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Enlargement Weekly

15 April 2002

Welcome to Enlargement Weekly. This weekly bulletin provides an overview of what European Union enlargement has got to, who's doing what in the EU, in the institutions or candidate countries, and how the main challenges are being met.

Articles this week

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CZECH ACCESSION "SHOULD NOT BE HINDERED BY BENES DECREES"

Czech accession to the EU should not be compromised or hindered by history, insists European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen and Czech prime minister Milos Zeman, in Prague on 11 April. They issued a joint statement affirming that legislation from the past - particularly the post-war Czechoslovak laws on rights of German and Austrian citizens known generally as the Benes decrees - was not an impediment to the future. And they stressed the need to look forwards rather than backwards. The move is part of a determined attempt to calm tensions that have shown themselves recently in Germany and Austria over the impact of these laws.

"European integration has always primarily been a political process. Since its very beginning, the key objective has been to overcome old divisions, enmities and prejudices, and to strengthen peace, justice, freedom and security", said Verheugen and Zeman. Despite "the pain and suffering caused by the horrors of the Second World War", European integration means "to move forward from there - not to look back in acrimony and continue fighting old battles".

"Some of these acts would not pass muster today if judged by current standards - but the belong to history", said the Verheugen-Zeman statement. The EU-Czech assessment current underway has demonstrated that the laws on citizenship and on property "no longer produce legal effects", and "are not part of the accession negotiations and should have no bearing on them", it went on. Some other acts are still under scrutiny and subject to further clarification and Czechoslovak restitution legislation and practice since the early 1990s is also being reviewed by the Czech authorities. But the EU and its member states must judge candidate states "on their present, not their past performance", according to the statement, which warns of "the need to guard against awakening the demons of nationalism".

Commissioner Verheugen made his intentions even clearer later in the day in a speech at the Charles University in Prague: "It gives me great cause for concern when in Austria (and Germany, voices are heard casting doubt on the suitability of the Czechs for EU membership because of the Czechoslovak Presidential decrees. However, one should not attach too much importance to it. In both countries, only a minority of people listen to these voices. In Germany the country I know better of the two, it is a tiny and ever shrinking minority. What worries me though, is that sections of Czech public opinion are still worried that people in the Czech Republic could still be driven out of their homes by some kind of lawsuit for repossession. The law as it stands makes that quite impossible and no-one in Europe would or could ever change that", he insisted. "Perhaps," he suggested, "the Czechs themselves should finally start to believe this".

For the full speech, see "What's new?" the web site of the European Commission delegation in Prague, <http://www.evropska-unie.cz/eng/>

VERHEUGEN INSISTS THAT ENLARGEMENT TOUCHES THE FUTURE MORE THAN THE PAST

European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen took advantage of his visit to Prague to deliver a strong view at the historic Charles University that "European integration is not about changing the past but about shaping the future". And much of his remarks focused on the need for a healthy balance between national and European ambitions and sentiments.

He made clear how high he believes the stakes are, even at this advanced stage of the process: "The EU must refrain from doing anything that could undermine confidence in its wish to go ahead with enlargement. The same goes for its individual members. Enlargement, especially to the East, is an easy target for populists of every hue. The political, cultural and economic elites in the existing member states and the member states-to-be have a clear responsibility. They must immunise their societies against anti-European populists and explain what the project is about."

"Enlargement is not something that the EU's ruling elites can take or leave as they see fit", he said. It is "Europe's response to the unhappy history of the last century". It is impossible to make a credible case for a policy that would exclude the new democracies in eastern and central Europe from full participation in the integration process", he argued.

He insisted on the need for a realistic understanding of the need to make an enlarged Europe and make it work: "There is only one way that so many different peoples can live so close together in such a relatively small continent, and often enough in the same neighbourhood. And that is if everyone accepts certain overarching ground rules. Otherwise, if people stick rigidly to their own national way of doing things, there is bound to be conflict." He reminded his audience that "The goal of safeguarding peace through integration is a thread running right through what can be a rather opaque integration process".

The Commissioner also tackled head-on some of the tough economic questions underlying these final stages of the enlargement debate. He acknowledged EU finance minister complaints about the cost of enlargement, and accepted that public opinion in the member states "is not very happy about these additional costs". He saw it as understandable that areas that have received most support up until now are worried that they might lose their eligibility for



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support for purely statistical reasons.

