Estonia: membership application

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PURPOSE: to present the regular report from the Commission on Estonia's progress towards accession. CONTENT: In line with the timetable of Agenda 2000 and the direction given by the European Council in Cardiff, the Commission presents a report in the form of an appraisal of the progress made by this country with regard to accession. The report examines: - the relations between the Estonia and the EU, particularly in the framework of the European Agreement; - the situation in respect of the political conditions set by the European Council (democracy, rule of law, human rights, protection of minorities); - Estonia's situation and prospects in respect of the economic conditions mentioned by the European Council (functioning market economy, capacity to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union); - the question of Estonia's capacity to adopt the obligations of membership, that is, the acquis of the Union as expressed in the Treaty, the secondary legislation and the policies of the Union. The conclusion of the Commission's analysis reveals that the Commission considers Estonia's results to be satisfactory both in political and economic terms: Estonia's institutions continue to run smoothly even if problems remain regarding access to citizenship and Estonia can be regarded as a functioning market economy and should be able to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. The land privatisation process needs to be accelerated and phytosanitary and veterinary rules implemented. Efforts are also needed in the financial sector. With regard to adoption of the acquis, Estonia has made general progress in the approximation process, although increased attention needs to be paid to the enforcement of internal market legislation (in particular intellectual property, standards and certification and state aids) and to the preparation of a strategy to introduce customs duties and the corresponding administration. Estonia has taken important steps to put legislation in place in the justice and home affairs area and is taking steps to ensure its effective implementation. At the same time, however, there are still shortcomings in the areas of control of financial markets and state aids, maritime transport, social and employment policy and regional development. In conclusion, Estonia continues to fulfil the political Copenhagen criteria, although decisions are needed on the naturalisation of stateless children. Estonia has dealt with all the aspects of short term priorities of the partnership for accession. The National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis needs to be revised to ensure effective implementation of Community legislative acts. The Commission will take a position on the revised programme which it will communicate to the Council during the second semester of 1999 at the time of the re-examination of the Accession Partnership.