

Presidency Conclusions Nice European Council meeting 7, 8 and 9 December 2000

1. The European Council met in Nice on 7, 8 and 9 December 2000. Proceedings began with an exchange of views with the President of the European Parliament, Ms Nicole Fontaine, on the main topics for discussion.

II. ENLARGEMENT

4. The European Council reaffirms the historic significance of the European Union enlargement process and the political priority which it attaches to the success of that process. It welcomes the stepping up of accession negotiations with the candidate countries, which has brought very considerable progress, particularly in recent months.

5. The European Council believes that the time has now come to lend fresh impetus to the process. It endorses the General Affairs Council conclusions of 4 December 2000 concerning the strategy proposed by the Commission. It is pleased to see that the principle of differentiation, based on each candidate country's own merits, and allowance of scope for catching up are reaffirmed in those Council conclusions. The road map for the next 18 months will ease the way for further negotiations, bearing in mind that those countries which are the best prepared will continue to be able to progress more quickly.

6. In the European Council's view, that strategy, together with the completion of the Intergovernmental Conference on institutional reform, will place the Union, in accordance with the objective set by the European Council in Helsinki, in a position to welcome those new Member States which are ready as from the end of 2002, in the hope that they will be able to take part in the next European Parliament elections. In Göteborg, in June 2001, the European Council will assess progress in implementing that new strategy, in order to give the necessary guidance for the successful completion of the process.

7. The European Council appreciates the efforts made by the candidate countries to establish the conditions for adoption, implementation and practical application of the *acquis*. The candidate countries are requested to continue and speed up the necessary reforms to prepare themselves for accession, particularly as regards strengthening their administrative capacity, so as to be able to join the Union as soon as possible. The European Council calls upon the Commission to propose a programme for the frontier regions in order to strengthen their economic competitiveness.

8. The European Council takes note of the Council report on candidate countries' exchange-rate strategies, which identifies an exchange-rate strategy compatible with accession to the Union, followed by participation in the exchange-rate mechanism and finally adoption of the euro. It welcomes the establishment of economic and financial dialogue with the candidate countries.

9. The European Council welcomes the progress made in implementing the pre-accession strategy for Turkey and is very pleased at the agreement reached on the framework Regulation and on the Accession Partnership at the Council meeting on 4 December 2000. It highlights the importance of that document for closing relations between the Union and Turkey along the lines mapped out by the Helsinki European Council conclusions. Turkey is requested swiftly to submit its national programme for adoption of the *acquis*, basing it on the Accession Partnership.

10. The meeting of the European Conference at the level of Heads of State or Government on 7 December 2000 provided an opportunity for discussion in depth of institutional reform and the operation of the European Union in the longer term. The European Council regards the European Conference as a useful framework for dialogue between the Union's Member States and the countries in line for membership. It proposes that the countries covered by the

stabilisation and association process and the EFTA countries be invited to attend as prospective members.