2004 enlargement: progress towards accession by the candidate countries. Strategy paper and report

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report on enlargement by its chairman Elmar BROK (EPP-ED, D). The report began by setting out general considerations valid for all the applicant states and then looked at the outstanding issues facing each individual country. MEPs called on the Copenhagen European Council to fix a date for the accession of the first ten applicant countries at the start of 2004 and "no later than 1 March 2004". The committee welcomed the progress made by these countries but also stressed the final efforts still needed to bring about reforms, in particular the administrative and judicial implementation of the 'acquis', which it said "remains the biggest problem". It called on the Member States and the candidate countries to negotiate on agricultural issues in a spirit of flexibility and solidarity. On agricultural quotas in particular, MEPs called for full account to be taken of the special circumstances that prevailed in some candidate countries during the "reference periods", including the repercussions of the Russian economic crisis on the Baltic countries. They backed the Commission's strategy of phasing in direct aid to farmers in the new Member States and endorsed the principle that the new countries should not become net contributors to the Community budget during the first few years after accession. The committee stressed that priority must be given to fighting corruption and to reforming judicial systems in the candidate states and it backed the principle of safeguard clauses which would be applied if serious problems arose in the implementation of judicial cooperation. MEPs also believed safeguard clauses should be included on economic policy. They called on the Commission to lay down the arrangements for the application and the scope of these clauses as quickly as possible. They said that these clauses should be applied following a qualified majority decision in the Council and after receiving the assent of the European Parliament but also after prior consultation of the countries in question. The committee also voiced concern at the trafficking in women and children in certain applicant countries. In addition, the implementation of the Community 'acquis' on non-discrimination remained a problem and greater efforts were needed to integrate Roma minorities. Turning to the issue of the Benes decrees, which - MEPs unanimously believed - no longer constituted an insurmountable obstacle to the accession of the Czech Republic, the committee suggested that current and future Member States sign a common "European Declaration" on mutual recognition of and regret for crimes against humanity committed during World War II. Lastly, in line with the view of Parliament's Budgets Committee, the report stressed that the financial perspective of the EU needed to be adjusted as it had been agreed on the assumption that only six new Member States would join. The report then considered the individual applicant countries, starting with the ten who are expected to join the EU in 2004: CYPRUS - the committee expressed the hope that the reunification of Cyprus, in the form of "a reunited Cyprus under single sovereignty, but with guarantees for the regional autonomy and protection of both communities", would be achieved before the completion of accession negotiations. It stressed that, once a settlement was reached, the Government must also "ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the whole territory of the island". MEPs said that, in the event of a political solution, a supplementary budgetary effort would be required in order to help the north of the island to catch up with the 'acquis communautaire' and also in order to contribute to the reconstruction of the "buffer zone". The report also supported the Commission's efforts to generate and finance bicommunal projects, and appealed to the northern Cyprus leadership to support these efforts and stop any harassment against those who are in favour of a solution and of EU membership; CZECH REPUBLIC - the committee supported the conclusions of the report commissioned by the EP on the Benes decrees, namely, that "the presidential decrees do not pose an obstacle to Czech accession to the EU, meaning that all Union citizens will enjoy the same rights on Czech territory after accession". It welcomed the 'concept' for integration of the Roma submitted by the Czech Government but reiterated Parliament's previous demand that discriminatory practices by state institutions and public

authorities be abolished. The report therefore called for a political commitment from the Czech Government on this question before the end of accession negotiations. On nuclear safety, MEPs stressed the need for full compliance with the bilateral undertakings regarding the Temelin nuclear power station and called on the Commission to report to Parliament, prior to the conclusion of the accession negotiations, on the implementation by the Czech Republic of the requirements laid down by the Council's Working Party on Nuclear Safety. Other recommendations included urging the new Czech Government to continue the fight against corruption and to adapt its agricultural and regional administrative structures in order to make the most effective use of Community funds. Lastly, the report called for the number of Czech MEPs to be amended to 22; ESTONIA - the report welcomed the continuing strong performance of the Estonian economy but drew attention to the difficulties experienced by the agricultural sector following the recession in Russia and the subsequent loss of Estonia's export markets. MEPs said that this must be taken into full account in the negotiations and called on the EU to "agree to quotas at an appropriate level for Estonian farmers". The report also called on the Estonian Government to implement rapidly the restructuring plan for the shale oil sector and urged the Commission to envisage special aid for the north-east region which will be particularly affected by this issue; HUNGARY - the report highlighted the large government deficit (5.5%) and urged the government to tackle the problem so as to enable Hungary to be competitive on the internal market. It welcomed the progress that had been made in fighting organised crime and money-laundering, but called for further practical measures to deal with this "worrying phenomenon". On minority rights, the report acknowledged the integration efforts that had been made with regard to the Roma minority but urged the government to continue negiotiations with neighbouring countries, especially Slovakia and Romania, as regards the law on the status of Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries. Lastly, MEPs called on the government to promote media pluralism and freedom and expressed support for Hungary's request that the number of its MEPs be adjusted; LATVIA - the language issue in Latvia remained a worry for MEPs, who were concerned about the planned switch to Latvian as the only language of instruction in secondary schools. They called for flexibility in this area as well as additional funding for social integration and for teaching Latvian. They also urged Latvia not to restrict opportunities to use a minority language, e.g. in dealings with public authorities. The reform of the judiciary was another subject of concern to MEPs, who believed that it was progressing too slowly and voiced concern at the delays in adopting the new Criminal Procedure Code. The report also called for effective measures to safeguard the independence of the judiciary and boost the fight against corruption; LITHUANIA - the committee believed that the main challenges facing Lithuania in the area of public administration related to the judicial and penitentiary systems and the fight against corruption. As regards the Russian territory of Kaliningrad, MEPs were opposed to any "proposal which does not fully respect Lithuania·s sovereignty". The report welcomed the decision to close the second reactor at the Ignalina nuclear power plant by 2009, while noting that the first unit would be closed in 2005. It pointed out that the decommissioning of this reactor would require specific aid from the Commission, which would have to continue after the expiry of the present financial perspective in 2006; MALTA - MEPs noted the "positive developments" in the fight against corruption but were critical of the lack of improvement in the efforts of the Public Commission against corruption. To ensure that Community policies were properly implemented following accession, the report recommended a range of improvements in Malta·s administration on tax, environmental and agricultural matters. MEPs were disappointed that the Maltese Labour Party did not support Malta·s accession but hoped that all political forces in Malta would contribute to the success of the process. They reiterated Parliament's recommendation that Malta, in accordance with its size, should have six seats in the EP; POLAND - agriculture, one of the toughest chapters to negotiate between the EU and Poland, was a key issue for MEPs. They appealed to the Member States ·to adopt a realistic, generous, forward-looking approach, without neglecting the specific concern of the Polish and European farming worlds· and which also offered small farms a chance of survival. The report also urged the Polish authorities to make the rural world more conscious of the importance of environmental protection. Despite the ·considerable effort· made by Polish society to take on board the 'aquis communautaire', MEPs pointed to a ·discrepancy· between the adoption of the 'acquis' and the capacity to enforce it, which they regarded as inadequate in the areas of agriculture, food safety, veterinary and human medicines, and customs. They called for more stringent scrutiny of the management of public money and said that they expected the new government

