Malta: accession to the European Union and progress in negotiations

1999/2029(COS) - 08/11/2000 - Supplementary non-legislative basic document

This Regular Report for 2000 on Malta largely follows the structure of the Commission's 1999 Opinion and of the subsequent Regular Reports; however, it differs from that used in the previous years on three minor points. Firstly, the part of the present report which assesses Malta's ability to assume the obligations of membership, has been structured to follow the list of 29 negotiating chapters. Secondly, this part has been broadened to cover also Malta's administrative capacity to apply the Acquis under each of the negotiating chapters (previously discussed in a separate section of the report). Thirdly, the report includes for the first time a section assessing the progress made by Malta in translating the acquis into its national language. This report takes into consideration progress since the 1999 Regular Report and looks at whether intended reforms referred to in the 1999 report have been carried out and it also examines new initiatives. With regard to the relations between the European Union and Malta, no particular developments can be reported as far as the implementation of the Association Agreement is concerned. The establishment of a customs union in two five-year-stages is a long-standing objective that up to now has not been achieved. The EC remains Malta's major trading partner (65.4% of Maltese imports come from the EC). Furthermore, Malta has started to implement a plan aiming at dismantling all levies on EC imported products by 2003, except for agricultural products. Following a request from Malta, the Commission is proposing a mandate to negotiate with Malta further trade liberalisation on fish products. The Council adopted a first Accession Partnership (AP) for Malta on 20 March 2000. Malta finalised its first National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) and it was published on 18 September 2000. This document, which includes an evaluation of the costs of the different measures, sets out Malta's plan for the adoption and implementation of the acquis. As far as Community assistance is concerned, the Commission proposed in October 1999 a pre-accession regulation for Malta. The Council approved the regulation on the implementation of operations in the framework of the pre-accession strategy for Malta on 13 March 2000. It provided a total pre-accession aid to Malta of EUR 38 million for the period 2000-2004, to be used mainly for institutional capacity building, as well as for participation in Community programmes. With regard to twinning, there are as yet no ongoing twinning operations with Malta as the regulation on pre-accession assistance was only adopted in March 2000. It should be noted that Malta continues to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria. Its institutions are democratic and function smoothly and there are no particular problems with regard to human rights. Basic civil and political rights continue to be respected. The overall situation with regard to economic, social and cultural rights is satisfactory. However, special attention should be devoted to the issue of the backlog of civil judiciary cases. Malta should also pursue and reinforce the implementation of its policies with respect to the treatment of refugees and gender equality, as well as thereform of its public administration. Moreover, the government deficit remains very high and needs to be further reduced in order to improve the macroeconomic environment. The influence of the state in the economy is still too high in some areas. The authorities need to complete the consolidation of public finances, including the reform of the social security system. In addition, in the areas of agriculture, the environment and regional policy, progress has been very limited as well as in the areas of administrative capacity, and martime transport safety. The areas in which Malta has made significant progress include telecommunications and, culture and audio-visual policy, justice and home affairs. Lastly, all adminstrative capacity should be strengthened in order to facilitate the implementation of the acquis.