2004 enlargement: state of preparedness for Union membership of the 10 new countries. Comprehensive monitoring report

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Elmar BROK (EPP-ED, D) by 382 votes in favour, 17 votes against and 14 abstentions on the comprehensive monitoring report of the Commission on the state of preparedness for EU membership of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia. Parliament called on the ten countries, which are set to join the EU on 1 May, not to relax their efforts to fully achieve European standards after their accession, especially on sensitive issues such as the Roma. Parliament noted that in only 3% of EU legislation being adopted, "serious" problems had been highlighted by the Commission but that there are also other shortcomings in the implementation and enforcement of EU law. The Commission should therefore keep up the pressure after accession. Parliament pointed out that the ten countries can only benefit fully from the benefits of EU membership if EU law is fully applied. A competent administration and an efficient and independent judiciary must back it up. Properly functioning systems are important to ensure the delivery of EU funds. Regarding concerns over the safety of food coming in from new Member States, the Commission is reminded of its obligation to prevent food products coming on to the internal market should food safety be at risk. MEPs also mentioned the possibility of applying the "safeguard clauses", but said these should be used only as a means to limit possible risks of disruption of the internal market. MEPs were specifically concerned about the poor progress made by some countries with regard to certain aspects of veterinary legislation. Current Member States intending to close their borders for a transitional period to workers from the new Member States were urged to study closely real migratory patterns after enlargement and to abolish barriers to free movement as soon as possible. Parliament was aware that, in parallel to impressive economic achievements, some accession countries have suffered big increases in unemployment, social exclusion and inequality. These issues need to be further addressed and the situation should improve through sustained investment in social and economic policies, education and health. It called on the Commission to take initiatives to prevent social disruption - such as mass emigration from rural areas - and stressed the importance of semi-subsistence farms. There was support for efforts to continue policies for addressing the problems of minorities, especially the Roma, and MEPs urged the Commission to take more energetic measures to help both new and old Member States with the integration of the Roma. The new States should fully implement EU anti-discrimination legislation and make sure that discriminatory legislation, for example against homosexuals, is repealed. Support was also expressed for continuing the fight against corruption. MEPs called on the accession states to further improve security of the EU's external borders by efficiently combating illegal trafficking andorganised crime. There was concern about unresolved border problems between some of the new Member States and Russia, due to the Russian refusal to sign and ratify the border treaties. Specific remarks on individual accession countries included: Czech Republic: issues to be addressed include the alleged trafficking in human beings, especially children, the adoption of EU standards in food-processing, the combating of money laundering, mutual recognition of professional qualifications in the health care sector and financial control in connection with the regional and structural funds. The Czech authorities were asked to rethink the plans for the barrages on the upper reaches of the Elbe. On the Temelin nuclear power plant, the Commission was asked to provide full information about the implementation of the Melk agreement. Lastly, the Czech parliament was called on to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Estonia: Main issues to be addressed include mutual recognition of professional qualifications, labour law and equal treatment of men and women, the problem of stateless persons, certain aspects of regional development, the liberalisation of the electricity and gas sectors by the end of 2008. Cyprus: MEPs welcomed the resumption of negotiations on 10 February under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General. Issues of concern include the alleged intimidation of

journalists, problems with the future Paying Agency for agricultural funds and with external trade mechanisms and maritime safety surveillance. Latvia: Although welcoming improvements in Latvia·s administrative capacity and the reform of the judicial administration, and the recent creation of the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau, MEPs were unhappy with the lack of democratic control of this latter office, which is under the control of the prime minister. Also of concern were the length of pre-trial investigations, overcrowded prisons and the low priority given to investigating human trafficking, as well as the situation of people who, despite being long-term inhabitants of Latvia, have no clear status due to changes in citizenship legislation. Latvia should do more to integrate ethnic minorities and ensure bilingual education during school age. Latvia needs to ensure the full operation of a Paying Agency to carry out EU-funded rural development projects and to improve its regional policy. Lithuania: Lithuania needs to further address high and persistent unemployment through active labour market policies, to ensure security at its borders and to pursue the fight against illegal trafficking and organised crime. Hungary: Hungary urgently needs to remedy some administrative shortcomings in the agricultural sector. Government and trade deficits must be tackled. The ·Status Law· regarding citizens of Hungarian extraction in neighbouring countries has been amended and the parties concerned have agreed to intensify their dialogue in order to resolve all outstanding issues. An anti-discrimination law has been adopted and a special minister appointed, but measures to combat discrimination and exclusion, especially where the Roma are concerned, should go hand in hand with broader social and development policies. MEPs pointed to theseriousness of corruption, leading to misappropriation of public funds. Malta: the Maltese government needs to speed up the examination of asylum requests. Implementation of the Wild Birds Directive needs to take place. Poland: MEPs' main concerns related to corruption, which is continuing to damage various spheres of economic and political activity. The reorganisation and modernisation process must continue and greater security should be provided for foreign investors. Unemployment is high. EU legislation on environment, food safety, and animal welfare is still not fully implemented. Other urgent issues to be addressed are the setting up of administrative structures in agriculture, the improved effectiveness of the judicial machinery, the setting up of a professional civil service to help citizens, and the transposition of EU legislation on mutual recognition of professional qualifications. Slovenia: Slovenia needs to ensure compliance with EU rules on procurement and speed up mutual recognition of professional qualifications regarding some sectors. Further action is required on corruption and the law on rail transport needs to be expedited. A problematic issue in the relationship with Croatia is the latter's unilateral declaration of an ecological zone in the Adriatic, for which a mutually acceptable solution must be found. Slovakia: Effective implementation of the EU legal and administrative framework will require further efforts over several years. The Slovak government as one of its priorities should continue the fight against corruption. There is concern about the reform of public administration, the improvement of the living conditions of the Roma and the fight against their social exclusion. Slovakia·s Paying Agency for agricultural funds needs to be up and running and conditions need to be fulfilled if fiscal aid is to be granted to one particular steel company until 2009.