

Statement made by Indulis Berzins at the opening of the accession negotiations with the European Union (Brussels, 15 February 2000)

Caption: On 15 February 2000, at the opening of the negotiations for Latvia's accession to the European Union held in Brussels, Indulis Berzins, Latvian Foreign Minister, outlines his country's guiding objectives.

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Statement by the Foreign Minister of Latvia H.E. Mr. Indulis Berzins on the Occasion of the Opening of Latvia's Accession Negotiations with European Union (Brussels, 15 February 2000)

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was only four years ago that the Latvian Government submitted its application for membership and now, Latvia enters a new stage in the accession process as one of the better prepared of the candidates.

In Latvia, we believe that membership in the European Union is the best way to support Latvia's national interests. Through membership, we support the development of our democracy, we protect our language and our culture, and we reinforce our sovereignty.

Enlargement is indispensable for ensuring a stable future for Europe, politically and economically. Early accession for Latvia and the other Baltic States supports stability in the region. Of course, the time of accession should depend on merit and the individual achievements of each candidate. The political will to join the Union is manifest in Latvia - in the Latvian Government, the Parliament and the people.

Mr. President,

Since EU membership became available to us, Latvia has diligently pursued European integration as a responsibility and a task.

Latvia's readiness to begin the accession process as well as Latvia's conformity with Copenhagen and Madrid criteria are described in the Regular Reports.

The Union has provided vital assistance to Latvia in the accession process. And the Accession Partnership is an indispensable guidance tool for acceleration of European integration. So too, Latvia's participation in Community programmes provides for the experience of teamwork within the Union.

Mr. President,

Latvia is fully aware that accession implies full acceptance of the obligations arising from membership and compliance with the *acquis communautaire*. As the *acquis* evolves constantly, we are ready to base our negotiations not only on its present state but also to take on progressively any new *acquis* adopted by the Union before Latvia's accession.

To set up a clear time frame for transposition and implementation of the Communities' *acquis*, Latvia's Government adopted January 1st 2003 as a reference date. This is the date from which we will be able to assume obligations arising from membership in the Union.

We are convinced that the proper process for proceeding with negotiations should be based on principles defined by the European Council in Luxembourg and further developed in Helsinki.

We believe that the pace of negotiations should be set for each acceding country according to its individual degree of readiness. Differentiation in the number and composition of chapters to be discussed should be made from the very outset of the talks. This should provide for the possibility of catching-up in the negotiation process as envisaged in Luxembourg.

I can assure you that Latvia's Government will carefully evaluate any commitments before taking them and will stick firmly to those which it takes on.

Mr. President,

On some issues, Latvia will pay special attention.

With respect to the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Latvia is ready to accept, in full, the *acquis* in force at the time of our accession. To ensure rule of law and security for all of Latvia's residents, we are ready to adhere to the provisions of the European Union governing Justice and Home Affairs. We must improve administrative capacity in order to fulfil these goals.

We see joining the EMU, European Monetary Union as an integral part of the integration process. Latvia is entertaining the option to join the euro-zone as soon as the necessary preconditions are met, and is closely monitoring compliance with the Maastricht criteria.

Accession to the single market is a core issue for membership.

We are making the necessary efforts to ensure that we can assume all obligations in this area upon accession.

Latvia fully shares the goals of the present Common Agricultural Policy. As with the single market, we plan to accede to its instruments from the first day of membership. Bearing in mind the forthcoming negotiations within the WTO, we will be paying close attention to negotiations on this chapter.

Adherence to the Common Fisheries Policy is important and integral to accession. In this respect, provisions of accession should take into account the significance of fisheries for the economic and social development of Latvia's coastal regions.

Latvia has particular interests in adhering to the Community's commercial policy and to the customs union. Recent accession to the WTO provides similar instruments to those employed by the Union and Latvia, thus facilitating alignment of commercial policies. Latvia's experience in regional trade and implementation of the Baltic Free Trade Agreement could be used for the common benefit of the Union.

Policies on environmental protection and energy will be considered in light of the economic and social costs.

Latvia fully accepts its obligations towards the Union budget. Negotiations should reflect Latvia's ability to fulfil its financial obligations and ensure participation in the Union's regional, structural, agricultural and social policies.

Latvia expects that the outcome of the Intergovernmental Conference on institutional reforms will enable the creation of an enlarged Union – of which Latvia will be a part - and enhance its functioning.

Mr. President,

Let me assure you, that our Government has arrived at a realisation of the demanding nature of these negotiations.

For us, speed and quality will count equally.