

European Parliament resolution on the comprehensive monitoring report (11 March 2004)

Caption: On 11 March 2004, the European Parliament adopts a resolution on the comprehensive monitoring report of the Commission on the state of preparedness for EU membership of ten new member States.

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European Parliament resolution on the comprehensive monitoring report of the European Commission on the state of preparedness for EU membership of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia (COM(2003) 675 – C5-0532/2003 – 2003/2201(INI)) (11 March 2004)

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the applications by the Czech Republic, the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Cyprus, the Republic of Latvia, the Republic of Lithuania, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Malta, the Republic of Poland, the Republic of Slovenia and the Slovak Republic to become members of the European Union,

– having regard to the comprehensive monitoring report of the Commission on the state of preparedness for EU membership of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia (COM(2003) 675 – C5-0532/2003),

– having regard to all its previous resolutions and reports since the beginning of the enlargement process and the Commission's regular reports,

– having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy and the opinions of the Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs, the Committee on Legal Affairs and the Internal Market, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, the Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism and the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities (A5-0111/2004),

A. whereas the progress made by the Central and Eastern European candidate countries during the transformation process needs to be continued in order for these countries to benefit from their accession to the EU,

B. whereas since 1 May 2003 the representatives of the parliaments of the new Member States have been active observers in the European Parliament,

C. whereas the new Member States have already participated fully in the European Convention and participate in the Intergovernmental Conference,

The ten acceding countries

1. Welcomes the signing of the accession treaty and the impending accession of ten new Member States on 1 May 2004; calls on the parliaments of the current and future Member States concerned to ratify the Accession Treaty as soon as possible;

2. Welcomes the in some cases overwhelming support for accession by the public manifesting itself in the result of the referendums in the new Member States;

3. Emphasises that the endeavour to create a constitutional treaty was and is designed to create a framework to ensure the efficient functioning of the enlarged Union and eventually contribute to the consolidation of peace and democracy; is concerned about the failure of the Brussels Summit and calls on present and future Member States to clear the way for the adoption of the Constitution on the basis of the Convention text before 1 May 2004;

4. Insists that the Union of 25 has to try to speak with a common voice in world politics in view of the global challenges;

5. Appeals to the new and old Member States to use the opportunity of enlargement to enhance the feeling of common responsibility in shaping the present and future Union, where the general interest should always prevail over the national interest of a single Member State;
6. Observes that the prospect of accession to the European Union, linked to the necessity of complying with political and economic requirements, has been a powerful driving force for change in all the countries due to accede in May 2004, mobilising political and economic actors to carry out reforms on a scale which remains impressive; appeals to the future Member States not to relax in their efforts to pursue their aim of fully achieving European standards upon accession in the areas considered particularly sensitive (e.g. the Roma);
7. Relies on the willingness and capacity of the future Member States to fulfil the commitments undertaken and to remedy the remaining deficiencies identified by the Commission in its monitoring reports; recognises that serious problems have been highlighted by the Commission in only 3% of the legislative process and that in all the other areas the new Member States will have adequately transposed the *acquis* by the day of accession, but that there is still a big gap in its implementation and enforcement in important areas;
8. Is concerned that some of the new Member States have had major problems with implementing measures within Sapard, resulting in delays in paying funds, in some cases not even beginning before 2003 owing to administrative shortcomings; considers that it should be possible, in a transitional phase, to transfer money for rural development not used during the financial year to next year's budget;
9. Hopes that the participation of the new Member States in the common agricultural policy will ensure a positive development for rural areas, which will promote welfare and quality of life; calls on the Commission to take initiatives designed to prevent social disruption in the form of emigration from rural areas and a rise in unemployment; underlines the importance of semi-subsistence farming and stresses the need for support for these farms;
10. Relies on the Commission as the guardian of the Treaties to keep up the pressure on Member States old and new to adapt themselves to the EU legal environment also after accession; underlines that in a European Union based on shared values and the rights set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights, respect for freedoms and civil liberties is a matter of common concern;
11. Calls for the protection of the unique environmental heritage of the candidate countries, through the full and timely implementation of EU environmental legislation and integration of the environment into all EU sectoral policies; reiterates that the use of EU funds for infrastructure development in the candidate countries must be compatible with EU environmental legislation;
12. Stresses the importance of compliance with existing environmental law, especially environmental impact assessment for the proposed trans-European networks for transportation;
13. Shares the Commission's view that implementation of the *acquis communautaire* in the areas of public procurement, state aid and environmental protection is a basic prerequisite for receiving Structural Fund resources, and points out that the applicant countries concerned must carry out the strategic environmental impact assessment for the programming document and ensure compatibility with Natura 2000;
14. Notes that consumers in current Member States are especially concerned about the safety of food from new Member States entering the common market; points to persisting deficiencies in veterinary control in some countries; points to the obligation of the Commission to take measures to stop the sale or export of food products from a certain region or Member State should food safety be endangered;
15. Calls on those Member States introducing transitional arrangements for freedom of movement to closely study real migratory patterns following enlargement and to abolish these barriers to free movement as soon as possible;
16. Reiterates the possibility of applying existing safeguard measures as well as new clauses contained in the

Accession Treaty which are to guarantee the functioning of the internal market and the protection of the citizens of the European Union; underlines that the "safeguard clauses" should be understood as an instrument to limit possible risk of disruption of the internal market but not as a sign of mistrust vis-à-vis future members; reiterates its demand to be fully associated in the procedure for application of the "safeguard clauses", which should be applied following a qualified majority decision in the Council and the assent of the European Parliament; asks the Commission to inform the European Parliament, prior to the accession on 1 May 2004, what safeguard clauses it proposes to apply;

