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THE PROCESS OF ACCESSION TO THE EU - THE CASE OF ROMANIA

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It is an honour and a pleasure to be here today and it is a pleasure to see the European Institute of Romania up and running. The European Institute of Romania is the output of a PHARE project. Some time ago, the Romanian Government felt it needed a public and independent policy research centre, specialized in European affairs, very much like similar institutions that we have in the Member States or that exist outside the Union, like for instance in the United States, and the Commission agreed to support it. Now we have the Institute, as I said it is up and running, it is led by a recognized authority in EU affairs as Mr. Idu, and it has a wide variety of very useful activities. But today and from now on, I do not want to consider the European Institute as a Phare project any more. The European Institute of Romania is a research and policy centre on its own right and it is at the service of the Romanian Government, academia, researchers, the press, the interested public, and Romania at large. It is networking, and we encourage it to network even more with similar institutions elsewhere in the European Union and in the world at large; it has its own programme of activities and events – and this is of course one – so I am proud and at the same time humbled to be here today before you.

The subject that together with Mr Idu I have chosen for this talk is “The process of accession - The case of Romania”. There is a general part, ‘the process of accession’ – and note that I use the word “accession” and not “accession negotiations” (there is a difference which I will try to explain) - and one specific to this country - ‘the case of Romania’, because you as Romanians are legitimately interested in the case of your country in this big game that is the enlargement of the European Union. Given the place and given my functions as the Commission official responsible for relations with Romania – not negotiations with Romania, relations with Romania – this is going to be a difficult balancing act between Commission officialdom which I modestly represent and my personal views, to which I shall offer an opportunity to surface in a place like this, which is a research centre and a policy institute. So I will try and be diplomatic, but I will also try to be direct at times.

I would like to say a few words about enlargement as a dynamic process in the history of the European Union and what it means, in general and in particular in the course and the context of this enlargement. Enlargement is not just a mechanistic extension of borders, or an expanding coalition among states which are pursuing their own interests by an exchange of reciprocal advantages. It is one of the dimensions of a much wider historical phenomenon: the unification of Europe. I am using this terminology not to repeat the slogan which is always used when describing this particular enlargement, because the unification of Europe, the construction of Europe, the search for the right geographic dimension and the right institutional set-up for an entity capable to have a place in the world next to the then two superpowers is something that started over 50 years ago, right

after World War II, when the Council of Europe was first established and when the Coal and Steel Community came out of the minds of the founding fathers of Europe. It is a fact, however, that all these events happened in a very specific geopolitical context you are all too well aware of, when the West of Europe thought that it had to brace itself against the danger of confrontation with the Soviet Union and the communist block that surrounded it. This process, which started with a profound political significance but essentially an economic content, progressed with growing dynamism with further extensions, bringing further integration among its members with it. We have always lived with the thesis/antithesis of deepening and enlarging, enlarging and deepening, but the synthesis has always been further integration. The 1973 accession of the UK, Denmark and Ireland, the 1981 accession of Greece, the 1986 accession of Spain and Portugal and the 1995 accession of Sweden, Finland and Austria, have all been seen before they took place as a risk for the Union, a risk of watering down the cohesion among the member states. But in the end, each of these accessions turned out to be a success, not just for the new member states, but also for the Union as a whole, because it brought a wider vision, a deepening of the sphere of action of the Union, and also a greater say for the Union in world affairs. The Union expands and attracts more members because it has been a success - Monsieur de Lapalisse could have said that. If the Union were not successful neither you nor any of the other candidates in the present round would want to join it.

