Estonia: membership application

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This Regular Report on Estonia is largely similar to that of the Commission's 1997 Opinion and of the subsequent regular reports. However, it differs from that used in previous years on three minor points. Firstly, the part of the present report assessing Estonia's ability to assume the obligations of membership has been structured to follow the list of the 29 negotiating chapters covering the acquis. Secondly, this part has been broadened to cover also Estonia's administrative capacity to apply the acquis under each of the negotiating chapters (previously discussed in a separate section of the report). Thirdly, the report includes, for the first time, a section assessing the progress made by Estonia in translating the acquis into its official language. This report takes into consideration progress since the 1999 regular report and looks at whether intended reforms have been carried out and it examines new initiatives. Furthermore, complementing the assessment of new developments since the last regular report, this report provides also an overall assessment of new developments since the last report and also provides an overall assessment of the global situation for each of the aspects under consideration, setting out for each of them the main steps which remain to be taken by Estonia in preparing for accession. The report draws on numerous sources of information. The candidate countries have been invited to provide information on progress made in preparations for membership since the publication of the last regular report. As regards the relations between the EU and Estonia, it should be noted that Estonia's trade with the EC decreased slightly in 1999, to recover again in the first half of 2000. A new regime for agricultural products entered into force on 1 July 2000 on an autonomous basis, pending the conclusion of an Additional Protocol to the Europe Agreement. In addition, negotiations on further mutual concessions for a number of processed agricultural products were also concluded between negotiators in May 2000. In July 2000, the Council mandated the Commission to open negotiations with the associated countries on new reciprocal concessions in the field of fish and fishery products. In May 2000, Estonia presented a revised National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA), in which outlines its strategy for accession including how to achieve the priorities of the Accession Partnership. In the years 200-2002 total financial assistance to Estonia will amount annually to EUR 24 million from Phare, EUR 12 million from SAPARD, and between EUR 21 and EUR 37 million from ISPA. Estonia continues to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria. It has addressed most of the short-term priorities of the 1999 Accession Partnership in this area. Estonia has made progress in the following areas: integration of minorities; market economy; macroeconomic stability; restructuring the enterprise and financial sectors; structuring reforms in the utilities and energy sectors; internal market; transport; agriculture; fisheries; social policy; regional policy; justice and home affairs; administrative capacity. On the other hand, although progress has been made andcontinues to be made, there are also areas in which further progress is needed such as: the containment of government expenditures, especially in the pension and health care reform area; local government expenditure: administrative structures; market surveillance system; industrial and intellectual property rights; customs; financial control; penal law and labour law. Lastly, it is emphasised that Estonia's main weakness is the weak administrative structures and enforcement bodies which are needed to ensure that the existing structures are fully capable of enforcing and implementing the acquis correctly.