

**Speech by Günter Verheugen  
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***European Institute for Romania  
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**« Romania's future in the European Union »**

I would like first to express my gratitude to the European Institute of Romania for inviting me to deliver this public address. A creation of the EU PHARE programme, the Institute has become a key forum for debating European issues. You have built your reputation progressively but steadily, by good, solid work. I would like to congratulate you and to encourage you to continue like this in the future. EU accession is a fundamental issue for Romania's future. It is legitimate and fortunate that Romania's civil society and research institutes are involved in the debate.

We are going through a momentous period in the history of Europe. The day before yesterday the European Commission adopted its opinion on the accession of ten new Member States to the European Union. The assent of the European Parliament will now be needed before the Accession Treaty is signed in Athens on 16 April. If all goes well, as expected, ratification will follow, and the ten will become Member States on 1 May 2004. In the coming months the agreements on the accession of seven new members to NATO, including Romania, are also expected to be ratified.

These events that we take almost for granted today were practically unthinkable before the fall of communism. Now they are transforming our continent. We, Europeans, are leaving behind us the age of mistrust, Iron Curtains, hostility and cold war. Instead, we are shaping a new political order, based on peace, stability, democracy and co-operation.

Past rivalries did Europe a lot of harm – they continued to do so as recently as the 1990s where the Balkan conflicts became an unfortunate example of the devastation that hatred and war can bring. Unity and co-operation is the antidote. And this is what the European Union is all about: not only a single market – important as though this is; not only an economic union; but also a community of common values, an attempt to build together a common future.

Chance has put Europeans close to one another on the map. We cannot do anything about geography, but we can do a lot to make the best of it. It is clear that we need each other. Our economies thrive in peace, not in war. The problems that we all face, be it pollution, illegal immigration or organised crime, do not stop at our borders, and we need to tackle them jointly. We are strong when we are united, and we are heard best when we speak with one voice.

The enlargement process has enabled us to bring unity and stability to the whole continent. It has given the incentive to former communist states to transform radically their societies and their economies, and to improve relations with one another. Romania too has taken an active and visible role in regional co-operation. Being itself a stable democracy, Romania is leading by example and is exporting stability to the whole region.

The first ten of the candidate countries will join the European Union in 2004. Bulgaria and Romania will follow as soon as they are ready for membership. The accession process for Bulgaria and Romania too is irreversible. The timing depends on the pace of preparations of the countries themselves.

The last time I gave a speech in Bucharest was in the spring of 2001. It is a great pleasure to be back in the city – and it also gives me an excellent opportunity to review the progress that has been made over the last two years.

Early 2001 was also the first time I had the opportunity to speak to the present government – which was then only newly installed in office. At that time there were three basic messages.

The first of these messages was that in order to make progress in the accession process, a series of fundamental reforms would have to be undertaken. These included the adoption and implementation of EU legislation. But even more important would be the structural reforms that would allow Romania to meet the accession criteria – economic reform, administrative and judicial reform, improving the respect of basic human rights such as the treatment of institutionalised children.

A second message was that the clear popular mandate given at the last election provided a sufficiently stable framework for the reform process to have a realistic chance of success. This was a great opportunity for getting things done, and Romania should make the best of it.

The final message was simple. Romania would be judged not upon words but upon concrete actions. It would be deeds and not promises that would determine the progress made towards EU membership.

Two years have since passed, and the occasion now arises to assess how far Romania has come along the road to EU membership. To judge the extent to which political commitments have resulted in meaningful reforms.

### Real Progress has been Made

The Commission conducts an on-going assessment of Romania's progress towards accession, and, once a year, it publishes its findings in its Regular Reports. The conclusions of this process of assessment are clear. Romania has made very good progress over the last two years. Let me give some examples:

-Efficient management of the negotiations has ensured that a huge volume of legislation has been processed, and it has been possible to close more than half of the negotiation chapters.

