

Address given by Günter Verheugen on EU enlargement (Strasbourg, 13 November 2001)

Caption: On 13 November 2001, Günter Verheugen, European Commissioner for Enlargement, delivers to the European Parliament an address in which he gives a progress report on the negotiations for accession to the European Union.

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**Günter Verheugen, Member of European Commission responsible for Enlargement,
"Making a success of enlargement" (European Parliament Strasbourg, 13 November
2001)**

Madam President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year's progress reports and the revised accession partnerships show how far we have come along the path marked out. After almost a year we can safely say that the road map fixed at Nice has given the candidates huge impetus and that the transposition of Community legislation is progressing even more quickly and smoothly.

On the whole the Commission considers that all the accession candidates have made substantial progress in meeting the Copenhagen criteria, both in regard to the transposition of legislation and implementing the acquis. As a result significant advances have also been made in the negotiations.

All the candidate countries — with the exception of Turkey — meet the political criteria. Substantial progress has been made in increasing the independence, transparency and efficiency of public administrations. In most of the accession countries further improvements have been made in the operation of the legal system. Despite the general progress in meeting the political criteria, certain problem areas remain, which are identified clearly and unequivocally in our reports: corruption, minority rights (Roma people) and the trafficking in human beings. Here, we expect further improvements from the candidate countries.

The progress made in fulfilling the economic criteria established in Copenhagen must be assessed in the context of the serious deterioration in economic conditions world-wide. Nevertheless in 2000 and in the first half of this year the candidate countries achieved relatively strong economic growth. Cyprus and Malta already meet all the economic criteria. The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia are functioning market economies and will soon be able to meet the competitiveness criterion, provided they continue their reforms with undiminished resolve. Bulgaria and Romania have made progress, whereas Turkey, with its severe economic crisis, does not yet meet the economic criteria.

On the whole there is good progress in the adoption of the acquis and the countries are on course to meet the timetable. However, the candidate countries must make further adjustments to their administrative and legal capacities to the EU's more stringent requirements in order to reach a satisfactory level.

An efficient administration is not only necessary to transpose the Union's laws completely and in the necessary time frame, but also to ensure Community resources are used effectively, especially where the structural funds are concerned. Further improvements are necessary in nearly all the countries in regard to efficiency of administration, but such improvements are feasible.

In its strategy paper the Commission proposes an action plan to increase the efficiency of institutions in the candidate countries. If necessary further improvements will be supported by means of additional measures for modernising the administration (institution building facility).

The Commission will report to the Council on the implementation of its action plan early next year so that the plan can be taken into account in the accession negotiations. The 2002 progress reports will then assess whether the candidate countries are equipped with an adequate administrative capacity to transpose, implement and enforce the acquis fully by the time of accession.

The accession negotiations with Cyprus are well advanced. It is our strategic goal to take in a united Cyprus as a new member. This requires constructive and substantial progress towards a lasting peace solution. I therefore reiterate my appeal to all concerned to make use of the "window of opportunity" to achieve this goal.

The pre-accession strategy for Turkey is showing the first positive results. The constitutional reform recently adopted by the Turkish Parliament is a step in the right direction. Further reforms are necessary, especially in regard to effective protection of human rights and the implementation of economic reforms. The Commission considers that it is now time to intensify the pre-accession strategy. A more detailed scrutiny of legislation and its approximation to the *acquis* will be in the forefront.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 2002 we are embarking as scheduled in the roadmap on the most politically sensitive stage of the accession negotiations. We will lay down a general framework for the negotiation of the financial chapter which ensures that it can be dealt with in a common framework.

The Commission is confident that the enlargement negotiations can be successfully completed on the basis of the current *acquis*. We will strictly observe the expenditure limits of Agenda 2000.

It will therefore also be possible to conduct enlargement negotiations independently of future policy reforms, in the area of agricultural and structural policy in particular.

The negotiation progress has now reached its most difficult and politically sensitive phase. The issues at stake will have direct impact on the lives of citizens in the accession countries. The decisions made now will influence either positively or negatively the acceptance of the accessions in the candidate countries.

We must therefore make every effort to give the citizens in today's and tomorrow's Member States all the information about enlargement. No partner should be subjected to excessive demands in the accession process. It is therefore essential that negotiations be both flexible and result-oriented.

Taking stock today of the progress made in the past year, the results are both positive and encouraging. On the basis of next year's progress reports the Commission will make recommendations on the accession of those countries that are sufficiently prepared. It will make strenuous efforts to ensure that the negotiations are successfully completed with these countries.

The progress reports submitted today naturally focus on the areas in which there are still problems. This does not mean that we are looking primarily at shortcomings. The reports must be considered against the background of the enormous progress made over recent years. Only if we compare what has been achieved and what remains to be done does the full picture emerge. The aim of achieving the first accessions before the European elections in 2004 remains a demanding one. But it is not a utopian dream - it is a realistic and feasible challenge.

For the candidate countries who are not among the first accession countries, the Commission considers that all negotiation chapters can be opened in the next year. In its strategy paper for 2002 the Commission will also review the road map for these countries and if necessary will develop the pre-accession strategy further.