2004 enlargement: state of the negotiations, progress towards accession by the candidate countries. Report

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PURPOSE : to present a strategy paper and report of the European Commission on the progress towards accession by each of the candidate countries. CONTENT: the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union is being thoroughly prepared by means of the strategy set out in this document. It is founded on clear principles, which have been enunciated by successive European Councils, and on a transparent and objective method set out by the Commission in Agenda 2000 and applied each year in its Progress Reports. The present document, and the accompanying Reports, provide an analysis of the stage reached in the enlargement process in Autumn 2001 and point the way to ensuring that the next and decisive phase of the process is successful. The Regular Report shows that all negotiating countries have made substantial progress over the last year in implementing the accession criteria (acquis communautaire), which, together with the road map, has permitted considerable advances in the accession negotiations. However, particular attention is now being given to the candidates' administrative and judicial capacity. By means of an action plan, the Commission will increase support for institution building and monitor closely the fulfilment of undertakings made in the negotiations and the achievement of priorities set out in the Accession Partnerships. The principles for this process remain unchanged. The Berlin European Council has set out a clear framework for the financial aspects of enlargement. This framework provides a sufficient basis for the accession of up to ten new Member States in 2004. The European Council of Nice has defined the framework for the institutional reform necessary for enlargement. Negotiations are conducted on the basis of the existing acquis and will be concluded with those candidates that fulfil all the criteria for membership, applying the principles of own merits and catching-up. These are the necessary and sufficient conditions defined at the outset for accomplishing the first accessions. To this end, the road map should be followed as foreseen. The EU will now have to determine common positions for the remaining chapters. The Commission will ensure that the Council can debate financial issues in a common framework early in 2002 and will present proposals to the Council the fields of agriculture, regional policy and budget on the basis of the existing acquis and the principles inherent in the Berlin agreement. The accession negotiations can be concluded independently of decisions for financing the EU after 2006. It should also be noted that the joining the European Union is not identical with joining the euro. Whereas participation in the single currency is part of the acquis, candidate countries will have to conform to the convergence criteria for participation in the euro. This will be decided at a later stage, after accession, following assessment of the achievement of a high degree of sustainable convergence, as was the case for the initial participants in the euro zone. The first priority for each candidate must, however, now be to comply with the Copenhagen economic criteria. In addition, this year's Regular Reports and the present stage of the accession negotiations do not yet allow the Commission to conclude that the conditions for accession are fulfilled by anyof the candidate countries. Given the present pace of negotiations and the progress made so far, the Commission should be able to make recommendations on those candidate countries ready for accession on the basis of its 2002 Regular Reports. Among the twelve negotiating countries, ten have target dates of accession compatible with the Goteborg timeframe. The Union should therefore be prepared to conclude accession negotiations by the end of the Danish Presidency in 2002, in view of accession in 2004, with all countries meeting the necessary conditions. Necessary administrative preparations inside the Institutions are already under way and should be continued. In the framework of an action plan, the Commission will analyse by early 2002 with each of the candidate countries their on-going efforts for institution building and, if necessary, their intentions to reinforce them, using a supplementary institution building facility. The Commission will inform the Council on monitoring actions including peer reviews by Spring 2002, so that they can be taken up in the single framework of the accession negotiations. The Commission will, by the time of the Seville European Council in June 2002,

report on its action plan including on the monitoring of commitments made by the candidate countries during the accession negotiations. The 2002 Regular Reports will examine whether the candidate countries will have, by accession, adequate administrative capacity to implement and enforce the acquis. The Commission will give its evaluation of the readiness of each candidate to assume the rights and obligations of membership in next year's progress reports. Provided their efforts are sustained, it should be possible to conclude the accession negotiations by the end of 2002 with those countries which fulfil the accession criteria. On this basis these countries would be ready to become members of the EU in 2004, in accordance with the objective set out by the European Parliament and by the European Council in Nice. The pace of the negotiations with each candidate reflects, above all, the pace of its own preparations for membership. The application of the principle of differentiation based on each candidate country's own merit, together with the vigorous pursuit of preparations for membership backed up by the EU's pre-accession instruments, is also enabling candidates which began negotiations at a later stage to catch up. The enlargement strategy now in place provides a sound basis for completing the negotiations, on schedule, with the candidates that are sufficiently prepared. Lastly, the European Union will continue to lend its full support to the preparations for membership by candidates that are not in a position to complete negotiations within the timetable indicated above. Negotiations will be pursued with them, on the basis of the principles that have guided the accession process from the beginning. In its 2002 Enlargement Strategy Paper, the Commission will set out an updated road map, and, if necessary, a revised pre-accession strategy, for such candidates.