

Statement made by Algirdas Saudargas at the opening of the accession negotiations (Brussels, 15 February 2000)

Caption: On 15 February 2000, at the opening of the negotiations for Lithuania's accession to the European Union held in Brussels, Algirdas Saudargas, Lithuanian Foreign Minister, outlines the implications of accession for his country.

Source: An opening statement by Mr. Algirdas Saudargas, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, at the Conference on Accession to the EU, 15 February 2000, Brussels. [EN LIGNE]. [Vilnius]: Lithuania in the European Union-Office of the Prime Minister, [17.05.2005]. Disponible sur

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Opening statement by Mr. Algirdas Saudargas, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, at the Conference on Accession to the EU, 15 February 2000, Brussels

I. Background

1. The negotiations which are starting today are an extraordinary event in the relations between Lithuania and the European Union. For the EU Member States and Lithuania the development of European integration is a matter of mutual interest. Lithuania and Europe are bound together by common values, common history, common aspirations for the well being, stability and security of their peoples. Lithuania's accession to the Union is only logical outcome of our common destiny.
2. Europe and Lithuania also face common challenges: globalisation, development of technologies, protection of the environment, promotion of social and economic cohesion, security of citizens, preservation of national identity and individual freedoms. European integration is a right response.
3. Membership in the European Union is a precondition for modernisation of the Lithuanian economy and society as well as for fully fledged participation in the international community. Lithuania also seeks to contribute to the economic, political and social progress in Europe, to the promotion of cultural diversity and the development of European values.
4. The forces of European integration influence Lithuania's realities ever more profoundly and preparation for the EU membership is one of the main components of domestic reform program. We strive that economic, social and administrative transformation takes place smoothly.
5. Lithuania realises that a successful membership in the Union is feasible only by securing and maintaining the support and approval of the people, both in the countries of the European Union and in Lithuania. It is, therefore, natural that the interests of various groups are reconciled and harmonised.
6. In Lithuania there is a general consensus regarding membership in the European Union: since 1991, membership in the EU has figured as one of Lithuania's principal objectives in all the programmes of its successive governments; this aspiration is promoted by the President of the Republic as well as by all its main political parties.

II. Lithuania and the European Union

7. After the European Community recognised the reestablishment of Lithuania's independence on August 27, 1991, and signed an agreement on economic, commercial and trade cooperation on May 11, 1992, the legal foundations for cooperation between Lithuania and the European Communities were laid down in the Free Trade Agreement of 18 July 1994, which was integrated later into the Europe Agreement. The Europe Agreement of 12 June 1995 recognised Lithuania's aspirations for EU membership and created the framework for Lithuania's participation in the EU pre accession strategy. The joint institutions established under the Agreement, including today's Association Council meeting, are continuing their successful operations in supervising the performance of the Agreement and in developing the cooperation between Lithuania and the European Union.
8. The Copenhagen Summit of June 21 22, 1993, acknowledged the prospect of membership and basic criteria for the Central and East European countries to become Member States of the EU. The strategy for the EU enlargement was further elaborated at the consecutive Summits in Essen (1994), Madrid (1995), Luxembourg (1997), Berlin (1999).
9. The Accession Process, an inclusive and comprehensive framework to guide accession, was launched on 30 March 1998, establishing Accession Partnerships for each of the Candidate Countries, including a National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA), alongside the screening process.

10. In its Avis of 1997 on Lithuania's application for EU membership and its Regular Reports in 1998 and 1999 the Commission has recognised Lithuania's consistent progress in meeting the accession criteria. On the recommendation of the Commission the Helsinki European Council decided to start accession negotiations in February 2000.

11. The recognition of Lithuania's efforts over the recent years has been both encouraging and mobilising. Lithuania adheres to democratic practices, puts every effort on the strengthening of its market economy as the basis for competition within the Internal Market; adoption of the *acquis* is an on going process as is the consolidation of the administrative capabilities to implement it.

