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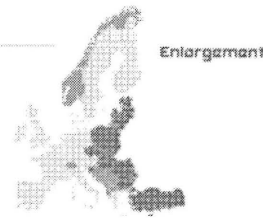
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PRESS CORNER

Enlargement Weekly - 09 September 2003



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

ESTONIA OPENS DISCUSSIONS ON STRUCTURAL FUNDS

Estonia is the latest acceding state to start talks with the European Union over its use of structural funds assistance. Negotiations started in Tallin on 8 September, aimed at finding an agreement on the strategy and priorities for promoting the development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind for the years 2004 to 2006. The whole of Estonia is eligible for this funding.

European Regional Affairs Commissioner Michel Barnier told Estonian finance minister Tonis Palts last month that Estonia's preparatory work was "excellent", and provided "a good basis for the negotiations that lie ahead". Barnier endorsed the Estonian desire to give priority to investments in areas that contribute to faster economic growth and job creation.

Almost €700 million is available to Estonia between now and 2006. Of this, some €386 million will be allocated to Estonia under the EU Structural Funds, focused on the productive sector and competitiveness, the development of human resources, rural development, agriculture, and the physical infrastructure - in particular transport. And some €312 million will be available under the Cohesion Fund to co-finance major environmental and transport infrastructure projects.

EASING LOCAL TRAFFIC OVER EUROPE'S NEW BORDERS

European Union enlargement means that many citizens living just on the other side of its new borders will face new controls when they want to cross into what will become EU territory on 1 May 2004. Short family or business trips from Russia into Latvia, or Ukraine into Poland or Hungary, for instance, could suddenly become administratively complicated. So to make life easier for people from non-EU countries who face this situation, the European Commission made proposals last week on what is known as "local border traffic" - which is defined as "the crossing of borders by nationals of third countries who live in border areas and regularly travel for

legitimate reasons to a member state of the Union without constituting a threat to security".

Possible solutions include special border-crossing points or corridors reserved for the inhabitants of border areas. And new types of document could be issued - such as a special visa for local border traffic, with limited territorial validity, but allowing the holder to cross repeatedly into the member state issuing the visa, for stays of up to seven consecutive days, but for less than three months every half-year. It could be valid for at least one year, and be issued free of charge.

Each member state would be entitled to negotiate bilateral agreements with each of the non-EU neighbours concerned, because of the local nature of small-scale cross-border traffic, but the Commission's proposal lays down some common concepts. Border-control authorities issuing these special visas would need to conduct full security checks on applicants, who would have to have lived for at least a year in the country where they make their application, and would have to demonstrate why they need to cross the border on a regular basis. And any bilateral agreement would have to confer reciprocal rights on EU citizens wanting to cross in the opposite direction.

The new rules would not apply to two of the candidate countries - Bulgaria and Romania - during their pre-accession phase, because their nationals do not need a visa to enter the EU. The same is true for Croatia. For some years, non-EU citizens will also find themselves subject to additional controls when they want to cross from a new member state into the Schengen Area of free movement - such as from the Czech Republic into Germany or Austria. This is because the new member states will not become full members of Schengen until at least 2006, and until they do they will have to maintain checks at their borders with Schengen states too. The Commission is also proposing that its new rules should apply at these "temporary" borders, as long as they remain in place. Here local traffic could be allowed to cross the border without having to get passports stamped, or use a separate corridor to EU citizens.

The **proposals** will now be examined by the EU Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

NEW EU GRANTS FOR ENVIRONMENT IN FUTURE MEMBER STATES

The European Commission approved funding last week for fourteen nature conservation projects in six future member states, under the LIFE-Nature programme 2003. The projects will help establish the EU-wide **Natura 2000 network** through the physical restoration of protected areas, the establishment of sustainable management structures and the strengthening of public awareness.

