

numbers. Such changes, however, must not be made at the expense of small states whose position has already deteriorated in relative terms since the compromise reached in Nice. The accession of yet another big country with a population outnumbered by only that of Germany and one that is more likely than not to become a net beneficiary of the Union's budget will not be feasible without a profound reform of EU finances. I believe that in under the circumstances the publicly debated issues of cultural and religious differences are little more than a fig leaf concealing the political and financial price to be paid for such a step. I believe, however, that given the vision of a future united Europe, its security and credibility, both the big and small countries will have to foot the ensuing bill equitably.

For the project of pan-European unification to continue smoothly, in addition to the internal power equilibrium it is necessary to preserve the equality of its components, i.e. member states. An alternating presidency, a sensible definition of official languages and the composition of institutions are key not only from a symbolic but also practical standpoint. The equality of states makes a difference to the democratic legitimacy of integration and the public is extremely perceptive to this issue viewed from the standpoint of equal rights of Union citizens. A failure to achieve this, i.e. a situation where the citizens of small states in the Union might feel disadvantaged, would be the beginning of the end of the integration process.

Slovakia is a typical landlocked country that is smaller than any of its neighbours. We joined the European integration project with the conviction and hope that it represented the best strategic alternative for the nation. Our vision of active Union membership is linked to the gradual deepening of integration, accession to the Schengen Treaty and the adoption of the euro. These EU attributes, along with a free movement of people, are perceived by a vast majority of the population as direct benefits ensuing from membership. Naturally, the Slovak Republic will have to fulfil all the necessary requirements which may temporarily have a negative impact on the lives of the citizens. By the same token, we expect qualified active participation in Common Foreign and Security Policy to enhance the prestige of Slovakia. Here, however, we will be seeking to promote a complementary relation between the European Union and the North Atlantic alliance, which we unequivocally perceive as the principal guarantor of the «hard security» of Slovakia and of