This major historical process can only continue with an even stronger sense of political necessity and motivation to include the new democracies that have emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is a different geopolitical context, but in this different geopolitical context there is even a stronger need to unify Europe. Indeed, what is the challenge that we all face, individually and collectively? Once again, as I said before, we face the challenge of finding (and our goal is that of finding) the right geopolitical size and the right institutional set-up for Europe to be able to tackle successfully the challenges of globalisation. What are they? That of international competition in the first place, not just economic competition, but general competition in all fields of human endeavour. Another challenge to face is that of political and economic security at home and in the world not only in military or security terms, even if the Union is now developing its own security capacity, but also as a response to societal threats or societal phenomena such as terrorism, migrations, the gap between the haves and the have-nots of this world.... Political and economic security now is much more than what it used to be when NATO and the EU (or the then European Economic Community) confronted the Warsaw Pact and COMECON. The concept we have of political and economic security now is one which is adapted to a globalized world and which is globalized itself, because it covers the entire gamut of challenges that we have to our security. A third challenge of globalisation is that of sustainable development, which is the need to consider present resources as something that we have to borrow from future generations and the need to use resources today in a way that would allow our children and the children of our children to continue to benefit from those same resources and have even more of them.

More specifically, what is the meaning of this enlargement? It is perhaps pretentious of me to speak of this enlargement in a historical context, but I would like to go a little bit beyond the immediate interest of each individual candidate country or the member states of the Union as a whole. I would say that for the ten candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe this enlargement is an experiment in state reform and modernisation. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, coming out as they do of their troubled and

difficult history, are going through a major process of reform. It is not just economic reform, but state reform. They are building new states and they are doing so at an incredibly fast pace. Don't be impatient! Things that you have done in ten-twelve years have taken centuries in the history of nation states of Western Europe and they have taken decades for the European Union. And the European Union itself, in the 40 or 50 years of its existence has done more than what nation states of Europe - East and West - have done in centuries of existence. What the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have achieved in ten years is an enormous acceleration of history. While impatience is understandable, it is a danger. There is an Italian proverb which says "*La gatta frettolosa fa i gattini ciechi* (cats in a hurry make blind kittens)". Don't make too many blind kittens in Romania!

As I said, this enlargement is an exercise in state reform. It is something that you have to do in any case, whether you want to join the European Union or not. But since you want to join it, you have decided – you have decided, you, Romania, you, Hungary, you, Bulgaria, and all the other candidate countries, not us – you have decided to accept as a model, as a blueprint for your reform, the way of doing things that has been developed by the member states of the European Union through fifty years of working together. This is what we call the *acquis communautaire*, which is not just those 80,000 pages of legislation that the European Institute of Romania is translating, but it is the way of doing things together and trusting each other that we have built on the basis of our founding treaties. This too is the *acquis communautaire* that you have chosen as the blueprint that you want to use for the reform of your state. Therefore you can use the target that you have set yourselves of accession to the EU as an extremely powerful catalyst to carry out the reform of the state that in any case Romania has to carry out. You see now why I said that I would speak about accession and not negotiations for accession, because accession is a much wider process than just the negotiations. Accession is something that takes place in Bucharest, in Brasov, in Timisoara, in the 42 “judete” of Romania, not so much in Brussels. Accession is preparations at home. And I would take an example from the recent history of the country I come from. In the mid '90s, after the treaty of Maastricht had established the parameters for Economic and Monetary Union, Italy thought that it should get an exception, or that it could get a postponement because, objectively, the state of the Italian economy was not that promising in '95 –'96. Not only various external watchers and economically rigorous member states like the Netherlands or Germany really didn't believe that Italy could make it to Economic and Monetary Union, but the Italians themselves didn't believe it. I remember the newspaper that I use to read carried a weekly supplement which had a table showing, on the basis of the pace of development of the Italian economy and the pace of its working towards meeting the Maastricht criteria, the chances of making it: this table went up and down every week! So one day Mr. Prodi, who was then the Italian Prime Minister went to Spain on an official visit to meet the then Prime Minister of Spain who was already Mr. Aznar, and tried to convince him that Spain like Italy was not in such a brilliant situation and perhaps, if the two together applied in Brussels for a little derogation, a little postponement, a very Latin thing ..perhaps they could get an extension for one year and still be able to jump on the EMU train in time for the Single Currency to be in place in Italy and Spain by 2002. And Aznar replied “No way, we are going to make it”. That was a terrible shock for Italy and for the Italian Government, which then decided to overhaul the entire economic policy of the country. This was accepted and understood by the Italian public opinion to the point that the economic sacrifices that Italy made were tremendous, we even had to pay a

