

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

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This is the second report produced by the Commission on the Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development, SAPARD. The first report, published in July 2001, gave an overview of the SAPARD instrument including the background to its introduction, the legal instruments upon which it is based, the financing arrangements, and the tasks to be accomplished before it could be operational. It must however be stressed that SAPARD is managed on a unique basis. With SAPARD the Commission is not involved in any such key points. For SAPARD it is the national authorities in the candidate countries which assume entire responsibility through fully "decentralised management". The Commission will nevertheless control, on an ex-post basis, that the funds are used in accordance with the applicable rules, namely by applying clearance of accounts procedures and financial correction mechanisms. Such management is very similar to that applied in Member States and contributes directly, and in a practical manner, to preparing for accession through administrative capacity building. By the end of the period covered by this report, the calendar year 2001, five of the ten countries eligible for support under SAPARD had secured Commission conferral of management decisions. They were thus able to begin to apply the instrument. The remaining five, as a result of dedicated, hard work by many people, continued to make good progress and in April 2002 two more countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia had secured such decisions. As regards budget execution in respect of these seven countries, payments to date amount to 42 712 829 euro, of which 40 525 553 related to payments on account. Since the beginning SAPARD has raised high (and sometimes unrealistic) expectations in the candidate countries. The Commission on many occasions recalled the message given initially in mid 2000 that it was events not the calendar that would determine when SAPARD would begin to operate. This was done in an effort to raise general awareness of the need for various legislative, institutional and administrative requirements to be complied with by the candidate countries before implementation of the programme could begin. Despite efforts to deliver correct and complete information on SAPARD and its implications (through press, web sites, speeches), on occasion misleading information appeared in the press of the candidate countries. Such information indicating, for example, unrealistic deadlines and timetables on the start of SAPARD, contributed to a certain feeling of disappointment and frustration with the programme. However, good progress in implementing the instrument was made in all countries in 2001 so that by the time this report was adopted eight countries were able to apply it. This report, which for the first time includes contributions from several candidate countries, describes work done and results in 2001.