12. On its part, Lithuania is thoroughly planning its actions of integration. The Programmes of the Government, Accession Partnership priorities, the Regular Report and other recommendations of the Commission have been subsumed under the unified EU Accession Programme (NPAA), a consistent set of integration objectives, priorities and corresponding measures for implementation, which has become the main instrument for managing the integration process.

13. Lithuania values the pre accession assistance which it has and continues to receive from the EU. PHARE programme has produced a tangible effect on the reforms under way in Lithuania. The size and diversity of the assistance will be increased from the year 2000, which will further support Lithuania's reforms towards membership. The SAPARD and ISPA programmes are long run structural measures which will make a considerable contribution to the modernisation of Lithuania's agriculture, environmental protection and transport networks.

III. Negotiation Principles

14. The aim of negotiations is Lithuania's membership in the European Union. Lithuania fully accepts and supports the goals and principles of the European Union as spelt out in the Treaties.

15. Lithuania will negotiate for its membership in the EU fully realising that it must adopt and implement the *acquis communautaire* as it stands at the time of accession. However, the assumption of EU rights and obligations in various fields may require technical adaptations, transition periods, derogations and exemptions.

16. On the basis of the analytical examinations of the *acquis* so far, we believe it is possible to conclude negotiations in year 2002, with the date for assumption of the obligations of EU membership from January 1, 2004. Lithuania is making every effort to adopt and implement as much of the *acquis* as possible before the accession date.

17. Lithuania welcomes the decision taken in Helsinki to conduct negotiations with all the Candidate Countries on the principles of equal opportunity and individual merit.

18. Lithuania also welcomes the decision to start accession negotiations with Latvia, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Malta and the confirmation of Turkey as a Candidate state.

19. Lithuania hopes that the decisions taken by the Inter Governmental Conference in the year 2000 on the reform of the EU institutions will allow a successful development of the European Union.

20. Lithuania believes that the institutions of the Union must be reformed, to ensure their effective functioning, based on the principles of democracy, transparency and subsidiarity. All the EU Member States must be treated equally and represented appropriately. Lithuania will seek that the Lithuanian language becomes an official language of the Union.

IV. The Pillars of the Union

21. The economic foundation of the European Union is the internal market based on the free movement of

goods, services, capital and persons. While the Lithuanian economy has already undergone a fundamental transformation and reorientation over the last ten years, it is only by participating in the internal market that Lithuania will be able to sustain the long run growth and competitiveness of its economy. On the other hand, the promotion of social and economic cohesion is one of the corner stones for the development of both the Lithuanian and EU economy.

22. In its efforts to meet the requirements of the Economic and Monetary Union, Lithuania encourages the implementation of structural measures, economic growth and will take further steps to approximate its monetary and fiscal policies to those of the European Union.

23. Lithuania's foreign and security policy has been geared with an eye on its prospective membership in the EU and NATO as well as with promotion of co operative relationship with its neighbours. Lithuania is an active participant in the political dialogue with EU and shares the aim of the development of the Union's military and non military crisis management capability as part of a strengthened common European policy on security and defence. Lithuania is ready to contribute to the future EU led crisis management operations.

24. Lithuania's membership in the EU will have a positive impact on the stability in the region and will be beneficial to its neighbours. Baltic Sea states regional cooperation, particularly among the states of the Baltic Sea, Latvia and Estonia, as well as the partnership with Poland, is of special importance to Lithuania. Together with the other Member States of the EU, Lithuania will endeavour to contribute to the strengthening of the role of the European Union in Northern and Eastern Europe, particularly in its relations with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Cooperation with the Kaliningrad Region of the Russian Federation takes a special place in Lithuania's relations with Russia.

25. The amendments introduced by the Amsterdam Treaty in the fields of justice and home affairs are acceptable to Lithuania. Fully aware that after accession its borders will be the external borders of the Union, Lithuania bases its border control and visa policies on the standards of the Schengen Convention and has tried not only to meet its principal requirements, but also to install the state of the art equipment and to train its border officers accordingly.

