Romania's progress towards accession. Strategy paper and 2003 report

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Emma NICHOLSON (ELDR, UK) on Romania's progress towards accession. The report was sharply critical of Romania for its lack of progress in fulfilling the political criteria for EU membership and said that accession in 2007 would be impossible unless Romania took tougher action to deal with the high level of corruption, ensure the independence and proper functioning of the judiciary, guarantee freedom of the media, stop ill-treatment at police stations and recognise the right of families affected by the moratorium on adoptions to receive a reply to their requests. MEPs recommended that the Commission and Council "reorient the accession strategy with Romania" and reminded Romania that Parliament had to decide whether to approve the country's accession. The committee called on the Romanian government to adhere strictly to human rights, and said the EU should give full priority to the establishment of the rule of law. The Commission should monitor closely the implementation of EU legislation which had already been adopted by Romania, particularly in the field of justice and home affairs. This should be accompanied by clear benchmarks, regular review periods and assistance in the fight against corruption. While acknowledging that the legal framework for this was in place, MEPs said that the focus should be on enforcing legislation and noted that corruption can only be rooted out if there is a political will to do so. As regards the independence of the media, MEPs called on the Romanian government to track down those responsible for physical attacks on journalists and asked the Commission to make a study of the working conditions of journalists. On the adoption of children, the committee said that EU institutions and politicians were misled as to the process by which children are identified as suitable for adoption, and that it had evidence that many children were in fact deprived of a suitable family setting against their will and against the wishes of their foster families. The setting up of an effective child protection system which does not pander to corruption and only has the interests of the children at heart was seen as paramount. MEPs also condemned child marriages and called on the Romanian authorities to actively fight the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation. The report also looked at the treatment of minorities. Although it supported the government in its Roma strategy, it called for regular monitoring of the results and referred to the lack of integration of Roma into society and the mostly appalling conditions in which they live. MEPs also called for steps to allow the Hungarian minority to use its own language in schools and at university and to solve the questions of property rights of churches and to develop education in the Csango language. The report also noted the lack of progress in the transposition of EU environmental legislation. MEPs specifically mentioned the planned gold-mining project in Rosia Montana and demanded an environmental impact assessment. Other points of concern to the committee were the use of emergency ordinances to push through legislation, the extreme poverty in Romania (affecting up to 30% of the population) and the low absorption rate of pre-accession aid.