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## REPORT

on Latvia's application for membership of the European Union and the state of negotiations  
(COM(2000) 706 – C5-0606/2000 – 1997/2176(COS))

Part 1: Motion for a resolution and explanatory statement

Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy

Rapporteur: Elisabeth Schroedter



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## PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 13 November 2000, the Commission forwarded to Parliament its 2000 Regular Report on Latvia's progress towards accession (COM(2000) 706 – 1997/2176(COS)).

At the sitting of 15 March 2001, the President of Parliament announced that she had referred this Regular Report to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy as the committee responsible and to all committees concerned for their opinions and she confirmed the referral at the sitting of 14 June 2001 (C5-0606/2000).

The Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy had appointed Elisabeth Schroedter rapporteur at its meeting of 23 September 1999 and confirmed the appointment at its meeting of 7 November 2000.

The committee considered the Commission report and the draft report at its meetings of 26 March, 18 June and 9 July 2001.

At the last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Elmar Brok, chairman; Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne, William Francis Newton Dunn and Catherine Lalumière, vice-chairmen; Elisabeth Schroedter, rapporteur; Alexandros Baltas, Bastiaan Belder, The Lord Bethell, Andre Brie, Michael Cashman (for Sami Nair), John Walls Cushnahan, Rosa M. Díez González, Andrew Nicholas Duff (for Francesco Rutelli), Pere Esteve, Monica Frassoni (for Daniel Marc Cohn-Bendit), Michael Gahler, Per Gahrton, Cristina García-Orcoyen Tormo (for Alain Lamassoure), Jas Gawronski, Alfred Gomolka, Vasco Graça Moura (for Franco Marini), Bertel Haarder, Klaus Hänsch, Mary Honeyball (for Linda McAvan pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Giorgos Katiforis (for Raimon Obiols i Germà), Christoph Werner Konrad (for Hugues Martin), Joost Lagendijk, Armin Laschet (for Jacques Santer), Emilio Menéndez del Valle, Philippe Morillon, Pasqualina Napolitano, William Francis Newton Dunn, Arie M. Oostlander, Reino Paasilinna (for Jacques Santkin), Guido Podestà (for Amalia Sartori pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Jacques F. Poos, Reinhard Rack (for Gerardo Galeote Quecedo pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Tokia Saïfi (for Hans-Gert Poettering), Jannis Sakellariou, José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, Jürgen Schröder, Ioannis Souladakis, Ursula Stenzel, Hannes Swoboda, Gary Titley, Johan Van Hecke, Geoffrey Van Orden, Paavo Väyrynen, Demetrio Volcic (for Mário Soares), Jan Marinus Wiersma, Matti Wuori, Christos Zacharakis, Sabine Zissener (for Ingo Friedrich pursuant to Rule 153(2)).

The opinions on Latvia of the Committee on Budgetary Control, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities will be published separately (part 2 - A5-0252/2001).

The global opinions of the Committee on Budgets, the Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs, the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy, the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport and the Committee on Constitutional Affairs will be published separately (part 3 - A5-0251/2001 to A5-0262/2001).

The report was tabled on 16 July 2001.

The deadline for tabling amendments will be indicated in the draft agenda for the relevant part-session.

## MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

### European Parliament resolution on Latvia's application for membership of the European Union and the state of negotiations (COM(2000) 706 – C5-0606/2000 – 1997/2176(COS))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Latvia's application for membership of the European Union, submitted on 27 October 1995, pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union,
  - having regard to the 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on Latvia's progress towards accession (COM(2000) 706 – C5-0606/2000<sup>1</sup>),
  - having regard to the 2000 Enlargement Strategy Paper on progress towards accession by each of the candidate countries presented by the Commission (COM(2000) 700<sup>2</sup>),
  - having regard to the decisions taken by the European Council, notably at Copenhagen (21-22 June 1993), Helsinki (10-11 December 1999), Nice (7-9 December 2000) and Gothenburg (15-16 June 2001),
  - having regard to the 1999 Accession Partnership for Latvia,
  - having regard to its resolution of 4 October 2000 on Latvia's membership application to the European Union and the state of negotiations<sup>3</sup>
  - having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy and the opinions of the other committees concerned (A5-0252/2001),
- A. mindful of the absolute necessity to make a success of the EU enlargement process,
- B. convinced that this presupposes openness, frankness and respect for agreed rules and principles, on the part of the EU institutions and the Member States as well as on the part of the candidate countries,
- C. convinced, also, that when the most difficult final phase of the negotiations is entered into, all actors must refrain from making unreasonable demands; expecting that they let, instead, their actions show that their commitment to the project of mending the fractures that tragic developments in the past inflicted on our continent, is beyond any doubt,
- D. whereas the principle of full differentiation within the negotiation process, according to which each country should be judged on its own merits, implies that a real chance to catch up must be given to those countries, including Latvia, with which negotiations were not

