Agenda 2000: CEEC applicant countries, pre-accession aid for agriculture and rural development SAPARD

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This is the first report produced by the Commission on SAPARD. The report emphasises the management aspects of SAPARD. Unlike PHARE and ISPA, this instrument does not involve the Commission in any points, not even in project selection. This approach required two major exercises to be accomplished before aid could be granted. The first is regulatory. An appropriate set of provisions covering all aspects relevant to the proper use, control and accountability of funds had to be negotiated with the applicant countries, then set out in bilateral international agreements with them. This has been completed. The other exercise required the establishment in each applicant country of an agency capable of implementing SAPARD. By the end of 2000, a considerable amount of work was accomplished by the applicant countries to build their SAPARD agencies. No applicant country, however, had a SAPARD agency ready to receive funds and therefore no Community SAPARD monies could be transferred to any applicant country by the year end. The report emphasises that SAPARD is an exercise in practical institution building, whereby organs in each applicant country are created and given important management responsibilities, including that of accounting for resources. This work will be of inestimable value once the countries become Member States. It is a major task, because for all applicant countries, the practice of granting public monies to support the large number of investments envisaged under SAPARD is unprecedented. The Commission acknowledges the enormous efforts made. On the programmes themselves, the applicant countries were invited to draw up their plans for agriculture and rural development, selecting measures which reflect particular national circumstances. Although the balance between measures differs from programme to programme, three measures are dominant in virtually all of them: - processing and marketing leads with 26% of the total Community contribution. - investment in agricultural holdings, and investment in rural infrastructure, each at just over 20%. Diversification of activities comes next with around 11%. Of the other nine measures in the programmes, none of them averages more than 4% of the total. Even though the agri-environment measure is not obligatory under SAPARD and only concerns pilot implementation, unlike for Member States rural development programmes, all applicant countries except Slovenia have included this measure in their programmes. Two measures - setting up farm relief and farm management services, and the measure on establishment and updating of land registers, have not been included in any of the programmes. It must be remembered that for every programme there is a provision permitting some flexibility, subject to Monitoring Committee agreement. For each measure, this is set at 10% of the total for that measure over 2000_2006. The aim is to avoid recourse to changes in the programmes for essentially bureaucratic reasons, as was the case with Member states in the 1994-1999 period.