In the 2003 selection round the Commission received 182 applications from current and future member states. Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and, for the first time, Slovakia were among the winners (with a further 63 projects selected in 12 of the current member states). The participation of future member states in LIFE-Nature has allowed six of them to prepare for practical implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives. The sustainability of LIFE-Nature actions is an important criterion in selecting projects. Particular attention is also given to the involvement of citizens and local communities. Beneficiaries are obliged to undertake public awareness actions in their projects and a preference is given to projects which provide long-term assurance of the management of sites.

Two projects will be funded in Estonia. One aims to restore large areas of coastal grassland, particularly by encouraging the farmers and land-owners to reintroduce farming practices of grazing and mowing. The project will clear the areas of scrub and give farmers an initial boost to graze and mow the land. It is expected that long-term management agreements will be reached through agri-environmental programmes. The second project adopts a similar approach for polders along the shores of Lake Peipsi, where hay meadows

have recently been abandoned, threatening the nature conservation value of the sites.

In Hungary one project will be funded, to restore the Pannonic oak woodlands and dry grasslands on the Szénás Hills near Budapest. These have great botanical value but have suffered from past forestry practice and are under threat from the expanding suburbs of Budapest. Pine stands will be converted to natural woodlands and the excess game population brought under control. Awareness raising will be carried out locally.

Three projects will be funded in Latvia. The first will take place in a northern river valley of high natural value with a mix of taiga forests, alluvial woodlands, hay meadows and bogs, harbouring many EU-listed species, including over 300 pairs of corncrake. As the area is still not protected, the first tasks will be to make an inventory and draw up a management plan. The second project targets a huge wetland complex in the heart of Latvia. Originally artificial, the area includes the largest variety of wetland habitats in the country, but has suffered from highly dispersed management. The project will tackle this by creating a broad partnership of stakeholders to agree on a new water regime and other conservation actions for the area. The third project concerns Lake Pape, on the border with Lithuania, a former forbidden border area situated on the palearctic bird migratory route. Actions will include reintroduction of grazing of meadows and management of the water level of the lake and surrounding bogs.

Three projects will also be funded in Romania, to improve the conservation status of protected areas whilst at the same time promoting the sites for visitors. One project will restore forest habitats of stone pine, dwarf mountain pine and Norway spruce in the Rodna Mountains by planting seedlings taken from neighbouring areas. The second project will draw up and implement a management plan for the Macin Mountains in the south-east of the country, which host a rich and diverse flora and fauna. In the third project LIFE-Nature will co-finance conservation measures on five strategic sites in a national park in the Carpathians, including protection of bat colonies in caves and regulation of climbing and hiking to reduce degradation of valuable natural habitats. The actions will be integrated in the park's management plan and be a model for other potential sites in Romania.

Slovakia too has won funding for three projects. The first will improve conditions for the globally endangered imperial eagle, in close co-operation with a similar project in Hungary. Measures include surveillance of nests, moving power lines and increasing availability of prey. Surveys will improve knowledge of the species and help identify areas for protection. The second project targets the last remaining natural floodplain forests along the river Danube in Slovakia, where a sustainable forest management plan will be applied. Considerable effort will go into demonstrating appropriate management techniques. The third project concerns Sur Fen, one of the largest alder swamp woods in central Europe, on the outskirts of Bratislava. These suffer from having been drained continually since the 1940s, and the project will restore the former conditions to stop further desiccation of the forests. The project is strongly supported by a local municipality partner. Two projects will be funded in Slovenia. One is aimed at protection of the country's significant corncrake population - a globally threatened species which is classified as vulnerable on three sites in Slovenia, none of which is protected. The project foresees the production of a national corncrake action plan and management plans for each of the three sites. Guidelines drawn up will be tested by a series of concrete actions. The other project will ensure conservation of habitats and species - in particular EU-listed birds - within the Secovlje salt pans on the Dragonja estuary at the southern end of the Slovenian coast. Main actions will be the restoration of dykes and embankments and creation of additional breeding areas for terns.

