Bulgaria's progress towards accession. Strategy paper and 2004 report

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Geoffrey van ORDEN (EPP-ED, UK) on Bulgaria's progress towards accession. The committee took the view that Bulgaria should be in a position to join the EU on 1 January 2007. MEPs said that Bulgaria met the Copenhagen political criteria, had successfully overhauled its administration and judicial system, had a functioning market economy and had made efforts to resolve the problems of minorities. They therefore saw no obstacle to speedy signature of the accession treaty, preferably in early spring 2005. And they emphasised that Bulgaria's accession timetable should not be linked to that of any other candidate country.

However, the report did not simply heap praise upon Bulgaria. MEPs called for even greater efforts to be made to fight organised crime, corruption and trafficking in human beings. On the last point, they argued that a database on ill-treated people and those who had disappeared would be useful. They added that measures were needed to speed up the integration of the Roma people through better access to education, healthcare and jobs. MEPs nevertheless stressed the need for the Roma to take responsibility themselves in this area as well. Lastly, they pointed out that the economic situation of many Bulgarians was not improving, despite the country's positive economic performance.