Estonia: membership application

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The Commission has prepared this fourth series of Regular Reports with a view to the Laeken European Council in December 2001. The structure followed for this Regular Report is the same as that used for the 2000 Regular Report. This Report takes into consideration progress since the 2000 Regular Report. It looks at whether intended reforms referred to in the 2000 Regular Report have been carried out, and examines new initiatives. The Report contains a separate section examining the extent to which Estonia has addressed the Accession Partnership priorities. With regard to the pre-accession instruments (Phare, SAPARD, ISPA), these programmes concentrate their support on the Accession Partnership priorities that help the candidate countries to fulfil the criteria for membership. For the years 2000-2002, total financial assistance to Estonia amounts annually to around EUR 30 million from Phare, EUR 12.1 million from SAPARD and around EUR 35 million from ISPA. Concerning the Copenhagen criteria, the main areas are as follows: 1) Political criteria : Estonia continues to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria. Progress has been made in the modernisation of the public administration by moving to a more results based system and improving public access to information. As regards the judicial system, Estonia needs to continue to improve the efficiency in dealing with court cases whilst at the same time improving the quality and enforcement of court decisions. There is also a need to further improve citizen's access to justice. Estonia should maintain the momentum of the integration process. This includes ensuring the efficiency of the naturalisation process, providing access to language training, and raising awareness of the issue across the entire spectrum of Estonian society. 2) Economic criteria : Estonia is a functioning market economy. Provided that it continues with and fully implements its reform programme, it should be able to cope with the competitive pressure and market forces within the Union in the near term. Estonia has returned to high growth and made further progress in strengthening its macroeconomic performance and stability, restructuring the enterprise sector, and in implementing structural reforms in the utilities and energy sectors. The pension reform has been adopted. The legal, institutional and regulatory framework is in place and enforcement is largely adequate. Nevertheless, the current account deficit remains high. The labour market is highly segmented leading to high unemployment combined with labour shortages. Initiatives to improve the response of the labour market to economic growth, with a focus on improving education, training and labour market mobility, need to be developed. 3) Alignment of Estonian legislation with the acquis : overall, Estonia has continued to make good progress in both adopting and implementing the acquis. - concerning the internal market : progress has been made in free movement of goods in aligning public procurement legislation and adopting standards although there is still a need to harmonise sectoral legislation. For free movement of persons, new legislation now ensures the mutual recognition of professional qualifications. In competition policy there has been furtheralignment of legislation which is now largely in line with the acquis in anti-trust and state aid; - concerning agriculture : important steps have been taken in preparing for the CAP, including the partial accreditation of the SAPARD agency. Progress has also been made in the phytosanitary sector. Considerable efforts still need to be made, particularly in the veterinary field. Raising food quality standards to EU levels is still a significant challenge; - transport and energy sectors : in transport policy, Estonia has continued to make progress in both aligning and implementing legislation. The necessary separation of accounts and the role of the railways regulatory body need to be clarified. In energy limited progress has been made. Efforts need to be made in this area particularly as regards the electricity market. Estonia also needs to further develop administrative structures and strengthen the energy market regulator; - for social policy and employment : Estonia has made good progress in terms of legal transposition. Further work is required on implementation. There is also a need to actively promote social dialogue; - environment sector : further progress has been made in relation to both alignment and implementation of environmental legislation. Estonia needs to continue these efforts and strengthen administrative capacity, particularly at local level. Also, enforcement of environmental legislation needs to be improved; - justice and home affairs : Estonia has made further progress in this area including the adoption of the new Penal Code. Work needs to be continued to ensure implementation of legislation, to improve internal coordination and to extend

cooperation with external organisations. Particular attention should be paid to strengthening capacity to fight organised crime including drug trafficking. 4) Administrative Capacity : Estonia has continued to take steps to improve implementation and effectively enforce the acquis which should be recognised as often being more difficult, more expensive and time consuming than the transposition of legislation. Specific areas to which further attention should be paid include reorganisation of the market surveillance system and reinforcing the fight against piracy and counterfeit goods, in preparations for the Common Agricultural Policy and in raising the quality of food. There is also a need for investment in compliance and enforcement in the environment sector, preparing for EC structural funds. 5) Accession Partnership : Estonia has continued to address aspects of all the short-term 1999 Accession Partnership priorities. Estonia is now tackling many aspects of the medium term priorities including those priorities in the internal market, agriculture, fisheries, transport, employment and social affairs, environment and justice and home affairs.