"These concerns cannot simply be brushed aside", he admitted. But, he went on, "willingness to show solidarity across the whole of Europe is a sine qua non". It was not question of charity, but of enlightened self-interest, because enlargement will bring economic benefits to both parties if the new markets develop quickly. He also recognised unambiguously another of the key issues underlying the economic approach to enlargement: "It will be difficult - in some cases impossible - to muster sufficient support for accession in the candidate countries unless they enjoy the full benefits of integration on the same basis as the existing members. If they do not, you can be sure that the new stability would be short-lived and the political situations would arise that would cost more to deal with than even the most generously financed enlargement", he said.

Speaking on a personal note, as a German of the post-war generation, the Commissioner said: "For me, European integration was never just one option amongst many others; it was an absolute necessity... I don't think you have to justify yourself when you defend Europe. I think you have to justify yourself when you don't. I do not underestimate the cohesive force of the nation state, and I do not try to deny it. I am a German. But I am quite clear that I cannot be European on German conditions. I can only be a German under European conditions."

And he expressed himself strongly in urging attention to future possibilities rather than past grievances: "We cannot afford to waste time and energy on pointless debates... We have to make sure that Europe maintains its immunity against its greatest enemy: excessive nationalism, which brings only exclusion, xenophobia, gross self-interest and the arrogant illusion of superiority. You cannot be a good Czech, Pole, German or Italian without being committed European", he concluded.

LINKING SMALL BUSINESSES TO ENLARGEMENT

To ensure that enlargement preparations move forward simultaneously across all the necessary fronts - political, economic, social, cultural... - the EU is working with the candidate countries on a wide range of subjects. One imminent exercise, closely related to the EU's own plans to develop its competitiveness, growth, and jobs (the so-called Lisbon strategy), will be a major meeting in Slovenia later this month aimed at improving conditions for the small businesses on which prosperity will depend so heavily in the candidate countries.

Candidate countries are due to endorse the European Charter for small businesses at the conference in Maribor on 23-24 April. Key issues at the conference will include education for entrepreneurship, access to finance, simplifying administrative procedures for business start-ups and setting up efficient support services for enterprises. As European Commission President Romano Prodi noted at the Barcelona European Council in March, endorsing the Charter's priorities is crucial to the drive to involve candidate countries more extensively in the policies and working methods at the heart of the Lisbon strategy.

In February, Enterprise and Information Society Commissioner Erkki Liikanen invited the EU accession candidate countries to endorse the European Charter. "The Commission is strongly committed to ensuring that the March 2000 Lisbon European Council's targets will be achieved in the enlarged Union".

At the conference, candidate country ministers and representatives of the private sector will discuss how to make the business environment more conducive to entrepreneurship and friendlier to small and medium-sized enterprises. The conclusions will contribute to defining future actions to be undertaken to help candidate countries make progress towards the Lisbon goals.

The conference is a milestone in the process of integrating candidate countries into EU enterprise policy, launched in March 2001 with the preparation of a report on entrepreneurship and competitiveness in the accession countries. Candidate country endorsement of the



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Charter is seen as having significant political value for countries completing their transition from planned to open market economies. In addition, candidate countries are now to be included in the Commission's annual report to the spring European Council on the implementation of the European Charter, and will fully participate in the Multi-annual Programme for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship 2001-2005, which includes policy performance benchmarking activities, the use of financial instruments and the Euro Initiatives' business support network.

Enlargement news in brief

Verheugen to report to EU ministers on enlargement

The General Affairs Council in Luxembourg on April 15 will hear a report from European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen on the state of play of the enlargement negotiations. His report will note that the 21 March Accession Conferences with ten candidate countries in Brussels allowed nine more chapters to be provisionally closed with Poland, Estonia, Malta, Slovakia and Lithuania, as well as the opening of two more chapters with Bulgaria and five more with Romania, in line with the conclusions of the Laeken European Council, which asked for special support to be given to these two candidates.

The next Accession Conference is scheduled for 22 April, and chapters that might be dealt with on that occasion include institutions, financial and budgetary questions as well as regional policy. The Spanish Presidency of the EU is expected to review the current work programme at the General Affairs Council, in particular plans for finalising the negotiation chapters on institutions, financial and budgetary questions and regional policy, on which the Commission is working on draft common positions.

In the meantime, the working party on the drafting of the Accession Treaty met for the first time on 13 March. During its April 15 session, the Council will also briefly deal with the issue of relations of the enlarged EU with its eastern neighbours, in particular Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova.

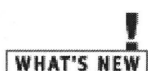
Last chance for Cyprus reunification?

The EU's accession timetable requires that the basic elements of an agreement between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities emerge in the course of this summer, according to Michael Emerson and Nathalie Tocci of the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), their latest study, "Towards resolution of the Cyprus conflict". At any event, they predict, this may well be the last chance for re-unification of the island. Should the divided island join the EU, there would be grave consequences for EU-Turkish relations. If Cyprus does not join, the entire EU enlargement could founder on a Greek veto. "There is only one good outcome, and two bad ones", it says.

