Bulgaria: membership application and partnership, 14 December 1995

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PURPOSE: AGENDA 2000: presentation of the Commission's opinion on Bulgaria's request for membership (14 December 1995). CONTENT: All the requests for membership were 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: 1) in political terms, the situation has been stable since the establishment of the new government (including respect for the rights of minorities); 2) in economic terms, Bulgaria's progress in the creation of a market economy has been limited by the absence of a commitment to market-oriented economic policies. The Commission does not consider that this country will be able to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union; 3) with regard to the capacity to take on the obligations of membership and despite the progress made towards implementation of the acquis, Bulgaria has neither transposed nor taken on the essential elements of the Community legislation on the single market. It is uncertain whether this country will be in a position to implement the acquis in the medium term. In addition, considerable efforts will be needed in the areas of investment, environment, transport, energy, justice and home affairs and agriculture. More generally, substantial reform will be indispensable if this country is to have the structures (administrative and institutional) to apply and enforce the acquis effectively. In conclusion, the Commission considers that negotiations for accession cannot be opened with Bulgaria until it has made sufficient progress in the economic field and in respect for the legislative acquis. The first objective should therefore be to reinforce the pre-accession strategy.