Accession of Bulgaria

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PURPOSE: to present the Commission’s follow-up report on the state of preparedness of Romania and Bulgaria for EU membership.

CONTENT: to recall, in its report of May 2006, the Commission stated that both countries should be prepared for membership by 1 January 2007, provided that they addressed a number of outstanding issues. The Commission indicated that it would report again on the state of preparedness of both countries by early October.

This report outlines the Commission's assessment of both countries' progress since May 2006. It confirms that Bulgaria and Romania have made further progress to complete their preparations for membership, demonstrating their capacity to apply EU principles and legislation from 1 January 2007. They have reached a high degree of alignment. However, the Commission also identifies a number of areas of continuing concern, and also areas where the Commission will initiate appropriate measures to ensure the proper functioning of the EU, unless the countries take immediate corrective action. Both countries are strongly encouraged to make proper use of the months before accession, in order to address the remaining issues.

The report focuses primarily on the areas highlighted in the conclusion of the May 2006 report as needing immediate action or further efforts.

For Bulgaria, these are the justice system, the fight against corruption, police cooperation and the fight against organised crime, money-laundering, integrated administrative control system for agriculture (IACS), transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE), and financial control.

For Romania, these are the justice system and the fight against corruption and IACS, Paying Agencies, TSE and interconnectivity of tax systems.

Many of the challenges set out in the May reports have now been addressed. A number of sectoral issues have been resolved. There has been some progress in the areas of **judicialreform** and the **fightagainst corruption**, **money-laundering and organised crime**, **but further tangible results are needed**.

This report identifies those issues which require further work. It draws attention to provisions in the acquis and the Accession Treaty which are designed to safeguard the proper functioning of EU policies and institutions following accession. In line with the findings of this report, the Commission, after consulting the Member States, will set up a mechanism for cooperation and verification of progress in the areas of judicial reform and the fight against corruption, money-laundering and organised crime. For this purpose, benchmarks have been established which refer to the particular circumstances of each country.

The Commission has adopted the necessary legal provisions to ensure the proper management of EU agricultural funds. The report underlines that the existing rules contain the necessary guarantees for the proper management of EU **structural funds**, and other programmes.

In the area of **food safety**, some specific measures are in place. At present, certain animals and animal products may not be exported from Bulgaria and Romania to the EU because of the presence of animal diseases. These restrictions will be maintained after accession, if necessary.

In the area of **aviation safety**, particular measures will be needed for Bulgarian aircraft and carriers.

General conclusions: overall, Bulgaria and Romania have made far-reaching efforts to adapt their legislation and administration to the laws and rules of the European Union. This has largely brought them into line with prevailing standards and practices within the European Union. Sustained support from the European Union will be available for addressing the remaining issues. Sufficient guarantees exist in the acquis and the Accession Treaty to ensure the proper functioning of EU policies and institutions. As a result of the progress made, Bulgaria and Romania will be in a position to take on the rights and obligations of EU membership on 1 January 2007. The Commission looks forward to welcoming Bulgaria and Romania as fully-fledged members of the European Union on this date.