special tax which was labelled as a tax for Economic and Monetary Union, so strong was the desire to make it to EMU. The prospect of Economic and Monetary Union and the fear of being left out of it were a powerful catalyst that made it possible for Italy to catch up in two years what it had not been able to do in ten years. And Italy made it. This is an example that I offer to your consideration. You have, in any case, to make a certain number of economic, administrative, political, legal, societal reforms. You have chosen to make them on the basis of the *acquis communautaire*. Your objective and your timetable to get into the EU should act as a catalyst for you to make these reforms.; It is not enough to set a timetable for accession without carrying out the necessary reforms, because I can assure you that the 15 Member States are not bound by the Romanian timetable and they will only accept it if, at the same time, they will consider that Romania is acting consistently with that timetable.

Having said all this about the meaning of enlargement in general and for Romania, you can really see how this process of enlargement and the ongoing debate on the future of Europe, which has its institutional *locus* with the Convention where Romania, like all the other candidate countries, is represented, are intimately linked, and why Member States and candidate countries have to work together in the Convention. This would be the subject for another seminar but I would like to make a digression to tell you what I have heard from Jacques Delors at a conference which I attended in Brussels in November 2000. I was really impressed by the description that he gave - or the dream, the vision that he has - of Europe after enlargement. To quote President Delors, he sees enlarged Europe as “*un espace de paix active, un laboratoire de la globalisation maîtrisée, et un espace de valeurs communes dans la diversité*”. What does this mean?

“*Un espace de paix active*” is an area of active, or even pro-active peace. Peace is not just the contrary of war. Peace is something we have to fight for every day. And Europe, enlarged Europe has a role in maintaining peace in the world, starting with its close neighbours; the past failures of Europe in the Balkans are a lesson that we hope Europe has learnt and that the same mistake will not be made again. “*Un espace de paix active*” is not only about trying to keep or enforce peace in the troubled spots of the world, but also about bringing peace by transforming European society and helping to transform societies elsewhere in the world through the promotion of justice, education, social and economic development.

“*Un laboratoire de la globalisation maîtrisée*” is a recognition of what the Union has already been able to achieve among its members – the single market, economic and monetary union, and many other policies that address global challenges and problems with a set of agreed rules that apply to all the members of the same family. It is also the recognition that the Union has a role to play working together with other partners to establish common rules to manage globalisation in international organizations, like the World Trade Organization, the International Labour Organization and the United Nations at large

“*Un espace de valeurs communes dans la diversité*” - an area of common values while recognizing our diversities, refers to the fact that, while we come from different Member States, we all share the same future. We have to recognize our differences; we have to accept the relative value of concepts like majority and minority on the wider European scene.. To use a formula that Mr Prodi borrowed from a Romanian parliamentarian when

he came here in January 2000, Europe is a Europe of minorities, meaning by this that we do not recognise a majority or a dominant culture, we do not bow to a dominant state in Europe. We are all subject to the same law. The Romanian majority in Romania is a minority in Europe and the full value of each individual culture can only be appreciated if it is put in the context of our common values. We have to accept each other, we have to recognize the wrongs that we have done to each other with wars, divisions and separations; we have to stop considering our differences as elements that oppose us, and we have to consider them as something that enriches us and on which we can build a shared future. I must say I was profoundly impressed by this vision of Europe depicted by President Delors.

