Accession of Bulgaria

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Geoffrey van ORDEN (EPP-ED , UK) in response to the Commission's final monitoring report on the accession of Bulgaria and Romania . The committee welcomed the confirmation from the Commission and Council that Bulgaria was sufficiently prepared for EU membership on 1 January 2007, but it also noted that there are areas "that require further progress" as far as the political criteria are concerned: the need for maximum transparency in every sector, a stronger role for the Bulgarian Ombudsman, rigorous implementation of measures to improve the training of police investigators, the coordination of anti-corruption policies and a strengthening of inspectorates within the public administration. Moreover, police units specialising in the fight against organised crime, corruption, drugs and human trafficking should be expanded.

MEPs also raised a number of points of concern, such as the conditions in children's homes and other institutional care and the protection of minorities. The latter issue should be included in the newly established cooperation and verification mechanism after accession.

With regard to the economic criteria, the committee expressed concern at "continuing invisible barriers to foreign investors", and urged the Bulgarian government to take measures in order to ensure a "positive investment climate".

The report also looked at Bulgaria 's progress in respect of the 'acquis communautaire'. It welcomed the progress made on the trade in live animals and animal welfare, such as in the transportation and slaughter of animals and the treatment of animal by-products. With regard to energy, the committee recognised the sacrifice that Bulgaria would have to make in closing units 3 and 4 of the Kozloduy nuclear plant and asked the Council to consider a delay of eight months to allow for a review. The report also recognised that "not merely Bulgaria , but countries throughout Europe are facing an energy gap in the years ahead, with increasing reliance on imports of energy from Russia and areas of instability".

Finally, MEPs insisted that after accession Parliament should be further involved in the monitoring process regarding Bulgaria and that it should be fully associated "in any consideration of activation of safeguard clauses".