*Dear Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs,
Dear Ambassadors, Dear representants of the Hungarian MFA&T,
Distinguished guests,*

Thank you for accepting our invitation to the brunch-debate on the occasion of the *20th anniversary of EU enlargement*. It is a privilege to reflect with you on that journey.

I am particularly happy to welcome today the Ambassadors of the candidate for membership of the European Union countries, which I hope will soon be our colleagues in this honourable club.

Twenty years ago, we embarked on a transformative path that reshaped the very fabric of our continent. The ‘big bang’ enlargement of 2004 was not just a geopolitical shift; it was a promise of unity, prosperity, and peace.

Poland, along with nine other nations, including Hungary, stepped into a new era, marked by the shared values and collective aspirations of the European Union. As we take stock of these two decades, the advantages of being part of this grand Union are undeniable.

For Poland, the EU has been a catalyst for economic growth, a guarantor of political stability, and a beacon of hope for a brighter future. Our integration into the single market has opened doors for Polish businesses, allowing them to compete and thrive on a global stage. The influx of EU funds has modernized our infrastructure, bolstered our industries, and improved the quality of life for millions of Poles.

Poland is one of the countries benefiting the most from enlargement in terms of catching up with the EU average. Poland’s GDP per capita, measured in purchasing power parity, has risen from 50% in 2003 to 80% of the EU average in 2023. In total values Poland’s GDP has more than doubled in 20 years (109% since 2003). All this despite four periods of recession in the Union.

Mr. Radosław Sikorski, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, during his annual information on Polish foreign policy said, that: *the EU is something much more than just cash transfers. As a Member State, Poland is considered a stable and predictable country, and a good investment destination. And even if we become a net contributor over time, the benefits of being part of the EU will still outweigh the costs, as we are talking not only about cash transfers but also security, participation in the European market, freedom to travel and settle, and development opportunities. This is why it is so important that Poland rejoins the group of countries that make up Europe rather than those that defend themselves against it*.

But the benefits have not been one-sided. The enlargement has also been economically advantageous for Western countries. It has fostered a more dynamic and competitive market, spurred innovation, and facilitated the flow of capital and labour.

One of the biggest misunderstanding is the conviction that there are “western donors” and “eastern beneficiaries” of the EU budget. This simplification creates a negative sentiments among the Member States, while the compromise becomes more difficult to achieve. It shall be stressed that the European Union is a positive-sum game which benefits each Member State.

As we gather here today, we stand at the threshold of a new geopolitical era, that is rapidly reshaping the world as we know. The landscape of global power is shifting, and with it, the dynamics of international relations and security.

The current era is also marked by numerous armed conflicts and challenges to European security. The optimism of the 90s, which saw the end of the Cold War and the hope that kinetic war in Europe was a relic of the past, has been shattered. The Russian attack on Ukraine was a stark reminder that war on our continent remains a present and real threat.

This aggression has also underscored the threat posed by Russian ambitions to NATO countries, influencing our priorities and defence postures. As we this year also commemorate the 25th anniversary of Poland’s and Hungary’s accession to NATO, we are reminded of the critical importance of unity and solidarity in the face of such challenges. As we reflect on this anniversary, I would like to emphasise that Poland’s dedication to our mutual defence is evident in its significant military spending, allocating 4% of its GDP for defence purposes. Our commitment to the Alliance is a matter of responsibility for us, especially in the context of defending NATO's eastern flank. The constant and real threat from Russia has changed and must continue to change the priorities of our foreign policy and economic strategy.

Energy independence and diversification is no longer a choice but a necessity. The events of recent years have shown us the dangers of over-reliance on a single source and of using prices and supplies of resources as political blackmail. Poland correctly recognised these dangers of relying on Russian resources and therefore did a lot for diversification.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

The accession of new member states has amplified the EU’s voice on the world stage, making it a more influential player in international affairs. Looking ahead, the journey is far from over. The European project continues to evolve, facing new challenges and seizing fresh opportunities.

A few years after Brexit, followed by many other crisis like pandemic and the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the EU needs solidarity, but also understanding for each other. Back to the roots of the EU is the key. Peace and prosperity - these are the historical foundations of European integration. Robert Schuman once stated: "*Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity.*" These words and goals are valid because there is still a lot to be done.

Thank you for your attention!