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<sup>1</sup> Not yet published in OJ C.

<sup>2</sup> Not yet published in OJ C.

<sup>3</sup> Texts Adopted of that Sitting, Item 3

opened until last year,

- E. whereas Latvia continues to make good progress in its preparations for EU membership,
- F. whereas this has allowed its negotiations to proceed at a steady pace, but a number of problems and weaknesses still call for stronger action,
- 1. Recognises that Latvia has made enormous efforts to close the gap with the previous first group of candidate countries; notes that Latvia has a real chance to catch up, provided it shows further progress in administrative and judicial reform, as well as in the fight against corruption;

### ***Fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria***

#### *Political criteria*

- 2. Recognises that Latvia satisfies the political criteria for EU membership;
- 3. Is concerned about the remaining deficiencies in procedural law, the persistent lack of qualified judges, insufficient guarantees for the right to a fair trial, unacceptably long pre-trial detention periods, of particular concern being the large number of minors in pre-trial detention, and overcrowding and very poor sanitary conditions in prisons;
- 4. Notes that Latvia has acknowledged the need to improve the efficiency, accountability and transparency of its public administration system;
- 5. Encourages Latvia to press on with the fight against corruption; points to the fact that a high level of transparency, clear separation of political and business elites, a politically neutral civil service and high professional standards within the judiciary are characteristic features of countries with very low levels of corruption;
- 6. Recalls that the integration of the still considerable number of non-citizens depends to a large extent on the implementation of the Programme for the Integration of Society; recommends the Latvian Government and Parliament to provide adequate financial resources to the programme via the "Social Integration Fund"; points to the importance of free language training programmes for adults;
- 7. Expresses the hope that as part of the general integration of ethnic minority groups into the Latvian society, these groups will be represented at political level in a more balanced way; believes that a precipitate approach should be avoided, but that at some point in the future, broadening the right to vote in local elections could be considered;
- 8. Welcomes the fact that Latvia has decided to introduce a new system of ID documents stating only citizenship instead of ethnicity; hopes that as a result all the old ID documents can be replaced as soon as possible;
- 9. Notes that the draft new Asylum Law addresses many of the gaps in the current Refugee law in relation to the EU acquis, stresses the need for further improvements so as to achieve compliance with the 1995 EU Resolution on Minimum Guarantees for Asylum

Procedures and full respect of the principle of non-refoulement;

*Economic criteria*

10. Congratulates Latvia to its successful economic development; notes that the government deficit has now largely been brought under control and that continued strong growth should lead to higher tax revenues;
11. Recalls in this respect that budgetary stabilisation policies should be in line with other objectives of sustainable development, such as the need to improve the provision of social services and social protection, and to reduce growing income disparities; considers also that the possibility to raise the very low legal minimum wage should be examined;
12. Notes that Latvia is well aware of the massive investments required to reduce pollution and comply with EU environmental standards; points to the need to enhance the co-operation between public administration at central and local level in implementation of environment legislation, including cost-effective and timely investments;
13. Notes that privatisation has almost been completed; asks the Commission to support Latvia in its efforts to liberalise the telecommunication sector in view of EU accession; recalls that in the context of the forthcoming liberalisation of the energy sector, incentives should be offered for the use of the extensive potential of renewable energies, especially in rural areas;

