2004 enlargement: preparation of the CEECs for integration into the internal market. White paper

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The committee adopted the report by Mr Arie OOSTLANDER (PPE, NL) on the European Commission's White Paper on the preparation of the associated CEECs for integration into the internal market of the European Union. Firstly, the committee considered that enlargement presented an opportunity for the European Union to contribute to peace, security and prosperity throughout Europe. At the same time, it pointed out that, for the CEECs, membership involved not only rights but also obligations. They should persevere in the restructuring and reforms embarked upon in the transition to a "social market economy". They also had to fully establish and maintain a democratic system at all levels of society. During the transitional period, encouraging private investment was vital. However, it was not envisages for areas such as culture, education, social welfare and health, since it was the establishment of a "social dimension" that encouraged cohesion. The committee pointed out, nevertheless, that overhasty accession by the CEECs on purely political grounds would undermine the internal market itself and would hinder the smooth operation of the EU. It called on the European Commission to draw up minimum criteria to be complied with in the run-up to accession and to inform Parliament regularly of the progress made in the various areas. The main issues dealt with in the report were as follows: Fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law: the committee emphasised the decisive role of the protection of human rights and pointed out that it was important to find solutions to problems which arose in protecting the rights of minorities and combating racism, anti-semitism, xenophobia and intolerance. As regards minorities, the committee felt that any conflicts should be dealt with by establishing permanent and constructive dialogue. Specific reference was made to the problems of the Romanies. The report emphasised the clause on human rights, which was included in most of the Europe Agreements. It called on the Commission to present a White Paper on the subsequent developments in the rule of law and democracy and to assess this on a yearly basis. The report also highlighted the role of NGOs with respect to "realistic and responsible opinion-forming among citizens of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe" and called on the Commission to adopt practical measures to eliminate material problems faced by the media.