# Romania's progress towards accession. Strategy paper and 2004 report

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Pierre MOSCOVICI (PES, FR) on Romania's progress towards EU membership. It wanted to see negotiations concluded rapidly (by the end of 2004), to enable the accession treaty to be signed "as early as possible in 2005" and enter into force on 1 January 2007. However, MEPs drew Romania's attention to the fact that, like Bulgaria, it could be made subject to a specific safeguard mechanism whereby the Commission could recommend that accession be put back by one year if it believed there was a "serious risk that Romania might not be able to fulfil the obligations deriving from accession".

The committee acknowledged that Romania met the Copenhagen political criteria and had strengthened the stability of its institutions, thereby guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law and human rights. However it pointed to the need for "further reforms in the spheres of justice and public administration and greater efforts to combat corruption".

The report congratulated Romania on the progress it had made on administrative and judicial reform and on the launch of a strategy to reform its public administration. Romania was urged to press ahead swiftly with these reforms "as a priority". On the judicial front, the committee voiced disquiet at recent official surveys showing that the executive continued to influence the outcome of judicial proceedings, and it renewed its call forthe judicial system to be made more independent and professional.

MEPs were also alarmed at the growing number of serious physical assaults on investigative journalists and said that further efforts were needed to guarantee the independence of the media and "the complete assertion of freedom of expression".

The report noted that corruption was still a major source of concern and expressed alarm at the fact that very few corruption trials in Romania were successful. It also underlined the need for specific law enforcement measures to combat people-trafficking and for improved controls at the borders with Ukraine, Moldova and the Black Sea. Romania was praised for introducing national child protection standards and strict rules to govern inter-country adoption although MEPs warned that these must be properly enforced. They also urged the Romanian Government to expand its efforts at combating discrimination against the Roma minority, which was still "very widespread", and give priority to education.

As regards bringing national laws into line with Community legislation, the report stated that Romania had achieved"a satisfactory degree of alignment in the vast majority of areas" and that, if it continued to advance at the current rate, it would have "every prospect of completing the requisite legislative transposition before the scheduled accession date". However, MEPs stressed that improvements to legislation and the adoption of action plans were not enough - mechanisms for implementing and monitoring the enforcement of legislation in all areas were also needed, so that progress could be assessed.

Lastly, the committee pointed out that poverty remained an extremely serious problem in Romania, although it praised the government's efforts to set up a substantial body of social welfare legislation.