The new report explores how a simultaneous re-unification and accession to the EU might be shaped, with a transformation of "the political structures and interests that have up to now made it impossible to resolve the division of the island". The proposed solution includes a three-tier political structure - the EU, the common state, and the two constituent states, with some adjustment of the territorial border in favour of the Greek Cypriot community, to resolve a substantial part of the refugee return problem, and property compensation arrangements for most of the others.

Rupel's view on democracy

Slovenia's approach to EU membership is based on the supremacy of the nation state, coupled with a clear determination to ensure that smaller countries are considered the equal of larger members, according to Dimitrij Rupel, the Slovenian foreign affairs minister, speaking at a European Policy Centre briefing in Brussels on 9 April. He said he favoured the use of



positive discrimination to bring this about. The key to an enlarged EU was the preservation of cultural identities and the predominance of the intergovernmental method, he said. And he warned that unless the democratic deficit is resolved, public complaints about a faceless Brussels bureaucracy would continue. Citizens had difficulty in identifying with impersonal bureaucrats, and national and ethnic identification was important for efficient governance, he insisted. Certain areas of national life must remain in the exclusive competence of member states, he said, certainly including language, culture, and education.

EU "Green week" will see critical focus on candidates too

The World Wildlife Fund is organising a series of events highlighting existing and potential threats to natural areas in central and eastern Europe during the "Green week", which the EU is holding on April 15-19. WWF plans to give special attention to the implications - both positive and negative - of EU accession for nature, as well as for ongoing efforts to protect the environment and achieve sustainable development in the region.

The European Commission has provided support for the programme, which is taking place in the Commission's own Charlemagne building in Brussels. The events include the presentation of cases where valuable natural areas from Poland to Bulgaria are threatened by different forms of development, from dam building to highway construction; an assessment of the impact that transportation infrastructure planned for central and eastern Europe could have on valuable bird habitats in the accession countries; results of a survey of bio-diversity and socio-economic threats in the Carpathian Mountains; and a discussion on whether enlargement is proving to be a missed opportunity for the future of rural areas: "In rhetoric, the EU has clearly recognised the challenge of achieving sustainable development in rural areas of the accession countries. But does rhetoric fit actual practice? To what extent does progressive legislation like the Water Framework Directive or Natura 2000 and various funding programs like SAPARD, ISPA, and Phare contribute to sustainable rural development?" WWF will be asking.

Lithuanian Sapard payouts

Lithuania has already distributed LTL 99.75 million from the European Union's Sapard programme for agriculture and rural development. The national paying agency reports that non-returnable financial support was given to 90 farmers and agricultural enterprises during the first stage of fund distribution. 16 applicants obtained support for the investment in primary agricultural produce, 11 applicants for the processing of agricultural and fishery products, 10 applicants for the development of economic activities providing for alternative income, 19 applicants for the improvement of rural infrastructure and 34 applicants for vocational training. During the next stage, applications will be accepted for investment in primary agricultural produce. In 2001-2006 Lithuania expects to receive LTL 750 million in SAPARD funds.

Estonia expects energy transitional period

The Estonian minister for economic affairs and transport and communications Liina Tonisson believes Estonia is likely to win a transitional period from the European Union for opening up the energy market. She told representatives of the Estonian Employers' Central Union in early April that Estonia would not have to drop its request for a five-year delay in opening up 35% of its electricity market to competition. She stressed that a transitional period was necessary to ensure the renovation of the Narva Power generating stations. Jüri Kõo, chairman of the power utility, Estonian Energy, said that a decision was needed by the government about what proportion of Estonia's energy consumption Estonian Energy had to guarantee, since this was the crucial factor in decisions about further investments and the price of electricity. Currently Estonian consumers purchasing at least 540 giga watt-hours a year are permitted to choose their supplier, and major consumers of this nature currently purchase 10-15 percent of the electricity sold in Estonia.

EFTA worries over enlargement



The four-member European Free Trade Association is looking forward to EU enlargement, but continues to maintain that it presents some challenges. Work is not proceeding rapidly on EFTA candidates' applications to join the European Economic Area, which links EFTA to the EU although Mr Rossier says he is confident it will be completed in time to allow simultaneous accession to both organisations, and simultaneous parliamentary ratification. Anything other than simultaneous enlargement of the EEA and the EU could lead to disruption of trade.