*Acquis criteria*

14. Hopes that the process to merge local communities into bigger units, with greater capacity to implement important parts of the *acquis*; will be accelerated; encourages Latvia to proceed with the establishment of viable regional structures, in order to draw maximum benefit from EU structural funds after accession;
15. Notes that in the area of social policy and employment, alignment with the *acquis* is not yet complete; points out that proper enforcement should also be ensured; draws attention to the prominent role of the social partners in Community legislation and the importance of functioning bipartite social dialogue;
16. Urges Latvia to adopt the necessary provisions for ensuring mutual recognition of qualifications and free movement of workers;
17. Urges that an urgently needed socially sustainable integration process is secured; invites the Commission to further develop together with the Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the European Parliament a reference document;
18. Draws attention to the importance of developing regional and local authorities' ability to implement environmental legislation, which depends also on the effective participation of independent non-governmental organisations in decision-making processes; suggests that the pre-accession instrument "twinning" should be opened also for local and regional authorities, so as to familiarise them with EU practice in this field;



### ***The Pre-Accession Strategy***

19. Regrets the delay in the launch of the Sapard programme for aid to agriculture and rural development; asks the Commission to speed up the process; agrees with the Commission that the deadline for spending the Sapard funds allocated in the 2000 budget should be extended to the end of 2003;
20. Underlines that Sapard should be implemented in a way that enables the rural population in its entirety to profit from it and to exploit the big opportunities for integrated rural development and environmentally friendly production; points to the importance of supporting and co-operating with farmers' organisations, not least with a view to reaching farmers with small resources and low access to information;
21. Welcomes Latvia's wish to manage future structural aid in a decentralised way; advises the Commission to speed up the process of decentralisation of pre-accession funds, including the application of the partnership principles, in order to support Latvia's preparations in this regard;
22. Is concerned about reports that EU based companies operating in Latvia are adopting hostile attitudes towards trade unions and are reticent in co-operating with Latvian employers' associations; asks the Commission to thoroughly investigate the situation;

### ***Latvian - Russian Relations***

23. Welcomes Latvia's efforts to re-activate the intergovernmental commission; regrets that several initiatives by the Latvian side for the enhancement of cross-border co-operation have not yet received support from Russia; reiterates its call on Russia to sign and ratify the border agreement with Latvia, which has been initialled<sup>1</sup>;

### ***The negotiations and crucial issues in view of Parliament's assent to Latvia's accession***

24. Stresses the crucial importance to the Union's cohesion of the principle that Member States have equal rights and equal obligations; insists on the defence of this principle against insufficiently founded demands for transitional periods or special arrangements in connection with accessions, regardless of whether these demands are made by candidate countries or Member States;

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<sup>1</sup> European Parliament resolution of 13 December 2000 on the implementation of the Common Strategy of the EU on Russia (Texts adopted of that Sitting, Item 11).

25. Following clear policy set by DG Environment that candidate countries do not ask for transition periods for the transposition, implementation and enforcement of nature protection legislation, considers it regrettable that some candidate countries are still trying to negotiate transition periods in this area, and urges the Commission to stand firm in the negotiations;
26. Calls on Latvia to put into place mechanisms necessary to link effectively to the Community's Rapid Alert System, both in terms of alerting the European Food Safety Authority of any serious perceived or identified risk and in terms of action to be taken by the RAS as a result of an EFSA warning;
27. Believes it to be of central importance that the implementation of the new proposals in the Commission's White Paper on Food Safety is carefully monitored by Latvia, and taken full account of before the negotiations are finally completed;
28. Emphasises that EU animal welfare legislation must be properly supported by adequate controls at national and EU level if enlargement to include Latvia is not to result in a deterioration in the EU's farm animal welfare record;
29. Encourages the participation of Latvia in the Community's new Health Action programme commencing 2000;
30. Calls upon the Commission to address the EU information strategy on Enlargement also towards the specific needs and concerns of non-citizens in Latvia;
31. Deplores the Member States' and the Commission's rejection of Parliament's request for better insight into the negotiations; considers this rejection illogical and damaging to the spirit of co-operation between the institutions;
32. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the parliaments of the Member States and the Government and Parliament of Latvia.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

### **The political situation**

Latvia continues to fulfil the political criteria for accession. It possesses viable democratic institutions and a stable parliamentary system.

