2004 enlargement: state of the negotiations, progress towards accession by the candidate countries. Report

2002/2023(COS) - 22/05/2002

The committee unanimously adopted the general report by Elmar BROK (EPP-ED, D) on the state of the enlargement negotiations, together with twelve sub-sections on individual countries. The report issued a clear, unambiguous political signal to the EU candidate countries, describing enlargement of the EU as a 'historical necessity' for the peoples of Europe and stressing that its aim was to ensure lasting peace, stability and prosperity for the continent. MEPs also restated their commitment not to place new obstacles in the way of enlargement nor to require the candidate countries to do more than was necessary to transpose and implement the 'acquis communautaire' (existing Community law and treaties), although they impressed upon the accession countries the need to continue meeting the political criteria, in particular by taking more energetic measures to combat discrimination against minorities. The resolution also emphasised that each candidate country must be assessed on its own merits. The committee welcomed the increase in cooperation with the candidate countries in the field of justice and home affairs since 11 September 2001. However it also highlighted the need for these countries to promote 'good governance' internally by combating corruption and organised crime through practical measures and to submit a report on their efforts to the EU institutions before the end of the accession negotiations. Regional cooperation was seen as crucial in this area and the Commission was urged to encourage it by providing financial support. Turning to the process of economic, legal and social reform, MEPs voiced concern at the delays in implementing the SAPARD programme and argued that efforts should focus more on making better use of the pre-accession funds, in particular by supporting administrative capacity-building at central and regional levels. The committee also urged the Member States to agree as soon as possible on a common position for the chapters on agriculture, regional policy and budgetary issues so that they could be completed in good time. In addition, MEPs looked to the Commission to present an updated road-map later in 2002 for those candidate countries which would not be able to join in the first wave, and they called for further political and financial support for those countries. At the same time they appealed to the countries which would be able to join the Union first to renounce in advance their right of veto against the others joining later.