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

2003/2204(INI) - 05/11/2003 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE : to present the strategy paper on the progress towards accession by Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. CONTENT : the Commission has adopted the Regular Reports on the efforts made by Turkey in view of satisfying the accession criteria by 2007. This document also shows the progress made by Bulgaria (INI/2003/2202) and Romania (INI/2003/2203) over the last year in implementing the accession criteria. This paper states that over the past year, by accelerating the pace of reforms, Turkey has made determined efforts and significant progress towards achieving compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria and has made considerable progress towards meeting the economic criteria. Turkey has also continued progress towards meeting the acquis criteria, although much remains to be done in many areas. Many priorities under the political criteria in the revised Accession Partnership have been addressed. However, further efforts are needed. This concerns in particular the strengthening of the independence and the functioning of the judiciary, the overall framework for the exercise of fundamental freedoms (association, expression and religion), the further alignment of civil-military relations with European practice, the situation in the Southeast and cultural rights. Turkey should ensure full and effective implementation of reforms to ensure that Turkish citizens can enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms in line with European standards. The Commission will next year assess the progress made by Turkey towards meeting the accession criteria as requested by the Copenhagen European Council. The Commission will issue a report and a recommendation before the end of October 2004 on whether Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria. This should allow the European Council to decide, at its meeting in December 2004, on the possible opening of accession negotiations with Turkey. As regards Cyprus the European Council has repeatedly underlined its strong preference for accession by a united Cyprus. The Commission considers that there are favourable conditions for the two communities to reach a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem before Cyprus' accession to the EU on 1 May 2004. To this end the EU should reiterate its call to all parties concerned, in particular Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leadership, to resume the talks on the basis of the UN Secretary General's proposal. The absence of a settlement could become a serious obstacle to Turkey's EU aspirations. The Thessaloniki European Council stated the Union's willingness to accommodate the terms of a settlement in line with the principles on which the EU is founded. The Commission is ready to assist in finding a speedy solution.