In January 2001 a new "Civil Service Law", which aims at improving the efficiency, accountability and transparency of the public administration system, entered into force. Latvia is also committed to improve the qualification and preparedness of civil servants at all levels for their future tasks in implementing EU policies, as shows the growing number of civil servants and civil servants candidates in the training courses of the School of Public Administration.

The legislative framework for the prevention of corruption is being improved, for example by amendments to the "Law on public procurement", the "Law on managing of the state shares in enterprises", the "Law on public agencies", the draft "Law on financing of political parties". However, institutions need to be established or strengthened. The Council on Anti-Corruption is an example of the latter. Anti-corruption control has to be extended also to the decentralised structures, and the witness-protection system needs to be improved. Community aid is needed for technical and financial assistance in this respect.

### *Respect for Human and Minority Rights*

The primary human rights problems in Latvia in 2000 are severe backlogs in the court system and long pre-trial detention periods, of particular concern being the large number of minors in pre-trial detention. The delays in court proceedings are caused partly by under-funding, leading to a shortage of personnel and lack of premises. Another reason for the delays is the absence of legal norms in criminal procedure setting time limits for the review of cases. The condition in prisons and detention facilities with large number of prisoners, high-percentage of remand prisoners, and the incidence of disease remain serious problems.

Legislation initiatives have recently been envisaged to improve the court proceedings regarding the minors, to establish a new sanction mechanism for minors' as an alternative to prison, and to develop the probation service. National funds have been allocated for the training of judges. But further urgent steps need to be taken. The drafting of the new Criminal Procedure Code needs to be speeded up, obligatory advocacy for minors must be strengthened, and the reform of the prison system continued.

With regard to the protection of refugees and asylum seekers, a draft new Asylum Law has been presented to Parliament. It addresses many yet not all of the gaps in the current Refugee law ("Law on Asylum seekers and Refugees in the Republic of Latvia") in relation to the EU acquis. The improvements relate to the introduction of complementary forms of protection, the re-definition of a safe third country and a safe country of origin, the introduction of safeguards for the use of detention during the initial review of a claim.

Nevertheless, the risk of violation of the principle of non-refoulement persists, especially in relation to extensive grounds for exclusion and cessation from refugee status and

complementary forms of protection, and in relation to the entitlement of state border guards officials to interview the asylum seekers submitting the application on the state border. The 1995 EU Resolution on Minimum Guarantees for Asylum Procedures provides that asylum seekers must be given the opportunity of a personal interview with an official qualified under national law, the services of an interpreter paid out of public funds, the right to call a legal adviser or counsellor and to communicate with UNHCR or another refugee organisation. Due to the very short time frames foreseen by the accelerated procedure at the border, the lack of competence of the border guards in asylum issues, their lack of access to updated country of origin information and the difficulties in finding interpreters and legal counsellors, especially in areas close to border crossing points, some refugees could be at risk of refoulement. Safeguards are still missing for the use of detention pending expulsion, whereby rejected asylum seekers, who cannot be deported for technical reasons, can be left in detention for indefinite periods of time.

The situation as regards the integration of ethnic non-Latvians into the Latvian society has clearly improved. The latest implementing regulations under the State Language Law adopted by the Latvian Government in 2000 were, as stated by OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, "essentially in conformity with both the Law and Latvia's international obligations". Future developments with regard to the integration of a still considerable high number of non-citizens will also depend on the implementation of the "Programme for the Integration of Society". The long version of the programme has been adopted by the Government at the beginning of the year and funds have already been earmarked in the state budget 2001. More integration-related projects can hopefully be launched as soon as the legal conditions for the creation of the "Social Integration Fund" are in place, which should also allow international donors' contributions to be channelled into initiatives for the promotion of inter-ethnic exchanges, mutual understanding, and free language teaching programmes for adults.

### **Economic development**

Latvia's economic growth rate is now among the highest in the candidate countries, inflation is low, the government deficit has been brought under control and unemployment is slowly going down from the high level it previously reached. The Government has set ambitious budget deficit targets at 1.8 % of GDP in 2001 and 1.0 % for 2002.

