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INFORMAZIONE ALLA STAMPA • MEDEDELING AAN DE PERS • COMUNICADO DE IMPRESA**

Brussels, 22 November 1991.

**European agreements
with Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland**

1. Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, whose relations ~~with the~~ Community were initially established under trade and economic and commercial cooperation agreements, expressed their wish to go further and conclude association agreements or "European agreements" with the Community. For each of these three countries, association is a way of turning its back on the past and once again being part of Europe.

The Community made clear at the end of 1989 that it intended to create an association with the Central and Eastern European countries engaged in economic and political reform (Strasbourg European Council of 8 and 9 December 1989). In April 1990 the Commission presented an initial outline for future European agreements to the Council and Parliament. In its communication of 27 August 1990 to the Council and Parliament it developed this, in the form of a general framework setting out its intention to begin exploratory talks with Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. The Council adopted directives on 18 December 1990 authorizing the Commission officially to open negotiations.

The negotiations, opened on 20, 21 and 22 December 1990 with Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland respectively, continued at a steady pace throughout 1991. Nine negotiating sessions with each of the three countries were needed to finalize the agreements initialled today.

2. The nature of the agreements

These are joint agreements which have an indefinite period of validity and cover Community and national spheres of competence. For the first time, in addition to the aspects concerning commercial and economic cooperation, the political dialogue dimension and a cultural cooperation component are taken into account. The agreements also provide for the setting-up, at a later stage, of a free trade area. They are geared to the possibility of these three countries' future membership of the Community. In the preamble to the agreements, the parties recognize that the ultimate objective of the associated countries is to become members of the Community, and association should help them attain this objective.