So, where does Romania stand in this grand design? I think that the best and most objective starting point is the Commission Regular Report for 2001. It is still very much up to date in terms of general impressions. Not that Romania hasn't moved forward since November 2001, when the Commission published its report. It has indeed, sometimes it has taken the right decisions, sometimes it has taken decisions on which we have something to say and you will read it in this year's Regular Report, but it has moved forward. This is not the place to comment on individual issues, but it may be useful to give you the general spin, the message that we wanted to pass in the 2001 Regular Report. In a nutshell, how did we describe the situation? We said there was a new momentum in Romania in 2001 and a sense of direction, objectives had been clearly set, there was cohesion in government and greater consistency in its action. This assessment has nothing to do with political preferences or ideologies, as the EU is ideologically very tolerant and very open as long as the basic criteria of democracy and the rule of law are respected. So, 2001 was a year when, perhaps after a slow start, progress was tangible, visible, important. And, at the end of 2001, the situation was better than at the end of 2000. But, as you have probably already heard, we also said that better does not necessarily mean good. And sometimes, excuse me, better is even less than good, because the distance to be covered between the present situation and the situation when you and the Union will be able to consider your country ready for accession is still long. But the movement is irreversible, not only for Romania but also on the Union side.

Indeed, as the Union has declared on several occasions, and lately at the Laeken European summit where ten countries have been mentioned for a possible first wave of accession in 2004, this accession process is unitary and inclusive.. Countries that will not join in 2004 will not be left behind and mixed up with possible other waves of candidates that have not yet even applied. The EU recognises it has a duty to support Romania and Bulgaria, and whatever other country will not join in 2004, to make sure that they remain on the same train of this inclusive accession process. This, however, will also depend on Romania. Romania, like Bulgaria, has set itself 2007 as the date for accession; this is a perfectly legitimate and sensible date, and therefore it would come as no surprise to Romania and Bulgaria if, at the Copenhagen European Council in December 2002, they will not be invited to join the Union in 2004. But it is clear that the Union will want to offer a perspective, perhaps a target date. Therefore the end of 2002 is important for Romania as it is important for Poland and Hungary and Slovenia and all the other countries that might be invited to join. Because the message that the Union will give to Romania at the end of 2002 will depend on what Romania will have done this year and has been doing over the past few years. The more positive Romania's performance will be at the end of 2002, the more positive and the more forthcoming the Union will be in

the message it will give to it. This is the idea of the roadmap and the new updated pre-accession strategy that the Union has committed itself to give Romania. This will not be like '*une Constitution octroyée de 1848*'. It is not something that comes from the sovereign as a concession, but it is something that has to be earned by Romania. Accession, once again, is what Romania does at home rather than the concessions that it gets from Brussels or from the Member States.

Where is progress necessary? To list what we consider to be Romania's weak points first on the basis of the 2001 Regular Report, you know that we have made very critical comments on civil service reform and the still unsatisfactory state of the economy in spite of the considerable progress that has been made on the road to macroeconomic stability. We still believe that, with the heavy presence of the state in the economy, Romania cannot yet be considered as a functioning market economy and its economic structures are still too weak for Romania to be able to withstand the pressure of competition once internal borders are suppressed. We are concerned at the functioning of the judiciary and its insufficient independence from the government. We are concerned – I think as much as the Romanian public is concerned – at the high level of corruption throughout a very wide range of sectors in Romanian public life.

Sectorally, there are two policy areas which are very important in the Union and where we think that Romania has to make very considerable progress if it wants to meet the requirements of membership but also if it wants to play an active role as a member of the Union and draw all the benefits that membership entails. These are agriculture and the environment.

Agriculture is a major asset for Romania. But agriculture today in Romania is subsistence agriculture, which is a fact that is recognized by the Agriculture Ministry itself. Romanian agriculture, with the potential that it has, a potential similar to that of France, has to be turned into a sector producing for the market, feeding Romanians in the first place but also offering export opportunities to the Union and the world markets at very competitive prices.