anti-corruption programme to produce practical results as soon as possible; SLOVAKIA - the report welcomed the improvements to the situation of the Roma in Slovakia but called on the government to take further measures to eliminate any discriminatory practices by the public authorities. It also called for a political commitment from Slovakia (just as it did from the Czech Republic) on the issue of the Roma before the end of the accession negotiations. MEPs also called for the fight against corruption to be stepped up, in particular in the judiciary. They were concerned about the environmental consequences of the development of the Danube-Oder-Elbe canal and called on the Commission and the Slovak authorities to ensure that all EU-funded infrastructure projects were compatible with the environmental 'acquis'; SLOVENIA - MEPs felt that the level of protection of minority rights in Slovenia was ·generally good· but they called for the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation to give greater protection to the Roma community. They also regretted the fact that ·no significant progress has been made in combating fraud and corruption and in combating drug trafficking· since the last report by the Commission. The report called on the Slovenian Government to ensure that its inspection capacities, especially for veterinary and phytosanitary issues, were ready at the time of accession in order to protect all EU consumers from any risks. The report then looked at the countries aiming at accession after 2004: BULGARIA - MEPs recognised that Bulgaria continued to fulfil the political criteria for accession but voiced concern about a number of issues: the ·appalling conditions· in homes for children, the elderly and the mentally handicapped, child-trafficking and the failure to apply the Framework Programme on the treatment of the Roma. The report said that these concerns must be overcome ·as a matter of urgency·. As regards public administration, MEPs felt that much remained to be done. They pinpointed the ·fundamental weaknesses· in judicial and administrative systems and said that corruption was ·still a serious problem·. Although Bulgaria was performing well economically, MEPs criticised the fact that this had not been translated into ·tangible economic benefits for all·, as was shown by the high level of unemployment and poverty. They suggested restructuring, labour-intensive industry and called for the implementation of veterinary and phytosanitary legislation. They were also concerned about the design deficiency of the reactors of the Kozloduy nuclear power plant; ROMANIA - despite progress made by the Romanian economy, the report noted that major changes were still needed in some sectors to restrain state intervention, reduce the black economy and intensify the fight against corruption and organised crime. On public health, the report noted the need for fundamental improvement. Turning to human rights, MEPs criticised the power of the numerous security services and the low ethical standards prevailing among the police and the judiciary. They pointed out that upholding the rule of law was one of the accession criteria and called on the Romanian Parliament to strengthen democratic freedoms. They also welcomed the progress made on child protection but called for strong measures against the rising tide of human trafficking; TURKEY - MEPs welcomed the reforms adopted by the Turkish authorities as they sought to meet the political criteria for accession but called for further efforts for their effective application in practice. The report said that if pre-accession aid to Turkey was to be increased, this should be primarily invested in the development of Turkey towards a ·democracy according to EU standards·. MEPs called on the Commission to step up cooperation with Turkey, in particular in the area of cross-border crime, ·in order to build up an enhanced relationship of confidence between the citizen of the EU and Turkey·. The committee also urged the European Council "to adopt a more coherent stance on the question of Turkey·s candidacy and to commit itself in good faith to developing the accession process·. Finally, above and beyond the 13 current candidates, MEPs suggested that new forms of collaboration and partnership with the neighbouring countries of the Union would need to be introduced, and they called on the Commission to put forward a strategy on this question by 30 September 2003.