Agenda 2000: the enlargement, EP position on Commission'opinions on applications for accession

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Enlargement of the EU, along with reform of the Treaty and monetary union, is one of the three great challenges of the turn of the century. The challenge facing the European Union stems from the fact that the ensuing benefits of enlargement will not come automatically: The problems are also daunting. The Committee welcomes the broad thrust of the Copenhagen criteria, but feels that it is also important to include conformity to the European socio-economic model as a criterion in the assessment. On the basis of the assessments contained in Agenda 2000, the Commission considers that Hungary, Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia can take part in the first wave of accession negotiations. Another approach is gaining ground in the Council, advocating that negotiations should start at the same time for all applicant countries, in order to avoid a feeling of exclusion and hostility developing among the general public in the countries concerned.The impact of enlargement The new EU financial framework proposed in Agenda 2000 is heavily influenced by the current climate of austerity, and by the reluctance of the Member States to increase Community resources. The Committee believes that the Member States and their citizens will have to be persuaded that the financial effort is worthwhile, and that it is in the common interest. Enlargement will radically alter the EU's institutional organization, decision-making procedures and internal balance. The Committee believes that the problem of the smooth political and institutional operation of the Union should be dealt with long before membership exceeds twenty, and that a new Intergovernmental Conference should be convened. The Committee broadly approves the Commission proposals, but wonders whether it might be better to alter the negotiation strategy with the applicant countries (five or ten countries). It also questions the limit on Community funding which was decided in Edinburgh (1.27% of GDP). It thinks that the structural policies to be carried out, as well as the other EU internal policies, could justify a higher level of funding.