In environment, we think that, while a lot has been done to understand and to transpose the Community *acquis*, major investments need to be carried out in order to bring your implementation standards up to the level of EU laws and practice on industrial pollution, water, waste water treatment, air, noise, waste disposal etc. We also consider that the administrative capacity of the institutions which have the responsibility to enforce environmental legislation, especially at the local and regional level, is still very weak.

Of course you can rely on the strong points, the assets of Romania, which we have also identified in the Regular Report. The first asset is your country's human resources. Romania, like all candidate countries, will bring considerable fresh and intelligent human resources to the Union. You have very good universities, academies, schools..., they just need a little bit of modernization and upgrading, more funds and a greater opening to the world (which, incidentally, is something we are contributing to by letting Romanian scientists, students and other relevant categories of citizens take part in Community programmes).

Another strong point which is worth noting is the progress towards greater civic and democratic maturity that Romanian society has been able to make over the last years. I am saying this with no intention whatsoever to oppose Member States to candidate countries. Every country has its own history and its own growing up process: in the European Union we have our jokes about national differences, and you can very well imagine the jokes that people make about the Italians or the Greeks or the Spaniards or the Latins in general as opposed to the Nordics and the Saxons, not to speak of the politically correct Scandinavians! Growing democratic and civic maturity in Romania can be seen in the greater attention that is given to excluded sectors of society like abandoned children, or in the legislative reform that has decriminalised homosexuality. What the Commission says about these individual issues is of course that progress is important *per se*, because it is important to take care of Romania's children, it is important not to discriminate against people, whatever their personal orientations are, but also that it has a wider implication because all these little –and big – things are evidence of a growing level of democratic and social maturity, which is relevant for the fulfilment of the political criterion set at Copenhagen.

Progress is being made in the economy as well, the second criterion.. Inflation has gone down, not as much as Romanian housewives and businessmen would like, but it has indeed gone down, and the macroeconomic performance globally has improved.

Turning to the third criterion of Copenhagen, transposition of the *acquis* and the modernization of Romanian legislation have continued and picked up speed. There is quite a number of important examples of progress that can be mentioned in individual chapters like the free movement of goods, company law, competition, transport, telecommunications...

If you have noticed, I have not yet spoken of the formal side of negotiations. Why so? Accession is not just about negotiations. Accession is much more than the Brussels-driven process of piling up documents, position papers on the Romanian side, EU common positions on our side. But it is a Bucharest-centred process of preparation and reform. What are the negotiations about, then? Somebody else before me has developed what I have taken to call “the iceberg theory.” Accession is like an iceberg. The tip of the iceberg is the negotiations. But as the bulk of an iceberg is under water, so the bulk of accession is below the level of negotiations. It is what we call preparations at home. As a matter of fact, accession negotiations are not traditional negotiations such as for instance trade negotiations between two entities that start negotiation as separate bodies and also end negotiations as separate bodies, looking after their own specific and individual interests throughout the process. These are negotiations where we begin with two parties and we end with one. These are negotiations which have a constitutional dimension because they involve amendments to our basic treaties. They are based on the principle that, if you want to join a club, you have to accept all the rules of that club. Accession does not create a different Union. It is a larger Union because membership is expanding, of course, and the territory and population of the Union are increased, but the rules remain the same. What we negotiate, then, is only that part of the *acquis* that cannot be taken over on the date of accession by the new member. Paradoxically, the most successful accession would then be the accession where there is nothing to negotiate, because all the *acquis* is applied on day one by the new Member State. This is impossible, or rather it has happened only once in the history of the Union, following the