-In the economic area Romania is "on-track" with its commitments to the IMF – the first time this has happened since 1989, and a clear sign of growing economic maturity.

-An ambitious package of childcare reforms has led to a remarkable improvement of the situation of institutionalised children. Not only are conditions for children still in institutions being improved, but structural reforms mean that the large old-style institutions are being closed down, and that preventative measures are reducing levels of out-of-home placement. This is an area where Romania should be congratulated on its achievements and should continue its efforts with the same determination.

### A Clear Commitment to Romania's Accession

These actions demonstrate Romania's clear commitment to EU accession. This is a commitment shared by all political parties and by over 80% of the Romanian population.

The genuine progress that has been made has allowed the EU to make its own strong political commitment: the present enlargement round will not be completed until Romania, and Bulgaria, reach their final destination, which is to become Member States of the European Union. The question is not "IF" but "WHEN".

At the end of last year the Commission's accession "Roadmap" and the subsequent Copenhagen meeting of the European Council made the first attempts to address the "WHEN" question.

#### But 2007 Remains a Best case Scenario

The Copenhagen Summit set the clear objective of "welcoming Bulgaria and Romania as members of the European Union in 2007." Does this mean that accession in 2007 is guaranteed? This has been the interpretation put forward by some of the less attentive political commentators. But to accept this view would be a serious mistake.

The objective of 2007 expresses the will of the European Union to accept Bulgaria and Romania if they are ready. Setting this target date is a critical milestone in Romania's progress towards accession because it explicitly recognises that joining the EU in 2007 is within Romania's grasp. But it is important to look at the language of the Copenhagen conclusions more closely since they go on to add that meeting this objective will "depend on further progress in complying with the membership criteria".

In other words, the road is open, but Romania must fully meet the accession criteria. There will be no rebates, and no shortcuts. 2007 will only become a reality IF AND ONLY IF the reform efforts are continued and deepened. Accession in 2007 is not a guarantee, nor a foregone conclusion. It is a shared objective which the EU will pursue with determination, but which also requires the full resolve of Romania's government and politicians, as well as of the entire Romanian society.

#### Meeting the accession criteria: what is the benchmark?

I will return to the specific reforms that will need to be carried out later in this speech. But at this point I would like to move beyond the language of Copenhagen and to tackle the key question of how Romania will meet its accession objective.

The process of joining the EU is a difficult one. It takes considerable effort and determination to always move forward until the final goal is reached. It is like riding a bicycle: the moment you stop turning the wheels, you lose balance and you fall down. To make sure that accession happens and that the criteria are met, Romania should aim high. It should not limit its ambitions to scraping through the membership test; it should aim to pass it with flying colours. In this way, Romania will not only ensure that the final verdict of the Commission and the present Member

States will be positive when the time comes to judge the country's overall preparations for membership. It will also guarantee that Romania will become an effective and influential member state.

The benefits of this approach are clear. Accession is not just about passing EU legislation – it is about using this legislation to improve the quality of life of citizens. EU membership is not simply about receiving EU funding – it should be about using this funding to transform the country. Romania should not simply hope to have a seat at the EU table – it should work towards having a strong and effective voice during the discussions around that table.

The work does not end once Romania joins the Union – the challenges, as well as the opportunities, will not disappear overnight. Romania must be well prepared to make the best of the circumstances of membership. In other words, Romania should not just become a member of the Union: it should become an effective member of the Union.

### The Reform Agenda

How can this be done? The things that I am about to say will not come to anyone as a surprise. They are not new, but there is value in repetition, especially now that we are approaching the final lap, and the clock is ticking. In order to meet the obligations of membership, Romania has to complete basic and structural reforms. And it has to do it soon, if it is serious about the target date of 2007.

The economy has to be thoroughly restructured and modernised so that it can benefit from the opportunities of the Single Market.

