The progress achieved by the European Union. Report 1997

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Adopting the report by Mrs Antoinette Spaak (ELDR, B) on the progress achieved by the Union in 1997, Parliament regrets that the Council report makes no political assessment of the progress achieved, the problems encountered or the shortcomings still to be remedied; before objectives can be defined, minds must concentrate on the political nature of the European enterprise. (1) Amsterdam Treaty and institutional balance: Parliament draws attention to its call for institutional reform to be completed before accession of any new Member State. Noting that the intergovernmental method has failed to bear fruit at institutional level, it calls on the Council to learn the lessons of that failure and considers that it is now necessary to reactivate the Community method. The Commission should undertake to draw up a preliminary draft reform plan by the end of the year. Parliament also stresses the need to preserve the institutional balance by clearly restating the role and powers of each Institution: the Commission, guardian of the Treaties, permitted to exercise the right of initiative, must have its independence reaffirmed; unanimous decisions in the Council should be required for constitutional matters only and Parliament must bring the necessary democracy to decision-making in all legislative matters and tighten its supervision of the Commission. (2) The euro and enlargement: Parliament maintains that revitalisation of European integration to bring about political union will be impossible unless the single currency and enlargement are successful. The Agenda 2000 reforms must be successfully completed; the new financial framework must serve to meet the cost of enlargement without jeopardising the continuity of the solidarity and cohesion policies and demonstrate by hard evidence that further enlargement will not work to the detriment of deeper integration. (3) The CFSP: Parliament hopes that the institutional reforms will also extend to the CFSP to ensure that the Union's political weight is commensurate with its status as the principal donor of aid. It regrets that the Member States are failing to invoke the Treaty provisions that would enable them to act together on the international stage and hopes that the provisions of the Treaty of Amsterdam will be implemented (planning and analysis unit, appointment of secretary-general to represent the Union, Commission's exercise of its right to submit proposals, defence policy coordination and integration of the WEU into the EU, respect for human rights, consistency between the CFSP and the common trade policy). Parliament also draws attention to its proposals to set up a European civil intervention corps and establish diplomatic representation at EU level in non-member countries where fewer than four Member States have diplomatic posts. (4) Justice and home affairs: Parliament calls for a political analysis of the opportunities offered by the new provisions of the Amsterdam Treaty and, after drawing attention to the principle of incorporating the Schengen acquis, calls on the Council to give effect to this integration.