

INSIGHT

1994, Dec 22-Jan 4. Bp. SUN

J.S.-Hungarian ties built on strong foundation

Donald M. Blinken

During the recent CSCE summit, the eyes of the world were focused on Budapest. But while headlines concentrated on summit fireworks, U.S. President Bill Clinton, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and their Hungarian counterparts were marking major progress in U.S.-Hungarian relations.

Warm and very productive meetings, leaders of both sides had a full exchange of views and succeeded in setting out new, concrete steps for the future. This lays an excellent basis for cooperation as Hungary assumes its duties as the next permanent-in-office of the renamed OSCE, the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe*.

Central to the bilateral talks was a recognition of the significant strides forward that democracy has made in Hungary since 1989. We have seen two national elections and transfers of power, the development of a stable parliamentary system, the protection of individual rights and countless other political reforms that have rapidly moved Hungary into the forefront of Europe. The flourishing of Hungarian democracy is the indispensable basis on which our excellent relationship was built.

On the economic side, Hungary has made a long way in the difficult but

essential process of restructuring. The United States shares in the goal of making Hungary an even more competitive and prosperous contributor to the global economy. Yet while much has been accomplished, a long road lies ahead. The United States intends to help as much as possible as Hungary goes through this transformation: So far, we have provided some \$200 million in assistance in areas such as privatization, enterprise restructuring and banking reform. We also have given strong support to Hungary's desire to join the European Union and, in January, the United States will host a major trade and investment conference aimed at pairing investors with business opportunities in this region.

On the vital issue of NATO enlargement, the president and secretary of state discussed the North Atlantic Council (NAC) decision to begin laying out an overall road map for the process. The NAC decision is an important first step in eventually saying "yes" on the question of Hungary's NATO membership. Both sides stressed that NATO enlargement will strengthen stability in Europe and should not be seen as threatening the security of any country. Clinton and Christopher expressed U.S. appreciation at the steps recently taken by the government

and Parliament to guarantee active Hungarian participation in the Partnership for Peace.

For their part, President Árpád Göncz, Prime Minister Gyula Horn, and Foreign Minister László Kovács made clear their commitment to the Partnership for Peace and to advancing concrete preparations for NATO membership. They also stressed the importance of improving relations with neighboring states and of addressing issues affecting Hungarian minorities there. All are important components of regional stability and are vital to extending NATO membership to countries in the region.

This was President Clinton's fourth visit to Europe this year — the first one being in January when he launched the Partnership for Peace initiative at NATO. Following stops earlier this year in Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic, President Clinton's visit to Budapest underscores the great importance the United States attaches to Central Europe.

On a range of other issues, the progress was also significant:

• The United States has selected Budapest as the site of a regional FBI training center. Police officials from Central Europe and the former Soviet Union will come to Hungary for training aimed at helping these states crack down on

organized crime and smuggling in the region.

• The United States and Hungary agreed to finalize a bilateral assistance agreement that will provide an overall framework for our ongoing assistance programs.

• The United States and Hungary have also just signed treaties on extradition and mutual legal assistance. Concerning the latter, Hungary is the first signatory among the countries of Central Europe and the former Soviet Union.

• The U.S. president and secretary of state welcomed Hungary's determination to improve its relations with neighboring states, and to continue its constructive dialogue with Russia and the other states of the former Soviet Union.

As ambassador, it pleases me immensely that the relationship between our two countries is so open, friendly and productive. With our common commitment to democracy, individual freedoms, free and open markets and the integration of Hungary and the rest of Central Europe into Euro-Atlantic institutions, we indeed have a solid foundation on which we will continue to build a strong, fruitful and lasting partnership. At year's end, allow me to extend all good wishes to our Hungarian and American friends for a healthy and prosperous 1995.

Blinken is U.S. ambassador to Hungary.