

**PRESS RELEASE**

**7095/98 (Presse 86)**

LAUNCHING OF THE ACCESSION PROCESS

**2078th Council meeting**

**- GENERAL AFFAIRS -**

**Brussels, 30/31 March 1998**

**Presidents: Mr Robin COOK**  
Secretary of State for Foreign and  
Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom

**Mrs Margaret BECKETT**  
President of the Board of Trade of the United  
Kingdom (for the WTO item)

The Governments of the Member States and the European Commission were represented as follows:

**Belgium:**

Mr Erik DERYCKE

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Denmark:**

Mr Niels HELVEG PETERSEN

Mr Friis Arne PETERSEN

Mr Gunnar ORTMANN

Minister for Foreign Affairs

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

**Germany:**

Mr Klaus KINKEL

Mr Werner HOYER

Mr Lorenz SCHOMERUS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Minister of State, Foreign Affairs

State Secretary, Federal Minister of Economic Affairs

**Greece:**

Mr Theodoros PANGALOS

Mr Giorgios PAPANDREOU

Mr Giannos KRANIDIOTIS

Mr Alekos BALTAS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

State Secretary for Economic Affairs

**Spain:**

Mr Abel MATUTES

Mr Ramón de MIGUEL

Minister for Foreign Affairs

State Secretary for European Affairs

**France:**

Mr Hubert VEDRINE

Mr Pierre MOSCOVICI

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Minister with responsibility for European Affairs

**Ireland:**

Mr Frank FAHEY

Mr Tom KITT

Minister of State

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise,

Trade and Employment

**Italy:**

Mr Lamberto DINI

Mr Augusto FANTOZZI

Mr Piero FASSINO

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Minister for Foreign Trade

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

**Luxembourg:**

Mrs Lydie ERR

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

**Netherlands:**

Mr Hans VAN MIERLO

Mr Michiel PATIJN

Mrs Anneke VAN DOK VAN WEELE

Minister for Foreign Affairs

State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

State Secretary for Economic Affairs

**Austria:**

Mr Wolfgang SCHÜSSEL

Mr Johann FARNLEITNER

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Federal Minister for Economic Affairs

**Portugal:**

Mr Jaime GAMA

Mr Francisco SEIXAS da COSTA

Mr Victor RAMALHO

Minister for Foreign Affairs

State Secretary for European Affairs

State Secretary attached to the Minister for Economic Affairs

**Finland:**

Mrs Tarja HALONEN  
Mr Ole NORRBACK

Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Minister for European Affairs

**Sweden:**

Mrs Lena HJELM-WALLÉN  
Mr Leif PAGROTSKY  
Mr Gunnar LUND

Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Minister at the Ministry for Industry and Trade  
State Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs

**United Kingdom:**

Mr Robin COOK

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Mrs Margaret BECKETT  
Mrs Clare SHORT  
Mr Doug HENDERSON  
Lord CLINTON-DAVIS

President of the Board of Trade  
Secretary of State for International Development  
Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry

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**Commission:**

Mr Jacques SANTER  
Sir Leon BRITTAN  
Mr Manuel MARIN  
Mr João de Deus PINHEIRO  
Mr Hans VAN DEN BROEK

President  
Vice-President  
Vice-President  
Member  
Member

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**Participants of the Applicants countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus :****Bulgaria**

Mrs Nadejda MIHAILOVA

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Estonia**

Mr Toomas Hendrik ILVES

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Hungary**

Mr László KOVÁCS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Latvia**

Mr Valdis BIRKAVS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Lithuania**

Mr Algirdas SAUDARGAS

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Poland**

Mr Bronislaw GEREMEK

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Romania**

Mr Andrei Gabriel PLESU

Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Slovak Republic**

Mr Jozef KALMAN

Deputy Prime Minister

**Czech Republic**

Mr Jaroslav ŠEDIVÝ

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs

**Slovenia**

Mr Boris FRLEC  
Mr Igor BAVČAR

Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Minister for European Affairs

**Cyprus**

Mr Ioannis KASOULIDES

Minister for Foreign Affairs

## **ENLARGEMENT**

### **- LAUNCHING OF THE ACCESSION PROCESS**

The joint Ministerial meeting launching the Accession Process with the 11 Applicant States was held during the morning of 30 March.