Budget consolidation is an important aim also with regard to the implementation of the *acquis communautaire*. Nevertheless the objectives of stabilisation policies should be in line with other objectives of sustainable development, thus allow for future-oriented public expenditure and public investments for enhancement of social and economic cohesion, for the provision of social services and social protection.

Last year's European Parliament report stated that growing social and regional disparities within the country should urgently be addressed by the Latvian government making the widest possible use of experiences resulting from the EU structural funds, as well as employment policies. The elaboration of a comprehensive National Development Plan is an important instrument in this respect; preparations for it should be speeded up (see below: Social and Economic Cohesion).

Privatisation has almost been completed, but still a few large enterprises remain to be privatised. The privatisation of the state owned equity holding of Lattelekom depends on the outcome of the negotiations with the private shareholder Lattelekom - Tilts Communications. The private

shareholder claims compensation for the reduction of Lattelekom monopoly periods. International arbitration has been launched in August 2000. The plans for privatisation of railways and post services are oriented towards the mainstream EU Member State experiences. Within the context of liberalisation of the energy sector, Latvia should make use of the extensive potential of renewable energies, especially in rural areas.

### **Capacity to implement the acquis**

It has already been mentioned that Latvia is actively engaged in improving the capacity of its public administration structures for carrying out EU requirements. Progress has been achieved in the first place at the central level. Initiatives include the Law on Civil Service, the establishment in the State Chancellery of the Strategic Planning and Policy Co-ordination Department for the functional review of the Ministries.

With regard to the administrative territorial reform, the process of amalgamation of existing communities in order to enhance their administrative capacity has also started. However, it needs to be speeded up to enable local communities to fully play their role in the implementation of important parts of the acquis once transposed in the national legislation, particularly in the fields of environment, transport, social security, health and regional policy.

For the same reasons, your rapporteur wants to encourage the Latvian Government to proceed with the establishment of viable regional governments, so as to take full advantage of the future participation in the EU structural funds. At the moment, five planning regions have been established with the task of promoting regional development. These may serve as a basis for the creation of regional governments. The rapporteur further supports the Government's decision to organise the territorial system of public administration in correspondence with the creation of regional governments.

### *Environment*

The Commission's Regular Report 2000 has acknowledged Latvia's progress as regards the transposition of the EU environment acquis, in particular as concerns environment information, nature protection, waste management and genetically modified organisms, GMOs. The Latvian legislation on environmental impact assessment is largely in line with the acquis. In its last Resolution on EU-Enlargement the European Parliament stressed that EU environmental directives which can be implemented at low cost should apply from day one of accession. It should therefore be welcomed that Latvia has reviewed its initial negotiation position and withdrawn the request for transitional periods in the field of nature protection.

Latvia appears to be well aware of the financial challenges linked to the adoption of the acquis in all environmental sectors, as is shown by the implementation programmes including preliminary cost assessments presented by the Latvian authorities. Priority at this stage should therefore be given to the enhancement of those administrative structures, in particular at the regional level, which in co-operation with local authorities are responsible for implementation of environment legislation, including cost-effective and timely investments.

### *Agriculture and rural development*

As the other applicant countries, Latvia had its Rural Development Programme adopted by the

Commission before the end of last year. Preparations for the establishment of the Rural Support Service, i.e. the national paying agency, have proceeded at a good pace. The annual indicative budget allocations for Latvia amount to about 22 Million Euro per year. This is a significant amount of financial resources for a small country like Latvia, and it will therefore have a significant impact on the national development policies in their entirety.

High expectation has been created among the rural population with regard to the Sapard programme. The inevitable complexity of the programme and its novelty make preparations difficult both for the applicant country and for the Commission and this is unfortunately delaying the launch of the programme. The Commission is therefore asked to examine possibilities for speeding up the process, also by making use of its decentralised staff at the EC delegation in Riga. Moreover the rapporteur welcomes the Commission's determination to safeguard the funds earmarked under Sapard and the intention to explore the possibility of extending the deadline for spending EU-funds allocated in the 2000 budget for Sapard from 31 December 2002 to the end of 2003.

