# Agenda 2000: the enlargement, EP position on Commission'opinions on applications for accession

1997/2183(COS) - 04/12/1997 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The report by Mr Arie OOSTLANDER (PPE, NL) and Mr Enrique BARON CRESPO (PSE; E) on the communication from the Commission on 'AGENDA 2000', adopted by 373 votes to 28 with 58 abstentions, considers that any country which is situated in Europe and has democratic institutions may legitimately aspire to join the Union. Enlargement, which is a response to the changes that have taken place on the European continent, is a moral, political and economic challenge. MEPs feel that a Union reinforced (rather than weakened) by enlargement is in the interests of both the applicant countries and the current Member States. While emphasizing the need to adopt a strategy which does not exclude any applicant country, Parliament states that membership must be based on full compliance with the acquis communautaire and that transitional measures must be limited to a minimum. Parliament reiterates the accession criteria laid down at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, which stipulate that applicant countries must have stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities. They must also have a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union. Finally, they must have the ability to take on the obligations of membership (respect for the acquis communautaire) and must adhere to the aims of political, economic and monetary union. 1) Enlargement strategy: The first strategic objective of the European Union must be to enable all the applicant countries to meet the Copenhagen criteria. To achieve this, the first step is to acknowledge their moral right to enter the Union, while implementing a strategy which encourages them to meet those criteria. The preparations for this must involve all the Central and Eastern European countries. Parliament considers that the decision taken by the Commission to preselect the countries that in the medium-term would be able to take on the obligations relating to membership of the European Union is appropriate neither in political nor economic terms. It is convinced that all the applicant countries have the right to participate in the enlargement progress from the start, on the understanding that the duration of negotiations may vary depending on the ability of each country to accept the acquis communautaire. Consequently, the European Union must be open to all European democracies wishing to support its objectives, and Parliament calls on the Council to embark upon the enlargement process with all applicant countries. It believes that all applicant countries which currently meets the Copenhagen criteria have the right to start the reinforced negotiation and accession process at the same time, early in 1998. Parliament shares the Commission's view that intensive negotiations should begin, on an individual basis, with the countries which have made the most progress. It also states that the Union should not determine the date of full membership in advance. At internal level, Parliament considers that the institutional framework which has emerged from the Amsterdam Treaty does not meet the necessary conditions for achieving enlargement without endangering the operation of the Union and the effectiveness of its actions. Consequently, it confirms the view set out in its resolution of 19 November 1997 on the Amsterdam Treaty regarding the institutional reforms which must be achieved before any further enlargement. Parliament regards the European Conference as an essential instrument for political cooperation, though it should not replace bilateral negotiations on accession. Instead, it must be designed as a specific instrument of pan-European cooperation. 2) Impact on EU policy: regarding financial aspects, Parliament notes the Commission's view that 1.27% of GDP is enough to meet the challenges facing the EU over the period 2000-2006. However, this estimate is based on its assumptions about GDP growth, reform of Community policies, and the outcome of the enlargement process. Parliament reaffirms its view that the current system of own resources is unlikely to be sufficient to fund a successful enlargement and that, in view of the need to take account of as-yet unknown factors, a review clause on expenditure and resources must be included in the new financial framework. Bearing in mind the positive overall outcome of previous enlargements, and considering that enlargement will strengthen

the weight and influence of the European Union in the international economic system, Parliament calls on the Union and applicant countries to define forthwith a coordinated strategy for the commitments to be made within the WTO. Parliament considers it essential for the phased integration of the applicant countries to go hand-in-hand with a more determined policy of harmonizing the external aspects of the internal market (coordination of trade policies). It believes, given the strength of the applicant countries, that enlargement will increase economic growth in the Member States. In any event, it stresses that the budgetary costs of enlargement are but a fraction of the peace dividend gained after the Cold War and that investing in enlargement is a way of sustaining this dividend. In terms of regional policy and economic and social cohesion, Parliament stresses the importance of ensuring that the financial repercussions of enlargement do not undermine the principles of solidarity and cohesion within the Community. The lack of adequate financial resources may result in a cut in the funding currently earmarked for the Union's regions benefiting under cohesion policy. Consequently, and irrespective of the enlargement process, Parliament believes that regional policy reform is essential. Regarding social issues, it notes the absolutely essential need for applicant countries to adjust to the European social model, and it would also welcome a white paper on the social situation and social policy in applicant countries. Parliament calls for appropriate flexibility as regards transition periods, in order to ensure integration in a manner which is acceptable in social terms. It also advocates the ongoing pursuit of economic, social and regional development in the applicant countries. Adaptation of the common agricultural policy is rendered even more necessary by the prospect of enlargement. Parliament believes that, given the considerable differences in prices and the need to encourage a rural development policy, the common agricultural policy in its current form should not be extended to the new members. Thought should be given to the possibility of setting longer transitional periods for the application of this policy in the new Member States. Finally, it notes with great concern the Commission's findings regarding the applicant countries' administrative and judicial capacity to apply Community law. Similarly, it emphasizes the importance of environmental and public health problems in the applicant countries and recommends that measures be adopted in these fields.