

Address given by Joe Borg at the accession conference with Malta (Brussels, 12 December 2001)

Caption: On 12 December 2001, in Brussels, at the fifth accession conference with Malta, Joe Borg, Maltese Foreign Minister, gives an account of the two years of negotiations for Malta's accession to the European Union.

Source: Address by the Hon. Dr. Joe Borg, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta, at the fifth meeting at ministerial level - Accession conference with Malta, Brussels, 12 December 2001. [ON-LINE]. [s.l.]: Department of Information - Government of Malta, [19.05.2005]. Press Release No.1888. Disponible sur http://www.doi.gov.mt/EN/press_releases/2001/12/pr1888.asp.

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Address by the Hon. Dr. Joe Borg, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta, at the fifth meeting at ministerial level – Accession conference with Malta, Brussels, 12 December 2001

We are today bringing to a close the second year of work on Malta's accession negotiations. In considering what has been achieved so far, we are also looking forward to the work which needs to be accomplished over the coming twelve months. Our primary objective is to ensure that this time next year Malta will have concluded its negotiations and will be poised to start finalising the formalities to take its place as a member of the European Union.

At the beginning of this year Malta had opened sixteen chapters for negotiations, and provisionally closed twelve. With the final chapter, that dealing with Agriculture, being discussed today, and three others, Free Movement of Persons, Transport and Social Policy, being confirmed as provisionally closed, we have now placed all the substantive chapters on the table, and provisionally closed nineteen of them.

The past six months have been an exceptionally challenging period for the Union and its Belgian presidency. The events of 11 September added major demands to what was already a heavy and complex agenda. As a candidate country, intent on seeing the enlargement process achieving its objectives in a timely and effective manner, Malta followed the unfolding events with two main considerations in mind.

On the one hand we were keen to see the Union forcefully asserting its role at the international level. The Union's openness and commitment towards international peace and cooperation is one of the main reasons why Malta is committed to becoming a member. The terrorist attacks of the 11th September constituted a fundamental threat to international peace and cooperation in all its essential elements. It was vitally important for all the democratic and peace loving forces of the world to unite in taking determined and effective action against this terrorist threat.

At the same time Malta was also keen to see that the demands arising from this international crisis did not distract the Union's attention from its other important tasks, not least those concerning enlargement. Over the last few weeks we have been fully reassured in that regard. We are deeply appreciative of the manner in which the Belgian presidency has dealt with the difficult task of managing the many diverse demands upon its time and attention. This has allowed steady progress in the negotiations and all the other aspects of the enlargement process.

The six chapters we have on the agenda today give a good, if partial, picture of the detailed negotiations which has been taking place over the last few months. The finalisation of the discussions on Free Movement of Persons, Transport and Social Policy was by no means a simple task.

Under the Free Movement of Persons chapter Malta sought a safeguard provision to take into account the vulnerability of its economy to sudden and heavy influxes of additional labour. Malta also requested a number of transition periods under both the Transport and the Social Policy chapters. None of these requests impinged upon our intention to apply the *acquis* in all its aspects. However the process of explaining and justifying these requests required detailed and thorough discussions with the Commission services over many weeks.

The task of finalising our negotiating position on the agriculture chapter also called for extensive consultations at the technical level, both internally in Malta and also with the Commission services. The key issue for Malta under this chapter is finding an acceptable and at the same time effective way of ensuring the survival and further development of a very small scale agriculture which is however closely integrated within Malta's social and environmental fabric. We are confident that the political will already exists which will permit the right solution to emerge in the negotiations which will take place on this chapter in the coming months.

A very significant amount of work on other chapters has also been taking place over the last few weeks. I am thinking in particular of the chapters regarding Justice and Home Affairs and Competition Policy, which

are also on our agenda today, but not for closure. From Malta's point of view it is indeed disappointing that we are not provisionally closing the Justice and Home Affairs chapter. We consider that all the elements required for closing this chapter are well in place. Our responses to the technical questions raised in the EU Common Position on the table today have already been prepared, and could indeed have been taken into account if more time had been available.

Useful work has also been done on the chapter on Competition Policy. This emerges clearly from the EU Common Position which is on the table today. Further work is however required on this chapter. This is particularly the case in connection with the transition period we are requesting for state aid for our shipyards, to ensure that the restructuring exercise under way in this sector achieves its defined objectives.

Among the chapters that have been the subject of intensive consultations over the past few weeks, but which have not made it to our agenda today, is the one on Free Movement of Capital. With regard to this chapter we are confident that EU member states recognise that Malta's particular circumstances justify the need for us to maintain some measure of restraint on the purchase of property. For us this matter is of especial importance and we note with satisfaction that agreement on an appropriate formula is within reach.