SOLUTION IN SIGHT ON ACCEDING STATES' US INVESTMENT TREATIES

Problems with future member states' bilateral investment treaties with the United States are on the way to being solved. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic,

Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia still have such treaties, and some of their provisions raise compatibility issues with the EU *acquis*. In particular, they offer wider rights for US investors than the EU allows, in agriculture, energy, telecommunications, services, and audiovisual policy.

But now preparations are in their final stages for a Memorandum of Understanding which envisages amendment or abandonment of these bilateral agreements by the time of accession. European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen and European Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy last week set out the plan, and received authorisation from the Commission as a whole to sign a memorandum later this month, which should deal with most of the outstanding issues. Further negotiations will be needed, however, to modify provisions that exclude the possibility for governments to intervene economically at times of balance of payments or debt crisis; EU rules require that member state governments should enjoy this right.

The United States welcomed the move, too. "The United States supports EU enlargement and is pleased that we have reached an understanding that both maintains a positive investment environment in the accession states and furthers the objective of assuring compatibility between the obligations of US bilateral investment treaties and the obligations of membership in the EU," it said.

FUTURE MEMBER STATES BATTLING FOR POSITION IN 2004 PLAY-OFF

Several of the future member states improved their chances for 2004 last weekend - not in the EU accession stakes, but in the UEFA EURO 2004 football competition qualifier on September 6. The Czech Republic obtained a good result, coming from behind to defeat Belarus 3-1 in Minsk, extending its unbeaten run to seven matches and keeping its number two ranking in its group. Slovenia cruised to a 3-1 victory against Israel in Ljubljana, leaving it ranked second in its group, too. Romania, too, playing at home, routed Luxembourg 4-0, so it keeps the number two spot in its group. And Turkey, away to Liechtenstein, went back home with a 3-0 victory in its pocket, keeping it firmly at the top of its group.

But Cyprus went down 0-5 to France in Paris, leaving it second from bottom in its group. In the fixtures where the future member states were matched against one another, Bulgaria beat Estonia 2-0 in Sofia, to retain its leadership of its group. And Poland revived its chances of reaching the next stage of the competition with a 2-0 victory over Latvia in Riga, leaving both of them joint third in their group. Some of the future member states didn't play last weekend: Hungary, at the number two spot in its group; Lithuania and Slovakia, which are languishing second and third from bottom in their respective groups, and Malta, which is last in its group. The penultimate round of qualifying matches, on Wednesday September 10, will be crucial for some of the future member states fighting for an automatic place in next summer's finals, as they are scheduled to face the leaders in their respective groups: the Czech Republic against the Netherlands, Romania against Denmark, Slovenia against France, and Poland against Sweden. Bulgaria is sure to secure a play-off spot if it beats Andorra. Hungary and Latvia will fight it out, Malta will be playing Israel, Lithuania the Faroe Islands, and Slovakia Macedonia.

And, just like the regular reports, there is one more qualifying round within the groups still to take place, on October 11, before those that go through automatically to the finals are identified.

Enlargement news in brief

Warning over rush to the Euro

Acceding states were cautioned last week against being over-ambitious in their bids to switch to the Euro. The warning came from senior German finance ministry official Caio Koch-Weser - who is also the new chair of the EU's economic and finance committee, which advises EU finance ministers and also has a key role in deciding who can join the Euro. His reasoning is that a premature focus on meeting conditions for switching to the Euro would be likely to impede attempts by the acceding states to sort out their economies. Instead, the acceding states should deal with high deficits and high unemployment first - particularly since in most cases they will have to complete their restructuring without the public finance cushion of privatisation revenues now that most state assets have been sold off. Koch-Weser was insistent that the Euro itself should not be compromised by any political decisions to admit new members before they were ready: he said acceding states' economies would be monitored very closely.

