Outcome of Copenhagen 2004 enlargement negotiations

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by its chairman, Elmar BROK (EPP-ED, D) on the outcome of the Copenhagen enlargement negotiations. It welcomed the arrival of ten new Member States "as an important step in building an even stronger and more effective European Union (·) consolidating democracy and peace, strengthening its economy and sustainable development (·) based upon the shared values of liberty, respect for fundamental rights, good governance and the rule of law". MEPs also believed that the new Member States would have a positive impact on the development and cohesion of the EU. The committee welcomed the statement made at the Copenhagen European Council that the EU should aim to admit Bulgaria and Romania by 2007 provided these countries continued with modernisation and reform and complied with the Copenhagen criteria. On Turkey, the committee welcomed the Copenhagen decision to offer further assistance and to decide in autumn 2004 whether accession negotiations could be opened. Turkey was reminded, however, that the political criteria were a precondition for EU membership and also that it would have to make progress on the adoption of the 'acquis communautaire'. Regarding Cyprus, MEPs said they expected agreement to be reached on unification. The committee also said that the enlargement process "offers the prospect of membership to all European countries which fulfil the political criteria". It confirmed that the countries of the Western Balkans were potential candidates and called for closer cooperation with them. It particularly welcomed the application for membership by Croatia and hoped this country would take concrete steps to comply with the Copenhagen criteria. The committee also called on the Croatian authorities to cooperate fully with the Hague tribunal. Turning to world affairs, MEPs insisted that an enlarged EU should speak with a common voice on the international stage. The EU's new geo-political position as a result of the accession of ten new countries should not weaken its internal cohesion. The current and future Member States should therefore even now cooperate actively in formulating a common foreign and security policy. At the same time, MEPs said the EU now had "special responsibilities..... to strengthen transatlantic ties, and relations between the EU and NATO in particular", so as not to disappoint the legitimate expectations of the peoples of the new Member States. Going into more detail, MEPs recognised that progress had been made on the protection of human and minority rights, but they pointed out that in many candidate countries abuse and discrimination persisted. The committee welcomed the reports by the countries concerned as to how they were addressing the problems of the Roma minority and their full social integration but it stressed it would pay special attention to this issue under the monitoring procedure. In an implicit reference to problems which had arisen over the Czech "Benes decrees", MEPs said they assumed that after enlargement all citizens of the EU would have the same rights under the Treaty in all countries and not be subject to any discrimination through laws, judicial decisions or administrative measures. They added that the judicial capacity in the new countries needed to be further increased so that individual citizens, companies and associations could benefit from the legal framework of the EU. It was essential that judicial independence be maintained, and the report called on the candidate countries to "strive to achieve a high level of transparency, a politically neutral civil service and fully independent media". Lastly, referring to the Council's inclusion of budgetary figures for the 10 new countries in the draft Accession Treaty (see also factsheet INI032050), the committee issued a reminder to the Council to respect the budgetary provisions under the Treaty and the 1999 Interinstitutional Agreement, which stipulate that "where the Union is enlarged to include new Member States..... the European Parliament and the Council..... will jointly adjust the financial perspective to take account of the expenditure requirements resulting from this enlargement". It warned that any unilateral establishment by Council of the ceilings of the EU budgets for 2004 to 2006 would contradict the provisions of the Treaty.