EFTA is particularly concerned about the implications for Norway's and Iceland's trade in fish unless new arrangements are agreed, said its Secretary General, William Rossier, presenting the EFTA annual report for 2001 in Brussels on April 9. He also flatly denies that EFTA is facing extinction, despite current discussions within its own member states of possible EU accession. A recent poll in Iceland suggested overwhelming public support for leaving EFTA and joining the EU, and the issue is likely to figure in Iceland's upcoming general election. The new Norwegian government coalition has explicitly refused to discuss the subject, which remains a divisive issue. Even Switzerland's recent narrow public vote in favour of joining the UN is being construed as another indication that EU accession too may come back on the agenda within the next few years. EFTA's secretary general also made plain when he was in Brussels that he had no intention of seeking to win new members from "failed EU candidates".

Reassurance for candidates' researchers on EU research programme

Candidate countries will not be disadvantaged by the new instruments proposed for the EU Sixth Framework programme for research, nor by the different starting points at which the countries will begin fully participating in the programme, according to the European Commission Director-General for Research, Achilleas Mitsos. He was responding to concerns expressed by researchers in some candidate countries that their lack of facilities may mean that they lose out in the new programme. For instance, Dr Karel Jungwirth, former vice-president of the Czech Academy of Sciences, has gone on record with worries "All players are playing by the same rules, but do not have the same opportunities at the beginning. They are coming from different starting places". And Professor Wojciech Maciejewski, chairman of the commission for international programmes at the Polish University rectors' conference, has said that the sort of integrated projects envisaged by the new programme would mean only big projects would qualify, and this would disadvantage smaller or less developed countries.

"The issue is not big projects versus small projects. It's not the size of the project that makes more or less efficient," said Mitsos in response. "The objective is not to go for big again small, but to go for integrated instead of dispersed efforts." The networks of excellence envisaged by the new programme will also be beneficial for candidate and smaller countries, he said, underlining that they are not intended to be a network of large entities and that there is a place for the excellent scientists that all candidate countries have.

During April, the Commission will meet representatives from candidate country research ministries to discuss the legal basis for their participation in the programme, and what the financial contribution should be. "The Commission view is that it wants to be sure the candidate countries will fully participate, and therefore won't bring about proposals that would make it difficult to do this," according to Mitsos.

Agenda

Date	Event
April	
Monday 15th	EU Council of Ministers working group on central Europe meets, Brussels



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	<p>EU foreign affairs ministers discuss enlargement at the General Affairs Council, Luxembourg</p> <p>Delegates from the candidate countries join their counterparts from the member states for discussions during et plenary of the Convention on the Future of Europe, Brussels</p> <p>EU-Slovenia Association Council, Luxembourg</p> <p>European Commission President Romano Prodi receives the Turkish deputy prime minister Mesut Yilmaz, Brussels</p> <p>European Employment and Social Affairs Commissioner Ana Diamantopoulou meets the Slovak president Milan Kucan, employment and social affairs minister Vlado Dimovski and National Assembly president Borut Pahor, Ljubljana</p> <p>European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen at the European Parliament foreign affairs committee, Brussels</p> <p>European Parliament committee on agriculture and rural development discusses the report by Spanish socialist Euro-MP María Rodríguez Ramos on an interim assessment in the EU and the applicant countries of rural development in the framework of Agenda 2000, and the report by German socialist Euro-MP Willi Görlach on the 2000 annual report on the SAPARD programme for agriculture and rural development in the candidate countries, Brussels</p>
Monday 15th-Tuesday 16th	<p>President of European Parliament Pat Cox visits Estonia, for contacts with the European affairs committee of the Estonian parliament, Toomas Savi, speaker of the parliament, prime minister Siim Kallas, foreign minister Kristiina Ojuland, and chief negotiator Alar Streimann.</p>
Tuesday 16 th	<p>European Research Commissioner Philippe Busquin meets Slovak education and research minister Milan Ftacnik and deputy prime minister Maria Kadlecikova, Bratislava</p> <p>EU Council of Ministers working group on enlargement meets, Brussels</p> <p>EU-Turkey Association Council, Luxembourg</p> <p>European Economic and Monetary Affairs Commissioner Pedro Solbes attends the Spanish Presidency seminar of enlargement, decentralisation and institutional reform, Segovia</p> <p>Richard Cachia Caruana, Malta's chief negotiator, and the European Commission's negotiator with Malta, Arhi Palosuo, at the European Parliament foreign affairs committee, Brussels</p>
Wednesday 17th	<p>European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen receives Latvian prime minister Andris Berzins, Brussels</p> <p>EU Council of Ministers working group on enlargement meets, Brussels</p> <p>European Employment and Social Affairs Commissioner Ana Diamantopoulou receives the chief negotiator for Cyprus, Georgios</p>

