Republic of Bulgaria: application for accession to the European Union

2005/2029(INI) - 13/04/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution by 522 votes in favour, 70 against and 69 abstentions on the application of Bulgaria to become a Member of the EU. The report was drafted by Geoffrey VAN ORDEN (EPP-ED, UK). Parliament stated that it shared the Council's conclusion that Bulgaria will be able to assume all the obligations of membership. Bulgaria was encouraged to continue with the reforms necessary, thereby removing any possibility that "safeguard clauses" might be invoked. With regard to the Copenhagen criteria, Parliament made the following points:

Political criteria:

- Parliament noted the stability of democratic institutions in Bulgaria, the fresh commitment of political parties to effective political coalitions, and the adoption of the amendments to the Constitution, as well as the adoption of the new Political Parties Act in December 2004;

- reform of the judiciary will be a key factor in Bulgaria's readiness for accession and in establishing real confidence in national institutions and processes, with significant knock-on effects in other areas. Parliament applauded the critical steps Bulgaria has taken in this regard, but felt that concerns about the pre-trial phase of the judicial process and the role of the Public Prosecutor should be further addressed. Parliament regretted that the planned reform of the penal judicature, which provides for the development of entirely new codes of penal procedure, is not scheduled for adoption by the current parliament due to the failure to secure a sufficient majority;

- continued tangible improvement must made in reforming the police so as to enable them to deal effectively with organised crime, people trafficking and corruption;

- Parliament congratulated Bulgaria on hosting the launch of the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion' and welcomed measures to improve housing in city areas mainly populated by Roma but also pointed out that more needs to be done to end segregation of Roma children in schools, reduce high unemployment rates and provide better health care. Parliament also asked the Commission significantly to improve its programmes relating to Roma;

Economic criteria:

-Parliament commended Bulgaria's economic performance (one of the highest GDP growth rates among EU candidates and Member States) which is the result of substantial structural reforms. It also congratulated Bulgaria on the reduction in unemployment levels;

- Parliament expressed disappointment at the failure of the sale of Bulgartabac subsidiaries and welcomed the Government's plan to rerun the auction for Bulgartabac subsidiaries before its mandate ends. The Bulgarian Government needs to maintain the momentum of privatisation and take steps to guarantee that procedures are transparent and fair.

Acquis communautaire:

- the capacity to ensure control over the future external border of the EU and to prevent human trafficking and smuggling remains an issue of the utmost importance for the citizens of European countries;

- Parliament expressed concern about environment and consumer protection and deplored the practices of illegal logging taking place on an extensive scale in Bulgaria;

- there are difficulties in enforcement of intellectual property rights, in particular as regards media piracy and infringement of copyright, which continues to affect the commercial interest and investment of both Bulgarian and foreign copyright industries;

- Bulgaria is congratulated on the steps taken to ensure a high level of nuclear safety at the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant but Parliament expressed concern that a considerable decrease in the region's reserve generating capacities has now been forecast for 2010-2012;

- Parliament called on the Commission significantly to improve the management, targeting and transparency of Community funding, noting that the Community programmes (PHARE, SAPARD, ISPA and nuclear decommissioning) consisted of an allocation of EUR 495.7 million in 2004, EUR 399.5 million in 2005 and EUR 432.1 million in 2006, while it is expected that the post-accession financial package will provide some EUR 4.6 billion during the years 2007-2009.

Parliament gave its assent to the signature of the accession treaty in April 2005, but insisted that its views should continue to be taken into account in monitoring the progress of reform in Bulgaria following signature of the accession treaty and before any consideration is given to invoking safeguard clauses.