

Enlargement of the European Union

[Paper prepared by EPP Group documentation department]

The future enlargement of the European Union represents an historic landmark on the road towards an 'ever closer Union among the peoples of Europe'. It is an opportunity to secure peace and prosperity in Europe. Enlargement is the natural continuation of the process of forging relations with the countries of central and eastern Europe, and with Cyprus and Malta, which began with the fall of the Berlin wall and the implosion of the former USSR.

As long ago as 1989, the European Council meeting in Strasbourg confirmed that these countries were entitled to join the European Communities. Subsequently, a whole series of measures to provide financial assistance and economic partnerships have been established between the European Union and these countries to help them achieve the conditions needed for accession.

In 1993, the European Council in Copenhagen laid down precise economic and political criteria for accession. Then a complete pre-accession strategy was drawn up by the European Council, under the supervision of the Commission. The 1997 European Council in Amsterdam declared that the way was now open for accession negotiations to begin. Official negotiations with the first group of countries began in March 1998.

The EPP Group has always supported the enlargement process, given its historical, economic and political significance. It has always taken the view that accessions should depend on the economic and political criteria being met.

The EPP Group succeeded in securing its wish that the accession process should begin at the same time for all the countries able to meet the Copenhagen political criteria. It believes that institutional reform is vital before any accessions take place, to ensure that the European Union can function effectively, while becoming deeper and more democratic.