reunification of Germany. But otherwise, it is clearly impossible that the entire *acquis* can be applied from day one. What we are negotiating are therefore the transitional periods or technical adjustments that are necessary to take into account the different objective situations of Romania and of other candidate countries. To give some practical examples, we are negotiating the time it will take Romania and the other candidate countries to be able to apply the excise duties on tobacco and petrol as in the EU, the amount of time that Romania will need to bring its environmental legislation up to European standards on industrial pollution, the time it will take for Romania to change its Constitution to make it constitutionally possible for foreign Community citizens to acquire real estate in Romania and many more similar technical issues, but all or most with important economic and political implications. There is of course an element of negotiation, because you start with a position, we start with another position, and in between we will find an arrangement. If you ask for a ten years' transition on something and if we are ready to concede two years, there are chances that we can agree on five years, that's the negotiation. But it is not a negotiation to change the *acquis*, the rules of the club remain the same. Once again, this shows how important preparation for accession, transposition of the *acquis* and the establishment of the implementation and enforcement capacities are. Negotiations, as I said, is the tip of the iceberg. Do not lose a sense of perspective, and do not think that the Member States and the Union will judge the final result of Romania's accession process - or the accession process of any other candidate country for that matter - on the outcome of negotiations alone. There is much more to it.

On what, then, will the judgment be based in the end? Once again, it will be based on the famous Copenhagen criteria: the political criterion, the economic criterion, the criterion related to taking over the *acquis communautaire*, and what that implies, that is the ability not only to transpose, but also to implement the *acquis*. This is what we call administrative capacity, which is a shortcut for a much more complex concept.

What fulfilling the political criterion means is obvious. It is essentially a political assessment that I would certainly not dare make here today, apart from repeating the clear statement in our Regular Report, which says that Romania does fulfil the political criterion. But, "nobody is perfect"... and I think that all of you as individual Romanian citizens may bring a judgment on the degree of democracy that exists in Romania today. And you are also an active instrument to make this democracy work through your vote, your right to speak up and all your rights and obligations. Perhaps this is the place to quote Jean Monnet, the "*éminence grise*" behind the political founding fathers of the Coal and Steel Community, who said "*nous ne fédérons pas des états, nous unissons des peuples*" (we are not federating states, we are uniting people) - and to make a little digression from here. The Union is more than just a union of states. The law of the Union applies directly to all its citizens. And all the citizens of the Union have rights and obligations under that law, which are protected by the courts, the national courts and the Court of Justice in the end. There is something which is called European citizenship, which is not a substitute to Romanian citizenship, or Dutch citizenship, or Italian citizenship, or French citizenship. It is the recognition of the common rights and common obligations that we have wherever we are in the European Union, not just in our own home countries. It is the right for a Romanian doctor to practice medicine in Germany

once Romania has joined, just like a German doctor, or the right for an Italian resident of Romania to vote for the mayor of Bucharest.

As to the economic criterion: what does it mean being a functioning market economy capable of withstanding competitive pressure in the internal market? It does not mean being rich. As the Union enlarged, especially in 1981 to Greece and in 1985 to Spain and Portugal, the Community grew poorer. Believe it or not, when Finland and Austria together with Sweden joined, they were going through an economic downturn, so that their average GDP per capita was below the Community average and the Community grew actually poorer even as a result of the 1995 enlargement. Of course, real convergence, that is what we call economic and social cohesion is important, and the EU has major policies, of which Romania together with the other candidate countries once they become members, will be a major beneficiary, in order to try and achieve greater internal cohesion. Being a functioning market economy means having a clear set of rules governing the economy, stability of those rules, the role of the state limited to setting a level playing field and taking care of the social dimension of all economic decisions, recognition of free economic initiative, the promotion of economic success, but also the recognition of failure and the acceptance of failure, and non interference from the state when failure occurs, that is, do not keep alive industrial dinosaurs that only cause losses to the state. Do you know that SIDEX – of course you know – used to lose 1 million USD a day before it was privatised? And this million dollar a day was paid by the Romanian taxpayers.