26. Education, social affairs, research and development have always been and will remain a focus of special attention in Lithuania. Lithuania will continue its efforts to develop a flexible and accessible education system capable of producing a well educated citizen, ensuring possibilities for life long learning, proper conditions for the development of research and technologies, employment, enhancement of working conditions, training and retraining.

V. Sectoral Issues

27. Attention is to be paid to several areas of special importance to Lithuania in connection with its commitments and negotiations for membership. It is expected that in the course of the negotiations we will be able to arrive at mutually acceptable conclusions.

28. *Energy sector.* In 1999, Lithuania adopted a new Energy Strategy which includes plans for the development of the legal framework and the restructuring of the sector. Lithuania will need substantial financial and technical support for the implementation of its National Energy Strategy. The Government is presently developing a detailed Action Plan for its implementation. In addition, international networks will have to be developed, finalising the connection of Lithuania's power systems with those of western and central Europe.

Ensuring a high level of nuclear safety at the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant is an issue of exclusive importance and attention in Lithuania. Measures for nuclear safety are coordinated with the requirements of the Euratom Treaty and the Convention on Nuclear Safety.

29. *Agriculture.* Lithuania has promoted the modernisation of its agricultural sector and its policy of rural development raising standards and competitiveness of the sector. The land market will start functioning in

the near future. Modernisation of the industry will require long term measures and investment.

Lithuania's efforts in the improvement of hygiene and quality standards are already proving successful, with the resulting increase in the number of Lithuanian enterprises authorised to export their products to the EU. The legal and institutional systems in the phytosanitary and veterinary field are being restructured with special attention paid to the modernisation of border inspection posts.

Lithuania assumes that with accession to the EU, its primary agricultural producers will be subject to the same form and size of direct payments and other means of structural support as applied in the other Member States.

Fisheries. The main aim of the fisheries policy is to ensure sustainability of fish stocks. In particular this implies the better management of fishing quotas in the Baltic Sea, modernisation of the fishing industry (such as the development of the infrastructure for services in ports, modernisation and safety of the fleet, reconstruction of the fish processing and aquaculture enterprises).

30. Regional policy. Lithuania has adopted a programme providing for the priorities of its regional policy and the measures for their implementation. Public investments are planned through the National Investment Programme and the EU regional policy will become an important factor for the economic and social cohesion. The funds for the co financing of the EU structural programmes will come mainly from the state budget. Lithuania will make efforts to strengthen its institutional framework, which will be needed in order to implement the EU structural policy, and it will improve the capabilities of interagency coordination between the central and regional institutions.

31. Environment. Fully realising the importance of the *acquis* in the environment sector and the administrative and financial requirements for its implementation, Lithuania has approved a Strategy for the harmonisation of its legal norms with the EU requirements. The Strategy determines the priorities in the harmonisation of every legal act, provides for the main measures and schedules of their implementation, presents the estimates of the respective costs and indicates the necessity of strengthening the institutional framework. The restructuring and strengthening of the administrative bodies is under way, but the costs of the implementation of the *acquis* on environmental protection are very high indeed, especially in the fields of water protection, waste management and integrated pollution prevention control (IPPC).

32. Transport. Lithuania has a rather well developed transport infrastructure (particularly roads). The port of Klaipėda is one of the few ice free ports in the region and therefore it is very important for transit. Lithuania has invested quite substantially in the modernisation of the north south (Corridor I, Via Baltica) and the east west (Corridor IX) transport arteries. We have established priority projects taking into consideration the assessment of the transport infrastructure needs (TINA) and the opportunities offered by ISPA. Ensuring of efficient transport services between East and West along the international corridors (including the security of the borders with Russia and Belarus) should be a common concern both of Lithuania and the European Union.