Slovakia: membership application and partnership, 27 June 1995

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PURPOSE : To present the 1999 Regular Report on Slovakia's progress towards accession. CONTENT : The report looks at Slovakia's relations with the Union and analyses the situation in terms of both the political and economic criteria set by the Copenhagen European Council. It addresses the question of Slovakia's ability to take on the obligations of membership and looks at administrative and judicial capacity as requested by the Madrid European Council. Relations with the Union: Slovakia's trade with the EU has continued to grow. Several trade issues have been resolved, such as the resumption of automatic licensing for coniferous wood. The Commission has, however, initiated anti-dumping proceedings on certain imports. The impact of the Phare programme has been positive, with particular importance for civic education during the 1998 elections and development of the SME sector. In the years 2000-2002, total financial assistance available will be 49M EUR for Phare, 18.3M for SAPARD and between 35M and 55M EUR for ISPA, per year. Copenhagen political criteria: Slovakia now fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria thanks to the changes made since the parliamentary elections of September 1998. The process of consolidating democracy has regained momentum. With respect to the Parliament, the main weaknesses identified by the last Regular Report have been addressed. Problems on judicial independence, which the 1998 Composite Paper saw as one of the main challenges to democracy and the rule of law, have been remedied. The situation must be further improved, mainly through an amendment to the constitution eliminating the probation period for judges and modifying the nomination and removal procedures. The fight against crime and corruption needs to be intensified. Particular attention must be paid to continuing discrimination against Roma. In spite of some positive developments, further measures are needed, including at local administration level. Roma living conditions must be improved, and police and state attitudes need attention. Copenhagen economic criteria: Slovakia is close to being a functioning market economy thanks to the courageous policy decisions and the impressive reform agenda of the new government. Continued progress towards sustainable macroeconomic stability and the implementation of the structural reform programme should enable Slovakia to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union in the medium term. In the course of 1999, Slovakia has adopted measures to reduce external and internal imbalances. Plans for privatisation have been adopted. Particular efforts need to be put into the capacity of the banking sector to perform its financial intermediary function by completing privatisation in a transparent manner. Ability to assume the obligations of membership: Legislative alignment in internal market matters have progressed with legislation on public procurement and standards and certification. In other sectors of the acquis, there has been little concrete progress in terms of adopted legislation. Administrative capacity: Certain improvements have been made in internal market matters, but the civil service reform law has not been adopted. In other key areas such as regionaldevelopment, financial control and justice and home affairs, the establishment of relevant institutions has been delayed. Given the delays that Slovakia has experienced in preparing for membership, it is important that legislation be accompanied by the strengthening of related administrative capacities.