2004 enlargement of the European Union: progress towards accession by the candidate countries in 1999

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The committee adopted the report by Elmar BROK (EPP-ED, D) on the enlargement of the EU. It welcomed the progress made in the accession negotiations with all the candidate countries and called on Commission and Council to ensure that the principle of differentiation was fully implemented so that each country was judged on its own merits in its application for membership. The candidate countries in their turn were urged to make further efforts to strengthen their administrative capacities for the implementation of the "acquis communautaire" and also to continue building up their financial control and audit procedures to ensure that pre-accession aid was properly controlled. They should also maintain the fight against corruption. The report called on candidate countries to afford full rights to minorities, and the Commission was urged to make sufficient PHARE funds available for assisting the integration of the Roma peoples. The committee also stressed that the forthcoming intergovernmental conference should strengthen the EU's institutional framework in order to make it ready for enlargement. There was support for the development by the Commission of an information strategy on the benefits of enlargement, and the report also raised the possibility of Parliament opening information offices in the capitals of applicant countries in collaboration with the Commission. The committee laid emphasis on the work of the Court of Auditors and the need for applicant countries to become fully involved in combating fraud and corruption. The Commission was also urged to examine the budgetary implications of a large number of new members acceding before the end of the current financial framework in 2006 - which was based on the assumption of only six joining. Concern was also expressed that existing budget commitments might prove insufficient to ensure the success of enlargement unless there was a radical reform of existing expenditure policies or a review of the ceiling for own resources.