Puwak postpones her visit

Hildegard Puwak, Romania's European integration minister, has postponed her planned visit to Brussels this week, when she was scheduled to meet European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen and Budget Commissioner Michaela Schreyer for talks about the final stages of accession negotiations. She is at the centre of an investigation into use of EU funding, after it emerged that companies controlled by her husband and son had received €150,000 from the EU's Leonardo programme while she was in government. Jonathan Scheele, Head of the Commission Delegation in Bucharest, said "the Commission is looking closely into the matter". A Commission audit team went to Bucharest last week, and the Romanian agency responsible for the Leonardo programme has been formally requested by the Commission to compile all the necessary information to help ascertain the facts. "It is clear that, in case irregularities are found, appropriate action will be taken", said Scheele, recalling "the Commission policy of zero tolerance to corruption related to the use of EU funds". Where there is any suspicion of irregularities, an investigation is conducted. If funds are incorrectly disbursed as a result of irregularities, the European Commission requires the responsible authorities to reimburse them to the EU budget, he added.

UK pushes enlargement in Norway

Denis MacShane, UK minister for Europe, spoke warmly of EU enlargement at a business forum in Oslo last week, and invited further Norwegian reflections on the theme. For the UK, he said, "it was axiomatic from the start that the EU must rise to the challenge of the end of the Cold War by offering a warm welcome to the former communist countries. They aspired to share our democratic values, our social justice, our security and our economic prosperity. It was overwhelmingly in our own interests as well as theirs to use the collective strengths of the EU to help them build the societies and institutions and infrastructures they needed so that they could join us as equal partners". Next year's accession by ten new member states "represents a major step in the most ambitious, successful and complex project of the EU's history. It will alter the character of the EU", he went on, adding: "I assume that it also alters the EU debate in Norway".

Schroeder backs Turkish accession bid

The first visit to Berlin of Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan last week won him some strong expressions of support from German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who stated that Turkey's EU membership would be in Germany's national interest. Erdogan used his visit to repeat his assurances about turning Turkey into a country which adheres to the highest democratic standards, and much of the German press commentary was also supportive of Turkey's accession. However, there is still opposition in Germany to Turkey's accession. The deputy leader of the CDU parliamentary group,

Wolfgang Bosbach, said last week Turkey would overstretch the EU's capacity to integrate new members, and Michael Glos, of the Bavarian CSU, promised to bring the issue into next year's European Parliament elections, because Turkey, he said, was part of a "completely different culture".

- See the new newsletter of the European Commission Representation in Turkey at <http://www.abinfoturk.net/news/news.asp?lang=1&mnID=15>

European Ombudsman to tour acceding states

The European Ombudsman, P Nikiforos Diamandouros, is to make an information tour of all ten acceding states. His aim is to inform citizens of their rights: "All EU citizens who might have a complaint to make to the European Ombudsman should be informed of how to do so. The general public should know that there is a European Ombudsman [link to <http://www.euro-ombudsman.eu.int>] and of the role he plays in ensuring that the EU institutions and bodies conform to the highest standards of administration", he said as he announced his programme. He is starting this week with a visit to Estonia, where will meet Estonian president Arnold Rüütel and prime minister Juhan Parts on September 11, as well as the country's legal chancellor, Allar Jõks, his counterpart there. He will also deliver a public lecture at the National Library, and meet the chairman of the constitutional committee of the Estonian parliament, Urmas Reinsalu.

Enlargement Mini-Briefs

- The European Parliament called for a vigorous continuation after enlargement of the European Union's commitment to solidarity across its regions, when it adopted two reports at its plenary session last week on cohesion policy. The allocation of EU funding will have to be adjusted in favour of the new member states, Parliament recognised, but it insisted that this should not be at the expense of support to priority disadvantaged regions in the present member states. The European Commission's initial proposals on the programming period after 2007 are to due to emerge in the third report on EU economic and social cohesion, to be presented towards the **end of the year**.
- The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has confirmed its intention to help fund a connection between Lithuania's and Poland's power grids. Negotiations are still underway on the details, but a joint venture is planned . between the two national power companies Lietuvos Energija and Polskie Sieci Elektroenergetyczne, supported by the EBRD. EU funding of some €275 million is also being sought.
- A Latvian publishing house is about to launch "Eiropas idejas Latvija" (European ideas in Latvia), a book of essays and extracts from philosophical, scientific, and literary works reflecting on the similarities and differences between Latvia and the rest of Europe. It draws on writers such as Immanuel Kant, Isaiah Berlin, current Latvian president Vaira Vike-Freiberga, and contemporary Latvian writers and poets who travelled across Europe on the Express Europe writers' train last year.
- A new call for proposals was launched this week to support SMEs in border regions. For further details, see [here](#).
- The European Investment Bank is lending €360 million to Hungary for transport projects. A €170 million loan will pay for modernising railway stations along Pan European Transport Corridors and for upgrading some 100 km of the rail network. Another €190 million loan will help build three urban by-passes on major national roads connecting Hungary with Austria and around the north-eastern shore of Lake Balaton, and will also be used to alleviate traffic problems affecting the northern part of Budapest. Since 1990, the EIB has lent over €9 billion in central and eastern Europe for investment in the transport