	Vassiliou, Brussels
Wednesday 17th-Thursday 18th	President of European Parliament Pat Cox visits Slovenia, and meets president Milan Kucan, Borut Pahor, speaker of the national assembly, and prime minister Janez Drnovšek.
Thursday 18th	European Budget Commissioner Michael Schreyer speaks on the financial implications of reform of EU policies in the wake of enlargement, Brussels
Thursday 18th and Friday 19th	European Internal Market Commissioner Frits Bolkestein visits Poland
Friday 19th and Monday 22nd	Negotiating session at the level of deputies (EU ambassadors and candidates' negotiators), Brussels.
Sunday 21st	Second round of Hungarian parliamentary elections
Monday 22nd	European Research Commissioner Philippe Busquin visits Slovenia
Tuesday 23rd-Wednesday 24th	European Commission conference on entrepreneurship in candidate countries, Maribor, Slovenia
Thursday 25th	European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen speaks at Forum Europe conference on EU enlargement, Brussels
Thursday 25th-Friday 26th	European Internal Market Commissioner Frits Bolkestein visits the Czech Republic Meeting of the liaison officers of the supreme audit institutions of the candidate countries, Malta
May	
Thursday 2nd-Friday 3rd	European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen visits Slovakia
Monday 6th	European Agriculture Commissioner Franz Fischler visits Bulgaria
Tuesday 7th	Meeting of the EU-Hungary Joint Consultative Committee, Budapest,
Monday 13th-Tuesday 14th	Meeting of the EU-Poland Joint Consultative Committee, Poland.
Thursday 16th-Friday 17th	European Institute of Public Administration conference on "A roadmap for candidate countries: how to steer eurozone integration economically", Maastricht
Thursday 23rd	Meeting of the EU-Slovak Republic Joint Consultative Committee



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Thursday 23rd-Friday 24th	European Commission Vice President for Transport and Energy Loyola de Palacio visits Poland
Wednesday 22nd-Friday 24th	Meeting of the EU-Romania Joint Consultative Committee, Alexandria
Thursday 30th-Friday 31st	European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen visits Bulgaria
Friday 31st	Negotiating session at the level of deputies (EU ambassadors and candidates' negotiators), Brussels.
June	
Monday 3rd	Possible negotiating session at the level of deputies (EU ambassadors and candidates' negotiators), Brussels.
Monday 10th	General Affairs Council will review the state of the enlargement process, Luxembourg
Monday 10th - Tuesday 11th	Ministerial negotiating session with foreign ministers of the EU and of the candidate countries, Luxembourg
Friday 14th and Saturday 15th	Czech Republic parliamentary elections
Friday 21st, Saturday 22nd	Seville European Council: European Commission reports on the implementation of the plan of action for strengthening the candidates' institutions.
Monday 24th	Informal meeting of education ministers from the EU and the candidate countries, Bratislava
Wednesday 26th	EU/European Economic Area (EEA) consultative committee will discuss the implications of EU enlargement for the future of the EEA at its annual meeting, Egilsstadir, Iceland
July	
Monday 1st	Start of Danish Presidency of the EU: the aim is to close negotiations before the end of the year with those countries that are ready. The Laeken summit noted that, if progress is maintained in the negotiations and in the reforms, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia could be ready.
Friday 5th	European Commission conference on enlargement from a local and regional perspective, Brussels
Thursday 11th-Friday 12th	Economic and Social Committee Joint Consultative Committee with Turkey, Erzerum
Autumn	



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Details tbc	Estonian local elections
Details tbc	Slovak parliamentary elections (probably September)
Details tbc	Slovenia presidential and local elections
October	
Details tbc	Hungary local elections
Details tbc	Latvia parliamentary elections
Details tbc	Poland regional elections
Wednesday 2nd-Thursday 3rd	Meeting of liaison officers from supreme audit institutions of the candidate countries and the European Court of Auditors, Luxembourg
24th and 25th	Brussels European Council: enlargement will be on the agenda and the Commission's regular reports on the candidate countries may be available.
November	
Details tbc	Ecofin Council discusses the report on economic dialogue with the candidate countries
Details tbc	Lithuania presidential elections
Thursday 28th and Friday 29th	Meeting of the presidents of the supreme audit institutions of the member states and the candidate countries, Luxembourg
December	
tbc	Meeting of heads of supreme audit institutions of the candidate countries and the European Court of Auditors, Bucharest
Thursday 12th, Friday 13th	Copenhagen European Council - enlargement may be on the agenda again, taking account of the aim of concluding accession negotiations by the end of the year.

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