Report on the strategy paper on progress in the enlargement process

2005/2206(INI) - 16/03/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Elmar **BROK** (EPP-ED, DE) on the Commission's 2005 enlargement strategy paper. (Please see the summary of 26/01 /2006.) The resolution was approved by 397 votes in favour, 95 against with 37 abstentions. Parliament c alled on the Member States and the Commission to work in close cooperation in drawing up a communication strategy so as to meet the legitimate concerns of the European public regarding European enlargement and integration. Parliament noted with satisfaction that the incentive offered by the EU enlargement strategy has undeniably contributed to the commencement of reforms in Turkey, Croatia and the western Balkan countries.

The absorption capacity of the EU remains one of the conditions for the accession of new countries. The Commission was asked to submit a report by December 2006 setting out the principles that underpin this concept. Parliament went on to state that the stalemate in the ratification of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe was preventing the Union from enhancing its absorption capacity. The Council was reminded that it must ensure that adequate budgetary resources are available to allow the proper financing of the EU's policies. Parliament reiterated its call for an increase of EUR 2.5 billion and a redeployment of EUR 1.2 billion 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.

It called on the Commission and the Council to submit, for all European countries currently without membership prospects, proposals for a close multilateral relationship with the EU. Countries which do have such a prospect should be free to join this multilateral framework as an intermediate step towards full membership. It also reaffirmed that the EU integration process cannot be guided by purely technocratic criteria but required a wholehearted commitment to the fundamental principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. Compliance with these values will be a decisive factor in assessing preparedness to join the Union.

Turkey: While Turkey's process of political transition is under way, the pace of change has slowed in 2005 and implementation of the reforms remained uneven. Parliament hoped that the opening of negotiations would act as leverage for further necessary reforms. Parliament urged Turkey to remove all obstacles to full enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms by all Turkish citizens. Whilst welcoming the positive remarks of Prime Minister Erdogan on the need to resolve the Kurdish issue by democratic means, it deplored the degradation of the current security situation in the south-east, in particular the increase in violence after the resumption of terrorist attacks. It welcomed the decision by the Turkish judicial authorities to discontinue the prosecution of Orhan Pamuk, but denouced the further prosecution of others for non-violent expression of opinion.

Turkish authorities must fully implement the provisions stemming from the Ankara Agreement and the priorities in the Accession Partnership. They are called upon to remove all restrictions on the free movement of goods affecting vessels flying the Cypriot flag or ships approaching Turkish ports from Cypriot harbours, or Cypriot aircraft. Parliament welcomed the adoption of the regulation giving financial support to Turkish Cypriot community. Parliament repeated that those priorities in the Accession Partnership which relate to the political criteria had to be accomplished in the first phase of the negotiations, and noted that the Commission now supported this view as well by stating that those criteria had to be fulfilled within one or two years.

Croatia: Parliament welcomed the decision to open accession negotiations with Croatia in October 2005, in the wake of the assessment by the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) that Croatia was now fully cooperating. However, Parliament pointed to ethnic bias against Serb defendants in the prosecution of war crimes and the fact that urgent action is needed to further improve the situation of the Roma. It also stressed that more needs to be done to create the conditions which will promote the sustainable return of refugees in the framework of the Sarajevo Declaration.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Parliament welcomed the Council's decision to grant the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the status of candidate country. This was a deserved recognition of the efforts made by that country to implement the Ohrid Agreement. Parliament commended the increasing cooperation between Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with a view to sharing experience and expertise. It called on FYROM to seek, together with Greece, a prompt, mutually acceptable solution to the unresolved problem of the country's name.

Other western Balkan countries: Parliament fully endorsed the presidency conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council of June 2003, when the Heads of State supported the European perspective of the western Balkan countries, which will become an integral part of the EU once they have met the established criteria. Parliament welcomes the fact that Albania is close to finalising negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, as well as the Council decision to start such negotiations with Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, it regretted the stalemate in the negotiations on constitutional reform in Bosnia-Herzegovina.The international intervention in the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina should be further reduced, and Parliament called on the Council and the Commission carefully to pave the way for winding down the Office of the High Representative. It recognised the "significant progress" made by the Belgrade authorities in their cooperation with the ICTFY, but supported the UN Chief Procecutor's call for Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadczic to be handed over without delay. On the upcoming referendum in Montenegro on a possible separation from Serbia, MEPs are confident that the government and the opposition will find an agreement on the terms and procedures for this referendum.

Finally, Parliament welcomed the start of negotiations on the final status of Kosovo but was concerned that the UN Special Envoy has described inter-ethnic relations, especially with regard to Serbs and Roma, as "grim". Parliament agreed with the Council that the solution to the status question could only be a multi-ethnic Kosovo.