Estonia: membership application

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PURPOSE: AGENDA 2000: presentation of the Commission's opinion on Estonia's request for membership (24 November 1995). CONTENT: All the requests for membership are assessed using a single method based on the criteria established at the Copenhagen European Council (June 1993). These criteria are as follows: - political criteria: the candidate countries must have stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, human rights and respect for minorities, - economic criteria: these countries must have a functioning market economy, as well as the ability to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union, - criteria relating to the ability of the countries to take on the obligations of membership (in particular integration of the acquis, to a greater or lesser extent, and respect for the criteria concerning economic and monetary union). With regard to these criteria, it is emerges that: - in political terms, Estonia presents the characteristics of a democracy, with stable institutions, guaranteeing the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. However, measures need to be taken to accelerate the rate of naturalisation of Russian speaking non-citizens to enable them to become better integrated into Estonian society; - in economic terms, Estonia can be regarded as a functioning market economy, and it should be able to make the progress necessary to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union in the medium term; - with regard to its capacity to assume the obligations of membership, Estonia has made considerable progress in transposing and implementing the acquis relating particularly to the single market. If it continues its efforts, it should become able to participate fully in the single market in the medium term. Particular efforts, including investment, will be needed to apply the acquis fully in sectors such as environment (where massive investments are expected). The Commission also notes that in the agricultural sector reforms must be made quickly. There is also a need to finance rising trade and current account deficits. Substantial progress is needed on public procurement, intellectual property, financial services, taxation and competition (especially the transparency of state aids). Efforts are also needed in the fields of statistics, fisheries, consumer protection and customs. Lastly, the administrative structure must be strengthened is Estonia is to have the structures to apply and enforce the acquis effectively. In conclusion: the Commission considers that negotiations for accession can be opened with Estonia. The pre-accession strategy will help this country to prepare rapidly for the obligations of membership by concentrating on the shortcomings.