Your economy must also be capable to withstand competition in the Single Market. This is where the economic criterion meets, in a way, the legislative criterion . Here I must say once again that I see a risk in accelerating accession, that of transforming accession in a paper-only exercise, with a lot of transposition, with all the laws prepared and in conformity with the EU acquis, but as you accelerate transposition without proper attention to reinforcing the institutions, training the civil servants and informing the citizens and economic operators, you increase the gap between transposition and the administrative capacity to implement the legislation that has been transposed. The end result of this may well be the inability of your economic sectors to withstand competition from industrial and agricultural producers, providers of financial and other services, all those people that once the remaining borders between Romania and the European Union will have disappeared are only waiting to have a new market of 23 million people to which they are ready to offer their sophisticated and extremely competitive products.. Unless one is well prepared, there is a very serious risk of not being able to withstand this kind of competition. This is why, on top of transposition and administrative capacity, it is important to consider what integration means in terms of economic consequences for Romania. I congratulate the European Institute in this respect, because it has launched a number of impact studies on the consequences of accession for various economic sectors and policies in Romania, and we are very much looking forward to reading the undoubtedly interesting papers that will be produced.

When I speak of administrative capacity, this is a shortcut for the good functioning of the state, and not just the central administration, but also local administration, and more generally civil society as well. We have scores of action plans that are being devised at

all levels of the Romanian government and the Commission to prepare transposition, implementation and monitoring. Of course they need to be implemented but what really matters is that the right decisions are taken at the right time, after full consultation of the stakeholders, through transparent procedures and in full awareness of the consequences and implications. Unfortunately, it happens in Romania that legislation is adopted very often too much in haste, while we would like to see greater legal security and stability. In the end, readiness and maturity for accession will be judged on the basis of the economic criterion and the criterion which I have called administrative capacity but which is a shortcut for the good functioning of the state. So, once again, take your time. Don't think that accession is a short mechanical process. I am sure that someone now will want to ask me: "But when do you think Romania will be ready for accession?", or: "When do you think Romania will join?". I understand that everybody wants to have a date, a figure, a number. But the answer I would give is not in terms of dates, it is about a process. What really matters is being prepared when the moment comes. Your preparation is what you decide to do, of course, but it is also supported by the Union with its assistance. The strength and depth of the relationship that already exists between Romania and the Union is unprecedented. We certainly did not have the same intensity of relationship with the candidate countries that joined in previous waves of accession. Think of the timeframe also: Spain and Portugal negotiated for 7 years. The EFTA countries, Austria, Sweden and Finland, negotiated for one year only, from spring 1993 to the beginning of 1994, but they started thinking about membership as early as 1987, and then they negotiated the EEA agreement which was a very long process. That process of "rapprochement" to the Union took 7 or 8 years, between 1987 and the beginning of 1995.

In the end, administrative capacity is a matter of trust. Membership of the Union is based on trust. The principle of mutual recognition has come more and more to the forefront of European law-making and policy-making, indeed of the Union's way of thinking. I accept your way of doing things because you accept my way of doing things; I accept that on your territory you treat liberal professions, goods, services that come from my Member State to yours because I trust that you will deal with them according to a law that we have established together, Community law, and that you will deal with them in a competent, transparent and efficient way. And you trust that I will do the same with your lawyers, your doctors, your services, your goods that come to my territory, because I will treat them in the same way as you treat them in your territory. Trust is what keeps us together, and trust has to be won every day, even among the present Member States.

In the end, the European Union (I would like to simplify things to the extreme) is all about peace and trust. Membership (it may sound indeed an anti-climax at the end of this long, much too long speech) is a nameplate and a microphone. There is of course more to it, and this is indeed a very cynical definition of membership. But it describes well the role of a Member State, of any Member State, old or new, irrespective of the number of votes it has in the Council of Ministers or in the European Parliament. Each Member State shares a common sovereignty. It contributes to setting the agenda of Europe, so that that agenda also takes account of the priorities and the concerns of that Member State. It shares a decision-making power and the same destiny as all the other Member States, but it also has a voice and a vote in shaping that destiny.

Thank you very much.