- sector, including €1.2 billion for Hungary.
- Further support for a "yes" vote in Estonia's September 14 **referendum** on EU accession has come from businessmen and religious leaders. More than thirty major Estonian information technology and telecommunication firms have issued a statement claiming that if Estonia does not join the EU, it would damage the foreign investments on which a large part of the Estonian economy is based, and lead to some companies moving out of the country. And leaders of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Episcopal Council have called on "...all Christians in Estonia and on all Estonian citizens to take part in the upcoming referendum and be guided by trust in God in making personal decisions".
- 62-year-old Lithuanian runner Petras Silkinas is on a tour of European capitals dedicated to Lithuania's upcoming membership of the EU. He recently passed through Brussels, where he met EU and Lithuanian diplomats and officials. He says his marathon is intended to lay a symbolic road through the capitals of the EU member-states and candidates countries. So far, over three months since he left Vilnius, he has visited Riga, Tallinn, Helsinki, Stockholm, Warsaw, Berlin, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, London, Dublin and Paris. From is currently en route to Prague, via Luxembourg. He plans to finish in Lisbon by the end of the year.
- Meanwhile, Todor Passev of Bulgaria is making a long-distance trip around Europe with his velo-rikshaw. He started from Sofia in July, passing through Serbia and Montenegro, Hungary, Austria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and the Netherlands, and was last week in Belgium, en route to the United Kingdom, and then France, Spain, Italy, and Greece.
- Prague was the setting last week for an informal meeting of state secretaries of the ministries of foreign affairs of 15 small and medium EU countries, to discuss, at the invitation of the Czech **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** the upcoming Inter-Governmental Conference and the new EU Treaty. Representatives from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia sat alongside their counterparts from Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Portugal, Austria, Greece, and Sweden. They agreed that the Intergovernmental Conference should be concluded within the shortest time possible.
- The number of European tourists coming to **Lithuania** increased strongly in the first seven months of this year, with visitors from the UK up 51.6%, and from Poland up 18.6%, Finland by 14.7%, Germany by 13.1%, and Estonia by 6.9%.
- Spain and Bulgaria have signed a new agreement on international carriage of passengers and cargo by road. "We have a lot to learn from Spain's experience in this area," said Bulgaria's deputy prime minister and transport and communications minister, Nikolay Vassilev, after the signing ceremony in Sofia with Spanish foreign minister Ana Palacio. He also expressed hopes that similar agreements on maritime and aviation transport would be signed soon.
- European social democrats have welcomed a decision by the Malta Labour Party leadership to ask its next party conference to accept the decision of the Maltese people on joining the EU. The MLP, which has for many years fiercely opposed EU accession, is to request full membership of the Party of European Socialists.
- The Enlargement DG of the European Commission acquired a new Director General this week, when Fabrizio **Barbaso** replaced Eneko Landaburu. The change was accompanied by a **reshuffle**, in the DG to take account of revised priorities after the end of negotiations with the acceding countries and the acquisition of responsibility for the "Wider Europe" dossier.

Agenda

See also the new "Enlargement events calendar" on the DG Enlargement web site at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/events/calendar.htm>. This gives a run-down of public events related to the enlargement of the EU taking place in all current and future member states.

