Enlargement: a European strategy to prepare the countries of Central and Eastern Europe CEECs for accession

1994/2121(COS) - 23/11/1994

The committee unanimously adopted the interim report by Mr OOSTLANDER on preparations for accession by the central and eastern European countries. Following the vote, Mr OOSTLANDER expressed his regret that the committee had not taken a stance on full NATO membership of these countries. The Committee on Foreign Affairs considered that enlargement would only succeed if the institutional problems of the 1996 IGC were resolved first. This implied increasing the Union's budget, strengthening its powers and improving the decision-making process so that a larger Union could function efficiently. It was in the light of these reforms that the European Parliament would need to give its assent and examine each candidature on its merits. In this sense, and taking note of the strategy proposed in order to prepare for accession, the report stipulated that all the central European countries, the Baltic states, the European Balkan states and Cyprus and Malta were entitled to join, provided that they met the relevant political and economic requirements, i.e. their states must be founded on democratic structures, human rights and the rights of minorities must be guaranteed and any related problems must be resolved. In the rapporteur's view, these criteria took precedence over the economic criteria for full membership of the Union's institutions and should allow them to participate in the second and third pillars. All forms of cooperation between the European Union and these countries needed to be developed in order to prepare for accession. Interregional cooperation also needed to be encouraged, hence the support for the Commission's approach, which needed to be supplemented by a new memorandum on budgetary and political implications, taking specific account of the consequences of enlargement on the CAP and regional policy. The report also called for the Essen European Council to take the necessary decisions on information and publicity vis--vis the citizens of future candidate countries and current Member States, in order to allow them to contribute to the decisions taken on enlargement by their governments. Finally, the draft report took a stance on several political aspects of enlargement, stressing that: - in the committee' view, the Mediterranean basin should not be forgotten during the process of enlargement, which is why the OOSTLANDER report felt that it was of paramount importance to develop a similar policy with the Mediterranean countries, meaning that budgetary appropriations would need to be increased; - these countries would need to consolidate the political and economic reforms implemented during the period from 1989 to 1990. In order to consolidate these democracies, the committee felt that the prospect of accession, the "partnership for peace", the status of "associate partner of the WEO" offered to candidates and their inclusion in international organisations such as the CSCE, would help bring about an order of security and stability in the region, based on international law and respect for human rights. However, having made this finding, the OOSTLANDER report reaffirms that, for candidate countries, the partnership for peace was not the response which these countries were expecting in order to satisfy their security requirements. On the budgetary side, the report reiterated that enlargement on the basis of the current financial perspectives and the interinstitutional agreement of October 1993 would not engender additional financial charges, given that the agreed financial package had been exhausted; hence its conclusion that enlargement would only be achieved independently of considerations other than financial considerations following a complete overhaul of and increase in the Union's own resources.