Republic of Estonia: application for accession to the European Union

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PURPOSE : to present the Commission's opinion on the applications for accession to the European Union by the 10 candidate countries. CONTENT : the European Commission adopted a favourable opinion on the accession of the ten candidate countries, that is Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia. Taken in accordance with Article 49 of the Treaty, this decision follows the conclusions of the accession negotiations at the European Council meeting in Copenhagen on 13 December 2002 and the finalisation of the Treaty of Accession in the first half of February 2003. The Commission's work started with the Opinions on the applications of the ten countries which were adopted on 30 June 1993 for Cyprus and Malta (updated for Malta on 17 February 1999) and on 15 July 1997 for the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia. The Commission has played a crucial role in the accession negotiations, up to the final moments in Copenhagen on 13 December 2002. The Commission has also provided the present and future Member States, and the citizens of these countries, with an in-depth analysis in its yearly Regular Reports (please refer to the procedure documents for each referernces for the candidate countrues) on the progress made by each of the candidate countries towards accession. The most recent ones, adopted on the 9 October 2002 (refer to INI/2002/2160), concluded that the Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Slovakia fulfil the political criteria for membership and that they will have also fulfilled the economic and acquis criteria to be ready for membership from the beginning of 2004. On this basis, the Commission recommended to conclude the accession negotiations with these countries by the end of 2002 with the aim of signing the Treaty of Accession in Spring 2003. The Commission is confident that the acceding states will pursue the reforms that need to be carried out in view of their accession, in line with the commitments they made during the negotiations. The Commission will continue to monitor the fulfilment of these commitments and obligations until accession, and will assist them with the available instruments. Procedure : in accordance with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, the decision to admit an applicant State to the European Union is taken by the Council, after consultations with the Commission and after having received the decision on assent of the European Parliament. The adoption of the Commission Opinion is the first step in this procedure. In accordance with the timetable established by the Greek Presidency, in agreement with the European Parliament and with the Commission, to enable the signature of the Treaty of Accession to take place in Athens on 16 April 2003, the decision on assent of the European Parliament is planned to be taken on 9 April 2003 and the Council decision is to follow on 14 April 2003. Lastly, the Accession Treaty needs to be ratified by the 25 present and future Member States and will enter into force on 1 May 2004. Referendums are planned to be held on the question of accession in most of the applicant countries.