(note: now that acceding states take part in Council meetings and EP and ESC plenaries, these will from now on be listed in this calendar)

Date	Event
September 2003	
Tuesday 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Viviane Reding, European Commissioner in charge of Education and Culture, visits Slovenia. She meets prime minister Anton Rop, foreign affairs minister Dimitrij Rupel, minister for education, science and sport Slavko Gaber, and minister for culture Andreja Rihter, as well as rectors of the universities of Ljubljana, Maribor et Primorska, and visits the studios of Viba Films. ■ European Budget Commissioner Michael Schreyer meets Czech deputy foreign affairs minister Jan Kohout, Brussels ■ European Parliament constitutional affairs committee adopts its report on the draft constitutional treaty and the forthcoming Inter-Governmental Conference, Brussels ■ European Parliament President Pat Cox visits Latvia, and meets president Vaira Vike-Freiberga, parliamentary speaker Ingrida Udre, foreign affairs minister Sandra Kalniete, and local government leaders in Jelgava and Rezekne, and visits the Information Centre of the European Parliament in Riga. ■ EU Council of Ministers working group on enlargement meets, Brussels
Wednesday 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ European Parliament foreign affairs committee holds a joint meeting with its counterparts from national parliaments in the member states and acceding states to discuss European defence strategy, with Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Brussels ■ EU Council of Ministers working group on central and south-east Europe meets, Brussels
Wednesday 10-Thursday 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ European Parliament President Pat Cox visits Estonia, meets president Arnold Ruutel and prime minister Juhan Parts, addresses the parliament and visits the European Parliament office in Tallinn, and meets local government leaders in Parnu.
Wednesday 10-Friday 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ European External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten visits the Western Balkans
Thursday 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ David Byrne, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection visits the Czech Republic ■ European Court of Justice delivers its ruling on the annulment of Council Decisions on the EU agreement with Bulgaria and Hungary on carriage of goods by road and promotion of combined transport.
Thursday 11-Friday 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen visits Ukraine
Friday 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ David Byrne, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection visits Latvia ■ EU Council of Ministers working group on enlargement and taxation, Brussels
Friday 12 - Saturday 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Informal meeting of the ministers of economic and financial affairs of the EU member states and the acceding states, Stresa, Italy ■ Informal meeting of the ministers of justice and home affairs of the EU member states, the candidate countries and the acceding states, Rome

- Acceding states and candidate countries take part in informal audiovisual ministerial, with Viviane Reding, European Commissioner in charge of Education and Culture, Syracuse
- Friday 12-
Sunday 14
- Sunday 14
 - **Referendum** in Estonia on EU accession
- Monday 15
 - David Byrne, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection visits Estonia
- Thursday 18
 - European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen visits Switzerland
- Saturday 20
 - **Referendum** in Latvia on EU accession
- Saturday 20 -
Tuesday 23
 - Informal meeting of the ministers of agriculture of the EU member states and the acceding states, Taormina, Italy
- Monday 22 -
Tuesday 23
 - European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen visits Korea
 - Competitiveness (internal market, industry and research) Council, Brussels
- Monday 22 -
Thursday 25
 - European Parliament plenary session, Strasbourg
- Wednesday
24 - Friday
26
 - European Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen visits Japan
- Friday 26
 - Franz Fischler, European Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries visits Switzerland
 - European Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy visits Hungary
- Monday 29 -
Tuesday 30
 - General Affairs and External Relations Council, Brussels
 - Agriculture Council, Brussels

2004

May 2004

- Saturday 1st
 - Entry into force of the accession treaty (according to conclusions of General Affairs Council, 18.11.02)

ENLARGEMENT WEEKLY is prepared for the Information Unit of the Enlargement Directorate General of the European Commission. As part of its communication strategy on enlargement, the Commission makes this bulletin publicly available. Comments are welcome and should be addressed by e-mail to enlargement@cec.eu.int.

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