

Medlemmerne af Folketingets
Europaudvalg og deres stedfortrædere

Asiatisk Plads 2
DK-1448 København K
Tlf. +45 33 92 00 00
Fax +45 31 54 05 33
Telex 31292 ETR DK
Telegr. adr. Etrangeres
Girokonto 3 00 18 06

Bilag
1

Kontor
N.1

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The Launching of the Enlargement Process

I. INTRODUCTION

Following the successful conclusion of the Intergovernmental Conference at the Amsterdam European Council, the Commission presented its communication "Agenda 2000" in July 1997. Since then Agenda 2000 has been dealt with in detail by the Council and Coreper. The Council (General Affairs) has been discussing the communication at all its sessions. Foreign ministers had an in-depth debate at the informal meeting in Mondorf in October and Heads of State and Government in the margin of the European Council meeting on employment on 20 November. Coreper has had "Agenda 2000" on its agenda every week.

In general, the work within the Council has shown that the Commission communication has formed a good basis for discussions. At the same time, the Mondorf meeting, as well as the informal discussions of Heads of State and Government, showed general agreement that further steps were needed to ensure the inclusiveness of the enlargement process and to avoid negative reactions in certain candidate countries.

In most areas we seem close to an agreement at the Luxemburg European Council in December. On two issues, however, consensus has not yet been reached: The specific model for the launching of the enlargement negotiations and the principles for sharing financial resources between those candidates most likely to join the Union first and other candidates.

II. LAUNCHING THE ENLARGEMENT PROCESS

a) The need for inclusiveness, non-discrimination and credibility

As discussions have evolved there seems to be general agreement that the enlargement model to be established should meet the following criteria:

- **inclusiveness:** The enlargement process must include all candidate countries irrespective of their present stage of preparations;
- **non-discrimination:** All candidate countries must be measured by the same yard-sticks and be treated on an equal basis;
- **credibility:** The model must make it absolutely clear to all candidate countries - and to their populations - that they form part of the enlargement process and will become members of the Union once they fulfill the criteria for membership.

Denmark and Sweden together with a number of other Member States have consistently argued that the best way to meet these criteria would be to start negotiations with all candidate countries simultaneously. Concerns have been voiced that such a model would risk delaying the negotiations for those candidate countries who have made the greatest progress towards meeting the criteria for membership. In order to allay such fears and provide safeguards against delays, Denmark and Sweden would like to offer some further ideas on the launching of the enlargement process.

b) A possible model

Ways must be found to meet the above mentioned criteria, without causing delays in the negotiations of those countries that meet the Copenhagen criteria in the medium term. The first feature of such a model must be that it involves a **unitary launching of the negotiations with all candidate countries**. In order to achieve this, the launching should take the form of one single decision by the European Council in Luxemburg encompassing all candidate countries. The candidate countries would be invited to express their approval on the occasion of the opening meeting in March 1998 (in the format of 15+ 11).

The decision could contain the following elements:

**Decision of the Member States meeting within the Council
on the launching of the enlargement negotiations
with 11 Candidate Countries
within the framework of
article O of the TEU**

Preamble

[The historical context, cfr. chapter A in the draft on general framework of negotiations (doc. 12203/97)]

1. A Reinforced Preaccession Strategy

[Description of the elements of the reinforced strategy, including accession partnership, participation in Community programmes and agencies, financial assistance and multilateral dialogue on enlargement related issues (including an Enlargement Committee to meet at various levels, cfr. Germany's proposal). This chapter will supplement the regulation on accession partnership based on article 235.]

2. General Framework for Negotiations

[The Union's general framework for negotiations, which will be valid for all candidate countries - cfr. chapter B and C in the draft general framework for negotiations (doc. 12221/97)]

3. Negotiation Process

[The negotiation process will fall in two stages:

- multilateral acquis screening to be concluded before December 1998 involving all candidate countries;

- the next phase of the negotiations would continue on a bilateral basis immediately thereafter (in practice from the beginning of 1999). Member States will pursue these bilateral negotiations in January 1999 with the 5+1 countries recommended by the Commission in its July 1997 communication and with any other candidate country that might be judged to be ready.

This is to be complemented with an annual review on request by a candidate country. The first review would be concluded in December 1998. The review should be based solely on the criteria used by the Commission recommendation of July 1997, i.e. fulfilment of the political criteria and the estimation that the candidate is able to meet the Copenhagen criteria within 4-5 years. The review would take the form of a Commission recommendation, the presumption being that such a recommendation would be followed by a unanimous decision in the Council (general affairs)..

For the other Candidates negotiations would continue in a bilateral framework (partnership-activities and continued review of acquis progress).

c) Financial support

Denmark and Sweden would hope that agreement could be reached at the European Council in Luxemburg on a substantial increase in overall financial support to the candidate countries, in line with the Commission proposal. We could agree that the support would be inscribed in a separate budget chapter.

To underline the inclusive nature of the process it is suggested that the European Council agree on the basic principles of non-discrimination between candidate countries independently of their time of accession, while agreeing that particular attention should be paid to those countries with the greatest need. The European Council could address a recommendation to the EIB that it follows a similar approach in its lending policy in the context of the EIB preadhesion facility.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Denmark and Sweden recommend the above ideas for consideration by the Council in preparation of the European Council on 12-13 December 1997.

27 November 1997