

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

2005/2204(INI) - 15/12/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Geoffrey **VAN ORDEN** (EPP-ED, UK) on the state of preparedness for EU membership of Bulgaria. It urged the Bulgarian Government to show increased determination concerning those areas highlighted as needing 'increased efforts' and to demonstrate in a concrete manner that it has taken effective action to remedy areas identified as being of 'serious concern'. Parliament noted that Bulgaria is as close, or in many cases closer, to fulfilling accession criteria fourteen months before accession as any of the new Member States were at the same stage in the accession process of the fifth enlargement.

Recalling its position on the activation of one of the safeguard clauses in the Treaty of Accession, Parliament stated that it would take a position on this issue, and especially the timing of accession, in the light of the state of implementation of the necessary reforms, in particular the requirements of membership regarding the judiciary system and the fight against corruption, on the basis of the Commission's detailed assessment of the situation next spring.

Political criteria: Parliament noted that Bulgaria continues to fulfil the political criteria, and reminded the Bulgarian government of the need to step up its efforts to develop sufficient administrative and judicial capacity to implement and enforce the acquis, with particular reference to the Anti-Corruption Strategy and the urgently needed continued reform of the judiciary. It recognised that crime rates in Bulgaria have been lowered to the level of many Member States, but expressed concern at the brazen nature of Bulgarian organised criminal elements, their contempt for the law and challenge to the authority of the State, and their involvement with apparent impunity in a series of high-profile murders in recent years. Parliament pointed out the small proportion of serious criminal cases that result in penal convictions, and the few successful convictions of high-level officials for corruption.

Parliament went on to raise the following issues:

- further efforts are needed to improve all aspects of border control, including measures relevant to the fight against organised crime, people trafficking and drugs trafficking as well as to public health, such as animal disease control;
- more resources need to be directed to improvement of orphanages and schools for disadvantaged children and those with special needs, including disabled persons, and to more rapid and effective implementation of the deinstitutionalisation plan, given that Bulgaria has a relatively high percentage of children in care;

§ whilst practical measures have been taken by Bulgaria to improve the integration of Roma into mainstream society but key reforms in combating discrimination in education, housing and healthcare remain to be achieved. Many Roma people still face discrimination and Roma women are especially vulnerable to trafficking and prostitution;

- the Strategy for Decentralisation must be implemented so that local administrative structures are considerably strengthened and have the necessary capacity to play a full and active role in Bulgaria's reforms.

Economic criteria: Parliament commended Bulgaria on taking action to further consolidate her economic performance via substantial structural reforms and sound fiscal policies, and encouraged further specific

efforts to reduce the current account deficit. It welcomed the Commission's verdict on the positive effects of the privatisation programme in Bulgaria, and noted that the share of the private sector reached 67% of GDP in the first half of 2005, an increase of 2.2% from the same period in 2004. Parliament called for greater transparency in the processes of public procurement, tendering and contracting. It also recommended measures to bring greater flexibility to the labour market, to encourage innovation, to increase mobility of the workforce and to improve education and training programmes.

Acquis communautaire:Parliament welcomed progress made by Bulgaria in the agricultural sector but urges immediate action to ensure that control and paying agencies are in place to address concerns over outstanding legislative commitments in this field. There also needs to be a strong focus on improvements in land use and on resolving issues of land ownership. Parliament made a series of recommendations on agriculture and went on to remind Council and Commission that Bulgaria must fulfil its commitments regarding the closure date for Units 3 and 4 of the Kozloduy Power Plant under the Accession Treaty. Bulgaria should be assisted in filling the energy gap that will be created by that closure.

Finally, Parliament reiterated its support for the Bulgarian nurses held in custody since 1999 in Libya and currently under sentence of death and called upon the Libyan authorities at the highest level to respond to the widespread international appeals for early and satisfactory resolution of this appalling situation.