

The Future of the Salzburg Forum

A revised proposal of an operational strategy presented at Brdo

Slovenia, 25–26 October 2006

Introduction

The Salzburg Forum, which came to life in 2000 upon Austria's initiative, is a form of concrete project networking and cooperation of states in a geopolitical area with the same interests. The political aim, which is also the basis for integration in the Salzburg Forum, is active participation in Euro-Atlantic integrations.

The Salzburg Forum also offers substantial support to EU candidate countries in their integration in European and Euro-Atlantic partnerships. Moreover, it is an arena of consultation where common positions on important and complex issues are formulated pertaining to the local and broader geographical regions.

The Member States of the Salzburg Forum are pleased to note that this Forum is increasingly developing and advancing and that every ministerial meeting contributes to reaching the common goals and shaping the role of the Salzburg group countries.

The ministerial meeting in Bratislava started the discussions about the future of the Salzburg Forum as well as its further expansion and the creation of the dimension of its external relations.

The joint EU Strategic Declaration of the Salzburg Forum adopted in Göttweig defined the fields of further joint action of the group. Furthermore, the need to reform the Salzburg Forum in order to become an efficient mechanism for lobbying in the European area was clearly expressed.

In the course of Slovenia's presidency, the well-coordinated cooperation between member states at the Council meetings, particularly in dossiers of common interests, actually developed into good practice. It is of paramount importance for the future operation of the Salzburg Forum to give a clear sign of the existence of "a pressure group" within the Council, and also in broader terms (Member States, the Commission, the European Parliament) which can have influence on decision-taking processes.

Recent activities within the Salzburg Forum along with requests for membership or participation in the meetings of the ministers of the Salzburg Forum have required, apart from the definition of and decision on the external dimension, the definition of the status that can be acquired by third countries within the Salzburg Forum based on a joint decision by all the ministers.

I. Definition of conditions for membership in the Salzburg Forum

Membership in the Salzburg Forum is conditional upon signing the EU Accession Treaty, which gives the acceding countries within the framework of the Council of the

European Union access to documents and contents discussed at the meetings of all the working bodies of the Council of the European Union.

The observer status is granted to a third country with a European perspective based on the consensus of all the ministers of the Salzburg Forum member countries. The SF+ principle can be applied at all Salzburg Forum meetings attended by member states and those with observer status.

Additionally, the status in the Salzburg Forum can be granted to countries which fit into a regional profile of group of member countries and which have very similar interests.

Decisions in relation to which country could take part at the next meeting will be taken on a case to case basis.

II. Defining the external dimension of the Salzburg Forum

The activities of the Salzburg Forum have already produced results in the form of excellent interstate relations, personal contacts as well as professional connections and were, in a certain way, rounded off when Austria's first partners entered the EU. Recently several initiatives were raised with regard to integration of new states in the Forum. Last year Romania and Bulgaria were included whereas Ukraine, Croatia and Moldavia (the latter requested to be admitted only recently) are aspiring to become involved the Forum's activities. To give consideration to the stated, cooperation with third countries is defined as part of the second pillar of the Salzburg Forum and its external dimension.

For the future work however Salzburg Forum member states define the conditions and manner of such activity, also referred as "the external dimension" of the Salzburg Forum.

- a) The central thread of debates in the Salzburg Forum reflects the important issues discussed in the Council of EU for Justice and Home Affairs. A well-established and effective coordination mechanism has been in place enabling the Salzburg Forum member states to deal with these issues at evening or morning sessions before the Council of EU for Justice and Home Affairs is in session. The same state of affairs applies to execution of the Council of EU for Justice and Home Affairs. It therefore follows that third countries are excluded from ministerial debates on core issues.
- b) The Salzburg Forum ministerial meeting organised by Austria shall focus on discussions concerning the current issues on the external dimension. Current interests¹ of the Salzburg Forum member states should serve as grounds for extending a common invitation. This means that in addition to Salzburg Forum member states, states with observer status as well as other interested states may participate. Ministers shall adopt a decision on their participation and appoint the holder in charge of arranging the contents of such a meeting.

¹ For example the security of our region.

III. Duration of the presidency of the SF

The 2004 Declaration of Fuschl laid the foundations for the principle of a 6-month rotation system of the presidency as well as three annual ministerial meetings. In addition to the traditional annual meeting organised by the country that initiated the Forum, i.e. Austria, the other two meetings are held in the two presiding countries respectively.

In future the Salzburg Forum should retain the existent 6-month rotation system².

IV. Recording the adopted decisions

The Salzburg Forum has outgrown the level of general joint declarations. In addition to drawing up political guidelines, ministerial meetings increasingly result in concrete decisions and conclusions.

To establish a systematically documented register of all official papers, such as conclusions and agreements, guidelines will be briefly noted at each ministerial meeting. The task of the presiding country is to submit the minutes of the meeting after the ministerial meeting to other participants for review and approval.

² For the Czech Republic the discussion whether to have a 6-month or one year rotation system is still open. Poland and the Slovak Republic supported the one year rotation system.