

Brussels, 11 April 2001

Enlargement: Commission proposes flexible transitional arrangements for the free movement of workers

The European Commission agreed today to propose transitional arrangements to phase in full rights to free movement of workers for new member states. The proposal envisages a general transition period of 5 years with a possible extension by individual member states for a further 2 years. After no more than 7 years free movement of workers would operate fully across all Member States. The aim of this proposal is to meet concerns where they arise and where they are justified, while allowing for mobility of workers.

The transitional arrangements proposed today at the initiative of Enlargement Commissioner Guenther Verheugen, apply to all candidate countries excluding Cyprus and Malta. Free movement of citizens in general will not be affected by these proposals, which apply specifically to workers.

Such arrangements are a common instrument in Community life, and have been used in previous enlargements. They do not imply discrimination against the new members concerned, rather a determination to ensure that enlargement takes place as smoothly as possible. The proposed arrangements offer those areas where there may be a significant number of new arrivals in the labour market from new member states, time to adjust. This is important, not least to ensure the widest possible public acceptance of enlargement.

The transitional measures would operate as follows:

- The **general transition period** lasts for 5 years. During this time, Member States continue to operate their own national measures on accepting workers from the new Member States. This means they can apply their own restrictions, or decide to go further than others in opening their labour markets, according to local needs and circumstances.
- An **automatic review** is held after no more than 2 years. This review is based on a factual report from the Commission to the Council. On the basis of a Commission proposal, the Council, acting by unanimity, and following consultation with the Parliament, decides whether to shorten or lift the transition period. This could lead to the full application of the *acquis communautaire*, perhaps combined with safeguards for exceptional circumstances. Member States that so wish, would be able to continue with national measures.
- One further **optional additional review** per country may be held at the request of a Member State (current or new) with a view to further relaxation of controls. The same decision mechanism as above would apply.

- The **general transition period ends after 5 years**. In the case of serious disturbances in its labour market, which will be examined by the Commission, any Member State may maintain its national provisions for a **further maximum period of 2 years**.