

A. THE STATE OF THE ENLARGEMENT PROCESS

In last year's Strategy Paper entitled "Towards the enlarged Union", the Commission recommended **concluding the accession negotiations** with the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia. The Brussels European Council of October 2002, endorsing the Commission's findings and recommendations, confirmed "its determination to conclude accession negotiations with these countries at the European Council in Copenhagen" in December 2002, considering that these countries will be able to fulfil the accession criteria from the beginning of 2004. The Council also took into consideration the overall progress achieved in the accession negotiations, as well as in transposing and implementing the *acquis* and the commitments undertaken in the negotiations by the candidates.

Subsequently, the negotiations with these ten countries were taken into their final phase in the months leading up to the Copenhagen European Council in December 2002. The final package, fair and balanced, was agreed at Copenhagen, the very place where the "Copenhagen criteria" for accession were laid down back in 1993.

The **Accession Treaty** was signed at a ceremony at the Stoa of Attalos in Athens on 16 April 2003.¹ The Treaty was then submitted for ratification by the current Member States and acceding states, in accordance with each state's national ratification procedures. This process must continue without delay in the remaining states so as to ensure the entry into force of the Treaty on 1 May 2004, which was fixed as the date of accession to the Union. Preparatory work for its implementation is ongoing.

As regards **Cyprus**, the European Council has repeatedly underlined its strong preference for accession by a united Cyprus. Regrettably, the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General to find a solution to the Cyprus problem have not yet succeeded. At the Thessaloniki European Council in June 2003, the Union called for an early resumption of peace talks on the basis of the UN Secretary-General's proposals and welcomed the Commission's willingness to offer assistance for a speedy solution to the Cyprus problem. Taking up the invitation of the Copenhagen European Council, the Commission adopted in June 2003 a Communication aiming at economic development of the north and bringing it closer to the Union. The Commission considers that there are favourable conditions for the two communities to reach a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem before Cyprus' accession to the EU on 1 May 2004. The accession of a united Cyprus to the European Union would benefit all Cypriot citizens and promote civil peace and reconciliation. It would also contribute to the overall stability in the region. The EU moreover foresees an amount of €206 million for the northern part of the island in the event of a settlement.

In all acceding countries except Cyprus accession to the EU has been the subject of a **referendum**. The referendums have demonstrated clear public support for accession, putting the seal of popular approval on the results of the negotiations: turnout has been sufficient in all countries to produce valid referendum results with very convincing

¹ Documents concerning the accession, including the Accession Treaty, were published in the Official Journal (OJ L 236, 23.9.2003, p. 1), accessible on the internet at the following address: <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex>.

majorities. An overview of referendums and ratification is given in *Annex 1: Referendums and ratifications of the 2003 Accession Treaty*.

Governments of current and acceding Member States have undertaken comprehensive information campaigns to inform their citizens about enlargement, while most acceding countries also established dedicated, intensive pre-referendum campaigns. The Commission has provided practical and financial assistance over many years in the framework of its communication strategy for enlargement. Up to €30 million per year has been committed to inform people, via dedicated information centres, partnerships, seminars, brochures, co-operation with media, web-sites, on the process and consequences of enlargement. The Commission will continue to support information efforts on enlargement with a view to the completion of the ratification process.

As the long-awaited date of accession approaches, the ten acceding countries must make their final preparations to join the EU in the best possible conditions. For that purpose, the Commission presents its evaluation, separately from the present document, in a **Comprehensive Monitoring Report**.

Special information and consultation procedures have been put in place to ensure the involvement of the acceding countries' representatives in the development of new *acquis* since the conclusion of the accession negotiations. Among other things, as from the signature of the Accession Treaty, the acceding countries have participated as “**active observers**” in Council bodies, as well as in committees presided over by the Commission. The acceding countries have the right to express their views on the various proposals under discussion, but not to vote. Furthermore, appointed deputies of acceding countries' national parliaments have observer status in the European Parliament.

The acceding and current candidate countries participated in the discussion on the **future of Europe** within the European Convention, which concluded its work with a proposal for a Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe submitted to the European Council with a view to the Intergovernmental Conference on the future institutional architecture of the Union. The ten acceding countries participate fully in the Intergovernmental Conference launched on 4 October 2003, and the new Treaty is intended to be signed after their accession. As candidate countries for accession Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey participate as observers in the Intergovernmental Conference.

