Comprehensive monitoring report on the state of preparedness for Union membership of Bulgaria

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The committee adopted the report on Bulgaria 's state of preparedness for EU membership, drawn up by Geoffrey VAN ORDEN (EPP-ED , UK) in response to the Commission's latest monitoring report. The committee urged the Bulgarian government to show "increased and visible determination" concerning problematic areas and, before the further Monitoring Report scheduled for April 2006, "to demonstrate in a concrete manner" that it had taken action to remedy areas identified as being of serious concern.

MEPs called on the Bulgarian government to step up efforts in the fight against organised crime and expressed concern about "the brazen nature of Bulgarian organised criminal elements, their contempt for the law and challenge to the authority of the state". They noted that only a small proportion of serious criminal cases resulted in penal convictions. The report also raised the issue of high-level corruption and urged the Bulgarian government to continue work on its anti-corruption strategy. Above all, it stressed the strategic importance of further reform of the judiciary "as the prerequisite for all other modernising initiatives" and called for constitutional amendment to provide clearer division of responsibilities and greater effectiveness in the prosecution and investigation of crime. Other problematic areas remained Roma integration, child welfare, psychiatric care and the agricultural system. MEPs also called on the government to improve all aspects of border control and to make increased efforts in all areas of the internal market.

The committee took the view that Bulgaria remains on course to meet the common objective of membership on 1 January 2007, "by which time she must have fulfilled the conditions laid down in the Treaty of Accession." While stressing that the accession of the country should depend exclusively on its own merits and should not be linked to the candidacy of any other country, MEPs nevertheless expressed the hope that the accession of Romania and Bulgaria would be able to take place at the same time. Lastly, they pointed out that the changes underway in Bulgaria with a view to achieving EU membership were beneficial in themselves, and that the process of modernisation and reform must continue for many years after accession. This should therefore be reflected in the conditions for cohesion funding.