In his opening statement the President of the Council recalled that this meeting formed part of the implementation of Article O of the Treaty of the EU and put into effect the decision of the Luxembourg European Council which defined this process as inclusive, global and evolutive.

The President underlined that the historic decisions in Luxembourg had made possible the inauguration of the overall enlargement process on 12 March 1998 in London. He also stressed that today's joint Ministerial meeting marked a new milestone in the process of European construction, the end of the post-war division and the extension of the European integration into Central and Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. It will culminate in an enlarged Union of nearly 500 million citizens, bringing a step closer the vision of the founding fathers of the Community of an "ever closer union among the peoples of Europe". To this end, the enhanced pre-accession strategy defined in Luxembourg will offer substantial, targeted and practical help to prepare the applicant States for accession.

The meeting, which was televised to the press and the public, gave to all participants - Ministers of the candidate countries and the present Member States - the opportunity to set out their expectations regarding the accession process. It enabled in particular the representatives of the candidate countries to express their aspirations for a rapid and successful outcome of this process. On their side, the present Member States, drawing on their experience of membership, commented on various aspects of the accession process. Commissioner Van den Broek elaborated on the role of the Accession Partnerships, which mobilise all forms of assistance to the applicant States of Central and Eastern Europe within a single framework. He also indicated the next steps to be taken in the process, in particular the launching of the screening of the "acquis" of the Union.

On behalf of the Union President Robin COOK expressed the conviction that the comprehensive accession process launched today can be concluded successfully with all participants, given the common political will which exists on all sides: success in this endeavour is an imperative for all.

The President concluded that it was now up to the Applicant States, as part of an evolutive and dynamic process, to take full advantage of the pre-accession period, in order to make rapid progress along the path mapped out towards accession; the European Union reiterated its commitment to give its full support.

#### **- OPENING OF ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS**

In the morning of 31 March were held six Ministerial Intergovernmental Conferences opening the accession negotiations with Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Czech Republic and Slovenia.

In each of the meetings the President of the Council presented the general position of the European Union and Commissioner Van den Broek made a complementary statement concerning in particular the implementation of the screening with the candidates of the "acquis" of the Union.

Each of the candidate countries set out its strategic objectives, as well as the political, cultural and socio-economic aspirations it was pursuing with its application for membership of the European Union.

All the applicant States stressed that the opening of the accession negotiations with the Union was an historic event for their respective countries. They also underlined their determination to spare no effort to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion.

At the end of each meeting the President of the Council proposed to the applicant states a date for the first meeting at Deputy level (23/24 April). These meetings should aim in particular at fixing the modalities of the negotiations and the first work programmes.

Following are recalled the bases and principles enshrined in the EU position for the negotiations, as expressed by the President of the Council :

- Accession implies full acceptance of the actual and potential rights and obligations attaching to the Union system and its institutional framework, known as the "acquis" of the Union. It will include the Treaty of Amsterdam, once it enters into force, which represents the latest stage of European construction.
- The "acquis" has to be applied as it stands at the time of accession. Furthermore, accession requires effective implementation of the "acquis", which implies in particular the establishment of an efficient, reliable public administration.
- The Union attaches a primordial importance to Justice and Home Affairs and the need for all applicant States to make rapid progress in this area even before accession.
- There is a need for a progressive alignment of the applicant States' policies and positions towards third countries and within international organisations to those of the Union. The "acquis" includes all the commitments entered into and the policies pursued by the Union externally.
- The negotiations with each of the applicant States, while separate, will be conducted on the basis of the same principles and criteria as the negotiations with the other applicants. The pace of progress will depend upon the individual situation of each applicant.
- The acceptance of the rights and obligations resulting from membership may give rise exceptionally to non-permanent transitional measures, to be defined during the accession negotiations. Transitional measures shall be limited in time and scope, and accompanied by a plan with clearly defined stages for application of the "acquis".
- Individual progress in preparing for accession will contribute to the advancement of the negotiations, taking into account in particular the Copenhagen and Madrid criteria and the fulfilment of the applicant States' obligations under the Europe Agreement, as well as the implementation of the Accession Partnerships.
- Enlargement should strengthen the process of continuous creation and integration in which the Union and its Member States are engaged. Every effort should be made to ensure that the institutional structures of the Union are not weakened or diluted, or its powers of action reduced.
- The Union side, for its part, will decide at the appropriate moment whether the conditions for the conclusion of negotiations have been met.