Like many other agreements the Union has with third countries, the **Europe Agreements** with Bulgaria and Romania, and the Association Agreement with Turkey, need to be adapted to take account of enlargement. The Commission will negotiate these adaptations with Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey on the basis of a mandate from the Council. The Protocols to the Agreements reflecting the outcome of these negotiations should be concluded as soon as possible after accession, using a simplified procedure foreseen in the Accession Treaty. One of the main areas to be adapted in the agreements with Bulgaria and Romania are the agricultural trade concessions, both as regards processed and non-processed products. Concessions have been improved twice in recent years as a result of the “double zero” and “double profit” negotiations. To continue this process of gradual market integration in the pre-accession period, the Commission envisages a further round of trade liberalisation. Another area to be developed in the coming period is the mutual recognition of conformity assessment, through Protocols on European Conformity Assessment.

Administrative preparations of the EU institutions for enlargement are ongoing, to ensure that all necessary measures are in place by the date of accession. This includes *inter alia* assessments of staffing needs and recruitment preparations, provision of translating and interpreting in additional languages, preparation of buildings, and schools. The Commission identified in particular its additional human resource needs, to be phased in from 2004 and completed by around 2008.² The European Personnel Selection Office became operational in January 2003 and the first competitions for staff from the acceding countries were launched in the first half of 2003. The Commission has set indicative recruitment targets over a seven-year transitional period. Moreover, in order to meet increased human resource needs prior to accession in certain policy areas such as agriculture, structural policies and the linguistic services, up to 500 non-permanent posts were made available already in 2003. These temporary members of staff, mostly nationals from acceding countries, have now begun to take up their posts in the Commission services.

The Commission's Delegations in the new Member States will be transformed into Press and Representation Offices as of 1 May 2004 and will concentrate on their new role of providing information to citizens and media in their host Member State. Nevertheless, for the purpose of accompanying the phasing out of pre-accession assistance, a certain number of specialised staff will be maintained as required for a limited transitory period.

On 20 February 2003, **Croatia** presented its application for accession to the European Union. At its meeting on 14 April 2003, the Council decided to implement the procedure foreseen under Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, and requested the Commission to submit to the Council its opinion on this application. A series of questions was transmitted to the Croatian authorities in July, aimed at obtaining an accurate picture of the situation, to which the Croatian authorities replied in October. The opinion of the Commission is under preparation and is expected to be delivered in spring 2004.

The Union has affirmed on many occasions that it does not wish enlargement to lead to new dividing lines in Europe. With this concern in mind, the Commission adopted in March 2003 a Communication on a new framework for relations with our **Eastern and Southern Neighbours**³. The Commission put forward an ambitious new vision: the creation of an enlarged area of peace, stability and prosperity encompassing the neighbours to the east and to the south that currently do not have a perspective of EU membership, based on common values and deep integration. In return for concrete progress in the implementation of political, economic and institutional reforms, the EU's neighbourhood is to benefit from the prospect of closer economic and political links with the EU. The Commission proposed to take a differentiated, progressive, and benchmarked approach in implementing the initiative, and to develop country-specific

² See the Commission Communication on Activities and Human Resources of the Commission in the Enlarged EU, 5 June 2002 (COM(2002) 311 final).

³ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament - Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours, 11 March 2003 (COM(2003) 104 final). This framework applies to the following countries: Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia.

action plans. The initiative was broadly welcomed by both the Member States and the neighbouring countries.

In July, the Commission also adopted a Communication on a New Neighbourhood Instrument⁴. It charts the adaptations to the Community's assistance in the border regions to the new neighbourhood policy, based on a two step-approach: the initial phase up to 2006 should seek pragmatic and dynamic solutions which would improve current cooperation between existing instruments and increase the effectiveness and visibility of cross-border and regional co-operation on the basis of the existing legal framework. A more far-reaching solution could then be considered at a later stage for the period from 2007 onwards, following an assessment of relevant legal and budgetary issues.

The Commission will continue to reflect and elaborate an overall methodology to put the Wider Europe - Neighbourhood concept into practice. This includes a thorough review of our current relationships with the countries concerned and the preparation of the first action plans. Based on the Thessaloniki conclusions, the Commission will next year present to the Council a comprehensive report including proposals for concrete actions.

This rest of this report concerns the three candidate countries not included in the accessions taking place on 1 May 2004, i.e. **Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey**. The 2003 Regular Reports on these three countries present a detailed analysis of their progress towards accession over the past twelve months. This progress is assessed by means of the same criteria and the same methodology which has been consistently applied to all candidates. Pursuant to the conclusions of the Copenhagen (1993) and Madrid (1995) European Councils, the report pays attention both to legislative changes and to their administrative capacity to implement and enforce the *acquis*. The Reports show that Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey have moved forward on the three sets of criteria – the political, economic and *acquis* criteria - established by the 1993 Copenhagen European Council.

⁴ Communication from the Commission - Paving the way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument, 1 July 2003 (COM(2003) 393 final).