The Treaty of Nice and the future of the European Union

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This document presents the report from the European Council to the European Parliament on the progress achieved by the European Union in 2000. In its last written annual report submitted to the European Parliament, the European Council concluded by expressing its confidence that the Union, building on the solid progress achieved in 1999, would prove equal to the various challenges that lay before it. Developments in 2000 under the Portuguese and French presidencies clearly demonstrated that that note of optimism was well-founded, with the Union simultaneously consolidating and building on previous achievements and showing its capacity to strike out in new directions in response to new situations. Progress achieved was underpinned by the ability of the Institutions to work closely together in the pursuit of commonly-shared objectives and served, moreover, to highlight even more closely than hitherto the role of the European Council in providing the Union with the necessary impetus for its development. Thus, the Intergovernmental Conference was brought to a successful conclusion with the agreement on a draft Treaty of Nice, a precondition for future enlargement of the Union. The enlargement process itself was marked by a stepping up of accession negotiations with the candidate countries. The Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy continued to be developed, with particularly significant advances made in forging a common security and defence policy intended to strengthen the Union's contribution to international peace and security in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter. Areas of direct and particular importance for the well-being of the citizen also remained uppermost in the Union's mind, as borne out, in particular, by the adoption of a strategy for turning the Union into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. Intensive negotiations on the institutional issues left open at the Amsterdam European Council but needing to be resolved given the prospect of a Union with almost double the present membership resulted in the overall agreement on a new draft Treaty in Nice in December 2000. This new Treaty, negotiated on the basis of the brief laid down at the Cologne, Helsinki and Santa Maria da Feira European Councils, strengthens the legitimacy, effectiveness and public acceptability of the Union's Institutions; once ratified, the Union will have completed the institutional changes necessary for the accession of new Member States. The key reforms introduced by the draft Nice Treaty are interconnected and are four-fold. The Commission will, from 2005, consist of only one national from each Member State; in future, when the Union reaches 27 Member States, it will contain fewer members than the number of Member States, with nationals from Member States chosen according to a rotational systems based on the principle of equality. The powers of the President of the Commission have also been reinforced. As from 2005, the dual nature of the Union as the Union of peoples and a Union of states will be further underlined in qualified majority voting. Moreover, qualified majority voting has also been extended to around afurther 40 Treaty provisions, inclusing such important areas as the common commercial policy, asylum and immigration policy and cohesion. Lastly, they agreed that a new Intergovernmental Conference should be convened in 2004. The enlargement process itself remained a top of political priority for the Union. The year 2000 saw very considerable progress achieved through the stepping up of the accession negotiations. All areas of the acquis, except covering the Institutions, i.e 29 in all, have been opened with Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia and between 13 and 17 closed provisionally. As far as Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania and Bulgaria were concerned, negotitiations were opened in February. Beyond enlargement, the European Union continued to affirm its presence both on the wider European scene and further afield in pursuit of its foreign policy objectives. Other issues of importance include: confirming the role of the Secretary-General/High Representative for CFSP; establishing the Common European Security and Defence Policy; issues affecting the citizens; the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European union; Justice and Home Affairs; food safety; immediate measures to combat BSE; economic and social development; the ten-year strategy intended to transform the Union into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based

economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more an better jobs and greater social cohesion and lastly, the adoption of the European Social Agenda.