EEA agreement and related agreements: participation of Bulgaria and Romania

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PURPOSE: to sign, and provisionally apply, the Agreement on the participation of Bulgaria and Romania in the European Economic Area and four related Agreements.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

CONTENT: following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU the two acceding countries are required to become contracting parties to the EEA Agreement. The Commission, together with Bulgaria and Romania, negotiated with the EEA EFTA States, namely Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, on the modalities of the Agreement. Launched officially in July 2006 the negotiations were only concluded on 29 March 2007.

The purpose of this proposal is for the Council to adopt the Council Decision on the signing, and provisional application, of the amended EEA Agreement and four related Agreements. The main Agreement on the participation of Bulgaria and Romania in the EEA defines the amendment to the EEA Agreement, with the bulk of amendments stemming from the Treaty of Accession.

However, technical provisions aside, the EEA enlargement process included negotiations concerning financial contributions and fish concessions. Following extensive negotiations and delays the following was finally agreed:

- The financial contribution and fish concessions will apply only from 1 January 2007 to 30 April 2009.

- Between 2007 and 30 April 2009, the EEA EFTA States will provide, € 21.5 million to Bulgaria and € 50.5 million to Romania through the EEA financial mechanism.

- Over the same time frame (i.e. 2007 and 30 April 2009) Norway will provide € 20 million to Bulgaria and € 48 million to Romania as additional bilateral financing.

- In return, the Community will grant Norway and Iceland a number of concessions in the field of fisheries – also limited in time until 30 April 2009.

As the negotiations suffered unfortunate delays and were not concluded until 29 March 2007, the Commission urges that the new Agreement enters into force as soon as possible. Hence the need for a provisions application. Among the various declarations included in the final act of the Agreement it is worth noting that all parties declare not to have any claims in the field of agriculture and processed agricultural products.