

## SLOVAK KDH BECOMES EPP ASSOCIATE

***Bratislava, July 6, 2002***

With only weeks to go before crucial parliamentary elections in Slovakia, the Slovak Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) was today unanimously accepted as a member of the 50-strong European People's Party.

Speaking to a meeting of the EPP-European Democratic Union Central Europe Committee in Bratislava, KDH party leader Pavol HRUŠOVSKY pledged to continue the current government's policy of moving swiftly towards both EU and NATO membership. But he stressed that it was vital that citizens who supported that vision of their country's future turned out in strength to vote for it.

The KDH's application to join the EPP was strongly backed by Bela BUGAR, leader of the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK-MKP). "Only together can we progress on the road to EU and NATO membership," he said.

Both parties are members, with the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU), of Slovakia's governing coalition under Prime Minister Mikulas DZURINDA.

The KDH was founded in February 1990, becoming in 1996 one of the first of the parties in the accession countries to be accorded observer status in the EPP. The cooperation between like-minded parties "is the only way to guarantee Slovakia's accession to the EU in 2004", said Wim van VELZEN MEP, vice-president of the EPP, and chairman of the working group.

He congratulated Hrušovský on initiating a Convention on the future of Europe on the model of the one currently sitting in Brussels. "That is exactly how we will achieve a political Europe rather than a technical, bureaucratic one," he said.

The EPP-ED Group has been crucial to convincing the current EU Member States that enlargement is the Union's absolute priority, and that the process must be concluded in time for the 2004 European elections so that accession countries can take part in them. He invited parliamentarians from the accession countries to come to Strasbourg for the November session and to participate in the Group's activities. "Like that we can see how we can work together after enlargement has been achieved," he said.