2004 enlargement: progress towards accession by the candidate countries. Strategy paper and report

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The Council reviewed the annotated draft agenda prepared by the Presidency for the Brussels European Council in accordance with the new procedures decided in Seville. Delegations expressed broad support for the annotated draft agenda. In introductory presentations, President Prodi and Commissioner Verheugen recalled the Commission's proposals on the different issues in discussion. Firstly, there was broad agreement with the Commission's findings that ten countries would be able to assume the obligations of membership from the beginning of 2004, and the recommendation to conclude accession negotiations with these countries at the Copenhagen European Council and sign the accession Treaty in Athens in April 2003. There was also broad agreement on the Commission's evaluation of the progress achieved by Bulgaria and Romania. It was noted that the Commission would come up with updated road maps and proposals for upgraded pre-accession strategies for these two countries at Copenhagen. The importance of adequate support for Bulgaria and Romania in their efforts towards accession was underlined. Likewise, delegations took note of the Commission's assessment on Turkey with a view to preparing decisions for Copenhagen on the next steps of Turkey's candidature, notably taking into account the substantial progress made by that country over the last months. Monitoring and safeguards : Delegations supported the Commission proposals on continued monitoring up to accession and the inclusion in the Accession Treaty of a general economic safeguard clause as well as specific safeguard clauses concerning the internal market and justice and home affairs. They underlined the importance of these elements. As regards budgetary and financial issues, the Council pursued work in preparation of the European Council on the different budgetary and financial issues, notably direct income support (agriculture), the overall allocation of commitment appropriations for structural operations and the question of budget compensation. Consensus was found in the Council on the principle of budget compensation and on the methodology for calculating the financial position of candidate countries. Concerning institutional questions, agreement was found on the institutional issues, on the basis of the Presidency's proposals encompassing the different institutional aspects: weighting of votes in the Council / threshold for qualified majority; overall size of the European Parliament to be elected in 2004 and allocation of seats between the Member States; transitional arrangements for dealing with these two questions in 2004 and, finally, the rotation of Presidencies after enlargement. Lastly, as regards competition/Czech Republic and Slovakia, in line with the objective of closing as many non-financial negotiation chapters as possible by the Brussels European Council, the Council agreed the EU Common Position on the Competition Policy Chapter for the negotiation with the Czech Republic. As far as the Common Position on the Competition Chapter with Slovakia is concerned, consultations are to continue with a view to an agreement being found before the European Council in Brussels.