Latvia's Rural Development Plan outlines different ways of promoting rural development that meets social, economic and environmental objectives. The programme needs now to be implemented in such a way as to enable the whole rural population to fully seize the considerable opportunities for integrated rural development and for environmentally friendly production which exist, given the wide natural resources and the low intensity of fertiliser and pesticide use. Particular attention has to be given in this respect to those rural population groups, which for lack of financial and human resources may find it difficult to take advantage of the Sapard programme. Support to farmers' unions and provision of access to rural credits have therefore to go hand in hand with the implementation of the rural development plan.

#### *Social and economic cohesion policy*

Latvia has recently taken several important steps to develop programming and implementation capacity in view of its future participation in the EU structural funds. At the end of 2000, the Government took a decision to define the whole national territory as a single NUTS II level region, as the Commission had suggested. Other forward-looking institutional measures are planned, such as the establishment of a new Ministry for Regional Development for the co-ordination of the EU structural instruments, as well as adaptations of the national budgetary policy procedures to the requirements of medium-term regional policy objectives. The rapporteur particularly welcomes the central authorities' commitment to manage all sources of structural aid on the basis of the partnership principle, i.e. in close association with the so-called Planning Regions Development Councils, as well as social partners (see below). As soon as these legal and institutional conditions are established, the European Commission is advised to speed up the process of decentralisation of pre-accession funds for social and economic cohesion, so as to enable Latvia to fully take advantage of the EU Structural funds immediately upon accession, on the basis of equal treatment.

#### *Social Policy and Employment*

With regard to labour law substantial parts of the acquis, such as equal pay, access to employment, working conditions, burden of proof etc. have yet to be transposed. The adoption of the new Labour Code and the law "On Labour protection" has to be speeded up, in line with the commitments made in the framework of the Accession Partnership.

With regard to Social Dialogue a viable tripartite system is in place in form of a National tripartite Co-operation Council with four sub-councils. The approach of all the three partners appears to be very constructive and results have been achieved; although the weak representativeness of the employers' confederation continues to be a major problem. Effective consultation of the social partners is taking place for the transposition of EU social acquis into the Labour Law, the Law on Labour Protection and the Law on protection of employees in case of insolvency of employers, as well as in the preparation of the National Development Plan.

The social partners will however play a prominent role also with regard to the implementation of the acquis once it is transposed in national legislation. Support for social partners' capacity building has started in the framework of pre-accession aid, but further efforts are needed. Bipartite social dialogue still functions to a very little extent, at the sector-based level as well as at the regional level, with the result that more than 80% of the Latvian workforce is not covered by collective agreements. The malfunction of the bipartite dialogue on sector-based level is linked to the difficulties for trade unions to establish themselves in SMEs and the low level of representativeness of business associations.

Also EU based companies established in Latvia are reportedly hostile towards joining Latvian business associations, and towards trade union activities at enterprise level. Given that the support of social partners' capacity-building efforts in developing and implementing the social *acquis*, notably through bipartite social dialogue, is a short-term priority of the Accession Partnership, the above mentioned attitude of EU based companies hampers pre-accession preparations in this field. The Commission is therefore asked to thoroughly investigate the situation.

#### *Justice and Home Affairs*

The Latvian Government envisages taking over and implementing the whole acquis in JHA from the 1 January 2003 onwards. The strengthening of border control has been continued and considerable national financial resources have been allocated to construction work of new border guard divisions. In January 2001, Russia abolished the visa-free regime for non-citizens to enter Russia.

#### **The state of accession negotiations**

Since 15 February 2000, when Latvia started the negotiations on accession to the European Union, considerable progress has been achieved. The negotiations conducted so far cover 26 chapters of the *acquis communautaire* of which 13 chapters have been provisionally closed. This shows the viability of the principles of catch-up and differentiation declared by the European Council in Helsinki as well as the Commission so-called "road map". This new negotiation strategy has eventually allowed overcoming the initial premature grouping among candidate countries and permits Latvia to proceed according to its true level of preparedness.