The public administration has to be reformed so that it not only passes EU legislation, but this legislation can be effectively implemented and deliver the intended benefits. A strong public administration will give a boost to the reform process, and with it to the accession process. It will allow effective management of EU funding, and it will mean that Romania's interests can be effectively promoted within the European institutions.

The role of the judiciary is another key factor for Romania's accession to the EU. It provides one of the foundations, on which the whole edifice of membership will either stand on its feet or crumble and fall. The judiciary needs to be upgraded and made fully independent. This is the only way to ensure that the EU legislation can be effectively applied. It is also the only way to

improve the quality of justice available to Romanian citizens and to increase private investor confidence, with all the resulting benefits for the economy and the overall image of the country.

Institutions must also be given their independence in order to guarantee the rule of law. This applies to institutions of government such as the civil service, the judiciary and the court of auditors. It also applies to the institutions of civil society such as the press and political parties.

Unless, measures are taken to lock in the independence of these institutions then there will be an almost irresistible temptation to use them for political or partisan reasons – which is one of the surest ways to undermine the rule of law. Romania has a long history of exactly this type of political intervention in the management of the state. I have to say that this is not a situation unique to Romania – but over the long-term this produces bad government and is not the way to become an effective member state.

Romania must revitalise its economy, it must reform its administration and judiciary, and it must de-politicise the machinery of government, so that it runs effectively whatever the colour of the party in power. If Romania can do these things without delay, then I am firmly convinced that the country will be ready not only to join the Union in 2007, but also to become a highly effective Member State.

There is a long list of other issues that need to be addressed that range from tackling corruption to improving the conditions of life for minorities, such as the Roma minority. We must see clear and tangible progress in those areas too in order to come to the conclusion that Romania is ready to join the EU. These issues are important, but again, they can only be successfully addressed by a state that is working efficiently.

I have deliberately avoided focusing on the negotiation process. Adopting the 80.000 pages of EU legislation is a strenuous and complex task. This is an area where progress has been good, and Romania should be congratulated. EU membership means of course much more than simply adopting legislation, and Romania will only be able to implement EU legislation if it makes the structural reforms that I have already outlined.

So we have now come full circle. The call for “further progress in complying with the membership criteria”, in the conclusions of Copenhagen Summit, means further and deeper structural reforms. These reforms are the ones that will allow an early conclusion of the

negotiations. They are also exactly the same reforms that will allow Romania to be an effective Member State after accession.

The time element is extremely important in all this. In terms of preparation for membership, the target date of 1 January 2007 is very near. If Romania wants to meet this target, 2003 will be an absolutely crucial year. There is no time for delays and postponement of basic reforms. Romania must tackle these problems already this year, so that there is sufficient time afterwards for the Commission and the Member States to record a sufficient track record until accession. I very much hope that Romania will rise to this challenge so that the Commission can report genuine substantial progress in this year's Regular Report.

### Conclusion

I would like to conclude by assuring you that the Commission is fully committed to supporting Romania's efforts to join the European Union in 2007. Last year we proposed a Roadmap for Membership for Romania, which the European Council endorsed. The European Council also endorsed the Commission's proposals for a significant increase in pre-accession assistance: an additional 20% in 2004, 30% in 2005 and 40% in 2006 compared to what Romania received in the past. This will bring the total amount of funding available for Romania in the period 2004-2006 to more than Euro 3 billion. It is essential that this high level of funding should be used in an efficient and intelligent way, in order to target those areas where Romania needs it the most. In the coming weeks the Commission will make a proposal for a revised Accession Partnership, which will provide further guidance to Romania in its pre-accession work.

We will continue to do our best to assist Romania so that the target date of 2007 becomes a reality. But I must stress that the responsibility for making sure that this happens lies with Romania, and more specifically with the Romanian Government. If the necessary reforms that have already been identified are carried out fully and without delay then I am confident that Romania will make rapid progress. I wish you every success in your work in the months and years to come.