Declaration. Ladies and Gentlemen, Does this mean that European integration - that combination of enlarging and deepening - has proceeded smoothly

and naturally, and not required the least effort? We all know this is not true. Having new member states join a political, economic and monetary union is no easy task. It requires major efforts by the old member states as well as the new ones. The biggest task in all twenty-five member states is undoubtedly explaining the European Union to the general public. In the current fifteen member states, in particular, we must do a better job explaining why expanding the Union is a good thing for all European citizens. In the recent past, we have done too little to combat prejudices. Unfortunately, they still exist today: prejudices linked to prosperity, relocation and social dumping, prejudices linked to employment and the migration of job-seekers; and prejudices linked to security and crime. Nor should we view the ten new member states as a single, homogeneous bloc and make generalisations about them. The differences between the ten new member states are just as great as the differences between the current members. Just think of Finland and Portugal, or Estonia and Malta. As a result of these similarities and differences, certain new member states within the enlarged Union will quite easily and naturally enter into a cooperative relationship with certain old member states. Here I am thinking of the cooperation that is emerging between the three Benelux countries and the four Visegrad countries; and the cooperation between the old and new Baltic member states.

Ladies and Gentlemen, During my meeting earlier today with my Czech counterpart, it was clear that one very sensitive issue is the matter of the free movement of workers. It is sensitive in the Czech Republic as it is in all accession countries. I do not wish to avoid this issue. Will enlargement lead to a massive influx of workers in the current fifteen member states? I am convinced that it will not. Let's look at enlargement in the 1980s, when Greece, Spain and Portugal joined the EU. Back then - as now - some people feared massive migration of cheap Greek, Spanish and Portuguese labour to countries like France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the Benelux. Well, precisely the opposite happened. By joining the EU, these countries enjoyed a period of sustained economic growth and rising prosperity. Through its policy of structural aid and cohesion aid, the Union managed to drastically reduce the prosperity gap between the nine countries that were already Union members, and the three newcomers. In the meantime, these three countries have evolved from emigration countries to immigration countries. A great many Greeks, Spaniards and Portuguese who had emigrated to various countries - including Belgium - because of a military dictatorship returned home because there were once again prospects for a better future. I am convinced that this will also be the case for the ten new member states that we will soon be welcoming. I know that I am addressing a very sensitive issue here: the free movement of workers. This has become a symbolic issue for the new member states. So I understand that the agreed transition period is running into resistance. But I would still stand by the agreed arrangement. First of all, because it was indeed agreed. The phased introduction of the free movement of workers is an integral part of the accession package approved at the European Summit in Copenhagen in December 2002. This package comprises a number of components: financial support, all kinds of transition measures, and specific agreements such as the one on the free movement of workers. This negotiated package forms a single whole. In my opinion, it is unreasonable to now re-open just one part of that package. Belgium's position on this issue has always been clear. The Belgian government has, right from the start, announced that it would use the two-year transition period. After two years, the Belgian government will assess the situation. But I would like to add three remarks here. First, Belgium - unlike certain other countries - does not differentiate at all between the new member states. Second, the Belgian labour market is not closed off: between 1999 and 2002 the number of work permits issued to inhabitants of the new member states rose by 84%. And third, there is no restriction on self-employed workers: any inhabitants of the new member states who wish to set up shop as self-employed workers in Belgium, are free to do so.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Once again, Europe stands at a crossroads. With twenty-five member states we will be creating this year the largest, the most united, the most peaceful, the most just and the most prosperous Europe that has ever existed. We already know that we won't stop at twenty-five member states. Not because we want to 'conquer' new countries and peoples, but because we do not wish to deny EU membership to any European state. We cannot imagine freedom and peace that do not apply to everyone or which are not open to everyone. This last point is still a challenge of global proportions. Let us not entertain any false modesty here. Over the past five hundred years Europe has had worldwide ambitions and has acted on them. But for most of that

time, we pursued these aims with crude violence. Now we have created a new and different Europe. Having rejected this kind of violence since 1945 and 1989, we cannot and will not use it in other parts of the world. The new, peaceful Europe indeed wants and must play an active role on the world stage. But it must do so only to advance a new and peaceful world. Because peoples and nations can only prosper when they are at peace. We in Europe have learnt that the hard way. Thank you.