Useful work has also been accomplished under two other chapters - Fisheries and Taxation. Here, however, some further consultations are required before final solutions can emerge regarding the two most sensitive issues - namely the establishment of a fisheries conservation zone around Malta and the agreement on a number of VAT.

Another chapter to which a considerable amount of time and attention have already been devoted is the one dealing with Environment. A significant number of issues still need to be dealt with under this chapter, particularly from the technical and financial aspects. We are however hopeful that appropriate solutions will be found for all these issues in the coming months.

Two reflections arise from a broader look at what has been accomplished in the negotiations over the past twelve months. In the first instance we are gratified not only by the rate of progress but also by the quality of the results achieved. A number of transition periods have been agreed under the chapters on Free Movement of Goods, Transport and Social Policy, while an important success was registered under the Free Movement of Persons chapter, with the agreement on a safeguard clause. We are close to a similarly important agreement on the Free Movement of Capital chapter with regard to the question of real estate.

A second reflection concerns the fact that, where results are not yet visible, there is nevertheless a significant amount of groundwork already completed. We are determined to make the best use of the opportunities which will be available under the Spanish and Danish presidencies to bring our negotiations to a close during the course of 2002. In this regard, we welcome the Council's reaffirmation of the principles of differentiation, own merits and catching up as the basis upon which the accession process is pursued.

We are conscious of the fact that over the coming months the Union will itself be engaged in important undertakings which will demand major effort and attention in their own right. The introduction of the Euro in January and the launching of the Convention on the Future of Europe in March are also of particular interest and importance for the candidate countries themselves. We are looking forward to our active participation in the Convention, in which we hope and expect to be able to make a useful contribution.

It is our hope that during 2002, as was the case this year, the Union will maintain its steady focus on the enlargement process even while dealing with the other heavy demands upon its time and attention. This will be especially important during the first part of the year when, in accordance with the agreed road map, the Union will be defining its position on the key financial issues relating to enlargement as they arise under the Agriculture, Regional Policy and Budget chapters. The early agreement on a common position on these chapters is a pre-condition for the achievement of the objectives set at Nice and Gothenburg for the new members to take their place in time for the EP elections in 2004. The intention already expressed by the Spanish presidency to give early and urgent attention to these matters is a source of encouragement to us.

As the Commission once again underlines in this year's reports, the accession process is not confined exclusively to the negotiating exercise. There is another dimension, that relating to monitoring the implementation of commitments undertaken, which is equally important in this context. The Council has expressed its support for the principle of the action plan proposed by the Commission to provide enhanced administrative and judicial structures in the candidate countries.

Malta takes very seriously the task of putting into place, in a timely and effective manner, the legislative and administrative measures arising from the commitments which it has undertaken in the framework of the accession negotiations. Our determination to fulfil commitments undertaken is indeed an important dimension of our approach to the negotiations. This may at times require more time to be taken in the negotiations themselves. It does however ensure that in the long run the implementation process becomes both more assured and more predictable. In this spirit we have welcomed the Commission's proposals regarding the Action Plan. We have indeed already started our consultations with the Commission in this regard.

There is another dimension to the accession process to which Malta attaches particular importance. This concerns our gradual integration into the Union in ways which, in certain aspects anticipate and in other aspects prepare for membership. There have been some welcome developments in this regard over recent months.

Malta has already started participating in a number of EU programmes in the education field - Socrates, Leonardo, Youth for Europe and the Fifth Framework Programme for Science and Research - and our initial experience in this area has been very positive. We are hoping to be able to join a wider range of programmes in the coming months, including the areas of energy, environment, industry, social policy, culture and customs, as soon as the framework agreement on our participation in EU programmes is in place.

During the course of the past twelve months, discussions were also concluded on a new trade regime between Malta and the EU on fish and fisheries products. The relevant agreement will be signed in the coming days. During last July's Association Committee it was also agreed that Malta would begin consultations with the Commission on a similar arrangement for certain agricultural goods. We will be submitting our proposals in this regard in the short term. With the further development of the political dialogue, including our increasing involvement in the ESDP initiative, and the prospect of our active participation in the Future of Europe debate, the process of our progressive integration into the Union is well on its way. All this forms an important backdrop to the prospects for a successful conclusion to the accession negotiations in the coming twelve months.

Before concluding I wish to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to those who have played and continue to play a part in the various aspects of our accession process - the Belgian presidency and the previous three presidencies which have been involved in our negotiations since their start early last year, the Commission services, and the Council secretariat, for their unstinting co-operation and assistance. I would also like to express once again my appreciation of the efforts of the many Maltese officials who have been deeply involved in this exercise over the last two years.