Bulgaria: membership application and partnership, 14 December 1995

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PURPOSE : To present the 1999 Regular Report on Bulgaria's progress towards accession. CONTENT : The report describes the relations between Bulgaria and the Union. It analyses the situation in respect of the Copenhagen criteria and assesses Bulgaria's capacity to take on theobligations of membership. It also covers judicial and administrative capacity as requested by the Madrid European Council. Relations with the Union: the report looks at developments under the Europe Agreement and the Phare programme. It describes the twinning projects undertaken. In the years 2000-2002, indicative figures for total financial assistance available will amount to around 300M EUR for Phare (including CBC),156.3M EUR for Sapard and 249M EUR to 375M EUR for ISPA. Copenhagen political criteria: the report notes that Bulgaria's commitment to integration was underlined during the Kosovo conflict. Bulgaria projected the image of a stable country respecting the principles of democracy and the market economy, and was firmly supportive of EU actions. Bulgaria fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria. Further efforts are needed to protect human and minority rights, particularly of the Roma population, which makes up about 5% of the total. The government has adopted decisions which reflect a political commitment to combating discrimination, but these need to be followed by measures with sufficient resources behind them. The judicial system and the fight against corruption must also be reinforced. Copenhagen economic criteria: Bulgaria has continued to make progress in establishing a functioning market economy but further steps are needed and it is not yet in a position to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union in the medium term. Macroeconomic stability has been maintained thanks to implementation of sound fiscal and incomes policies. Priority should now be given to completing privatisation and speeding up restructuring of the enterprises and banking sectors. A transparent legal framework is needed for business. Ability to assume the obligations of membership: Bulgaria has made efforts in the past year to put in place the key elements of internal market legislation, such as legislation on public procurement and standardisation. State aid continues to be a problem area. There are problems on the implementation of agricultural alignment, partly due to lack of funding. There has been little progress in the social sector where there is widespread poverty and cause for concern in terms of public health. There is no progress on the closure of units at Kosloduy nuclear power plant, despite the fact that this was a short-term priority of the Accession Partnership. Administrative capacity to apply the acquis: Bulgaria has adopted a Civil Service law and made progress in setting up a legal framework for institutions responsible for the application of the acquis. A shortage of resources, both human and financial, has prevented these institutions from implementing legislation. Financial control mechanisms and transparent public procurement systems need to be established, particularly in order to absorb increased EU financial resources. Border management must be improved.