Report on the strategy paper on progress in the enlargement process

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Elmar BROK (EPP-ED, DE) on the Commission's 2005 enlargement strategy paper. The committee called on the Commission to submit a report by the end of 2006 setting out the principles defining the EU's absorption capacity. It also urged the Commission to draw up a communication strategy ″so as to meet the legitimate concerns of the European public regarding European enlargement and integration″. MEPs added that the stalemate in the ratification of a constitutional treaty was preventing the EU from increasing its absorption capacity and that no new Member States should be allowed in before the necessary budgetary resources were available. They reiterated Parliament's call for an increase of EUR 2.5 bn and a redeployment of EUR 1.2 bn under Heading 4 (The EU as a global partner) as compared to the relevant Commission proposal in particular for Pre-Accession (IPA) and Neighbourhood and Partnership (ENPI) instruments.

The committee supported the Commission's emphasis on "fair and rigorous conditionality", whereby it will lay down clear requirements for each phase of the negotiations with accession countries and suspend negotiations when relevant conditions are not met. It reminded candidates and potential candidate countries that they should not only adopt laws to comply with the accession conditions, but should also rigorously implement and enforce them. With regard to Turkey, MEPs said that the pace of change had slowed in 2005, but they expressed the hope that the opening of negotiations would stimulate further reforms. They welcomed the decision not to prosecute Turkish author Orhan Pamuk, but denounced the further prosecution of others for non-violent expression of opinion, even on the basis of the newly-adopted penal code. Turkey was urged once more to remove all restrictions on Cypriot ships and airplanes, but MEPs also urged the Council to move ahead on the financial aid and trade package for northern Cyprus. The committee voiced concern at the increase in violence in south-eastern Turkey after the resumption of terrorist attacks.

The decision to open accession negotiations with Croatia was welcomed, as was the decision to grant the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the status of candidate country. With regard to other countries in the Western Balkans, MEPs pointed out that these countries were given a European "perspective" at the Thessaloniki summit of 2003. They welcomed the fact that Albania was close to finalising negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, as well as the Council decision to start such negotiations with Bosnia-Herzegovina. The BiH authorities were urged to review the Dayton constitutional arrangements, while combining democracy and effectiveness with a proper representation of all ethnic groups. The need for international intervention in the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina should be further reduced.

MEPs were pleased with the "significant progress" made by the Belgrade authorities in their cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. They also welcomed the impending start of negotiations on the final status of Kosovo but were concerned that the UN Special Envoy had described inter-ethnic relations, especially with regard to the Serb and Roma minorities, as "grim". They concluded that the only solution to the status question was a multi-ethnic Kosovo whose territorial integrity is safeguarded by the UN and the EU.