2004 enlargement: progress towards accession by the candidate countries. Strategy paper and report

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Following the extraordinary session on enlargement open to 200 Members of Parliament from the candidate countries, Parliament adopted by a large majority a resolution on the progress towards enlargement. Following the agreement by the Council of Ministers on 18 November that 1st May 2004 as the date for accession, Parliament agreed that the Commission should conclude its negotiations with the candidate countries by December 2003 with actual accession taking place on 1st May 2004. However, MEPs were critical of efforts made by the candidate countries in updating their legislation on the judiciary and administrative capacity Parliament notes that the adoption, implementation and transposition of EC anti-discrimination acquis, based on Article 13 of the EC Treaty, remains a problem in all candidate countries; urges the candidate countries to solve this problem as soon as possible by adopting general anti-discrimination legislation transposing the EC acquis. As regards agriculture, Parliament recommends that the promotion of rural development and agri-environment measures under SAPARD be given priority in the last stages of the accession negotiations. The Parliament welcomes the Commission's proposals regarding the special safeguard clauses within the accession treaty; regards such clauses as essential, in view of the specific nature of this enlargement, and calls on the Commission to lay down the arrangements for the application and the scope of these clauses as quickly as possible; expects that such clauses will be worded with the utmost circumspection on the political issues which they might involve, will be used after prior consultation with the country concerned only as an ultima ratio if all other avenues to find solutions for transitional problems have been exhausted, and will be applied following a qualified majority decision in the Council and the assent of the European Parliament. Concerning budgetary issues, Parliament considers that no new Member State should become a net contributor to the Community budget during the first few years after accession; notes the Commission proposals on a temporary budgetary compensation. It reiterates its previous positions on the financial impact and budgetary implications of the enlargement of the European Union, especially as put forward in its resolution of 13 June 2002 on the financial impact of the enlargement of the European Union and stresses that as a result of the accession of the new Member States, the financial perspective needs to be adjusted to cater for enlargement in agreement between the two arms of the budgetary authority, Parliament and the Council, according to the procedure laid down in paragraph 25 of the Interinstitutional Agreement of 6 May 1999; recalls that at that time, the financial perspective was agreed under the assumption that six new Member States would join the Union in 2002. Lastly, Parliament notes that public approval for the enlargement of the EU must not be taken for granted in the applicant countries and the current Member States. As regards the particular situation in each country, plenary followed the decision of the committee responsible (please refer to the summary dated 5 November 2002). Amongst the crucial elements discussed at plenary, the following points can be added: CYPRUS : plenary notes with satisfaction the detailed plan fora political settlement presented to the parties by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 11 November 2002 and calls on both parties to use the plan as a basis for negotiations and to arrive at a framework agreement to be signed before the Copenhagen European Council. Turkey is urged in particular, to lend its full support to efforts to reach a comprehensive settlement this year, in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. CZECH REPUBLIC : concerning the Czech Republic and the question of Presidential Decrees, (Benes decrees), Parliament considers that these do not constitute an insurmountable obstacle to accession but MEPs consider the law no. 115 of 8 May 1946, seen in the light of a modern state based on the rule of law, has no place. ESTONIA : Parliament congratulates Estonia on the success of its strongly market-oriented economic and commercial policies. It welcomes the fact that specificities in Estonia's policy as regards ethnic minorities, which to a large extent were motivated by the Estonian nation's difficult historical experiences, have gradually been replaced with provisions and practices which are fully in line

with international standards. HUNGARY : Parliament welcomes the greater attention being paid to the situation of the Roma minority. Improvement are also noted in the legal framework intended to fight organised and economic crime and the progress in combating money laundering. MALTA : Parliament recommends that an appropriate financial package should be agreed upon to ensure that Malta will have a net beneficiary status during the first years of membership. It hopes that the result of a referendum concerning EU accession will be accepted as a democratic decision of the population. POLAND : it was pointed out that that Poland has helped to bring the European area of security and justice into being and, in addition, strengthened its measures to combat organised crime and improved border management and checks. Parliament considers that, as well as the increased effort that it will be called upon to make to secure the future external borders of the enlarged Union in order to meet the requirements of the Schengen Agreement. SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA : Parliament emphasises the importance of a higher level of protection of the Roma community and it looks to Slovakia to fulfil its undertaking, set out in the last progress report, to close blocks 1 and 2 of the power station at Bohunice. BULGARIA AND ROMANIA : the House recognises that Bulgaria continues to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria and has made progress in many areas where concerns had been raised in previous reports. It also welcomes Bulgaria's target date of 1 January 2007 for its accession to the European Union and hopes that it will carry out the necessary reforms as quickly as possible with a view to bringing its political, economic and social standards within EU norms. Recent amendments to the Penal Code which remove certain discriminatory Provisions has been welcomed, but Parliament continues to be concerned about conditions in homes for children, the elderly and the mentally handicapped, where appalling conditions have been documented. Bulgaria has been commended for the role that it has been playing in the fight against terrorism, for example through its contribution to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan and its offer to take part in other military actions. LITHUANIA, LITHUANIA, TURKEY : as far as these countries are concerned, plenary agreed with the decision of the committee responsible (refer to summary 5 November). Lastly, plenary takes note of the agreement reached at the EU - Russia Summit of 11 November 2002 regarding Kaliningrad but draws attention to the fact that a number of questions remain unanswered and that it will be difficult to eliminate the risk of significant problems occurring during its implementation.