17. Recalls that the smooth application of the EU *acquis* backed up by adequate administrative management and an efficient and independent judiciary are necessary conditions to fully benefit from the advantages of accession to the EU; underlines the importance of good functioning systems to ensure the delivery of EU funds and warns that some countries have not yet taken all necessary steps;

18. Notes regretfully that major unresolved problems remain; is concerned, in that connection, that the central administration and other parts of the public administration in several countries are still not in a position to ensure due implementation of EU law, including payment of agricultural support; considers that the widespread corruption in the public sector in this context gives cause for particularly serious concern;

19. Is concerned about the scant progress made by some accession countries with regard to veterinary legislation, especially concerning BSE risk prevention and treatment of animal offal; insists that progress in the area of food safety is needed urgently; calls upon the Commission to apply the same level of flexibility in old and new Member States with regard to hygiene rules for direct or local marketing and traditional food processing, to distinguish between requirements on hygiene, improving public health and infrastructural demands of industrial food processing, and to take into account local and regional markets, employment and food preferences of producers and consumers in the respective regions;

20. Calls on the new Member States to integrate, to an ever larger extent, civil society into political and socio-economic life, bearing in mind that this is an essential factor for achieving full democratic maturity;

21. Observes that, in parallel to their impressive economic achievements, some new Member States have also experienced a significant increase in unemployment, inequality, and social exclusion; insists that these issues be further addressed and that the situation should gradually improve through sustained investment in social and economic policies, education and health;

22. Stresses the importance of effective systems for inspecting the actual implementation of the current *acquis*, especially in the field of the labour market and safety at work; endorses the role of social partners in the creation of effective implementation in this respect;

23. Calls on the new Member States to address the increasing segmentation of their labour market evidenced by the existence of serious skill shortages and mismatches as well as by the growing disparities in the labour market performances of the highly skilled and the low-skilled;

24. Calls for further investment in improving the quality and responsiveness of vocational education and training systems to the needs of companies and individuals; calls for access to lifelong learning opportunities for all to be expanded, in particular by promoting participation in training at the workplace and through targeted intervention aiming to reinforce the employability of those vulnerable groups facing a risk of exclusion from the labour market;

25. Calls on the new Member States to regard the building of Europe-wide infrastructure (transport, energy, etc.) not just as an essential contribution to their own development, but also as a vital means of supporting the cohesion of Europe as a whole;

26. Reaffirms that in new and old Member States additional efforts need to ensure that all individuals will be able to reap the benefits of the different dimensions of EU membership; calls upon the new Member States to address urgently the growing regional disparities on their territories;

27. Encourages the citizens of the new Member States to actively participate in the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament, which will be the first common elections in the history of the newly enlarged Union; calls on the authorities of the new Member States to establish a legal framework which is in conformity with the rules of the European Union and which guarantees all citizens an equal right to participate in these elections; calls on the institutions of the European Union and the authorities of the new Member States to secure sufficient and relevant information to and communication with citizens in order to improve the democratic legitimacy of the EU; calls on the new Member States to also take this opportunity to relaunch the public debate on the future shape of the enlarged Union and the role of its new members;

28. Supports the governments of all countries concerned in their efforts to continue a long-lasting and intensive policy addressing the problems of minorities (especially the Roma) and aiming at their social integration; calls on the Commission to take more energetic organisational and financial measures to bolster the efforts of the old and new Member States and make integration of the Roma one of the key goals for European policy towards minorities over the next few years;

29. Requests all new Member States to take care that the EU's anti-discrimination *acquis* is fully transposed and implemented in their legislation including full and correct transposition of the provisions for reasonable accommodation for disabled persons as provided for in the Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation⁽¹⁾, and to make sure that discriminatory legislation, for example against homosexuals, be repealed;

30. Urges the acceding countries, as far as social security is concerned, to continue their efforts, focusing especially on atypical workers and the different forms that discrimination against women and their social exclusion can take as regards migrant women, women belonging to ethnic minorities, women in rural or remote areas, and one-parent families;

31. Supports the new Member States in their fight against corruption and reminds all of them that corruption defrauds societies of the benefits of efficient allocation of often scarce but always limited public resources and affects confidence in the public administration;

32. Calls on the Court of Auditors to focus particular attention on the new Member States in its work concerning the systems for calculating, transferring, and monitoring the three types of own resources under the Community budget;

33. Insists on the need to further improve the security of the external borders of the enlarged Union by combating efficiently illegal trafficking and organised crime and to prepare for the rapid realisation of the Schengen standards as a condition for free movement and on the need, at the same time, to pay due consideration to traditional cross-border economic and cultural relations between cross-border populations as well as to guarantee the full respect of the asylum procedure according to the Geneva Convention and its protocols;

34. Stresses the importance of the comprehensive EU Wider Europe – New Neighbourhood strategy towards those countries which will remain outside the enlarged Union and counts on the new Member States to actively contribute to building "bridges" and seeking mutual understanding and cooperation; stresses the importance of the Northern Dimension in the northern regions;

35. Notes that relations between Latvia, Estonia and Russia, in spite of many positive changes, are still marked by tensions and that the border treaty, which is an essential element of normalised relations, has not yet been signed due to the Russian refusal; believes that, as new members of the EU, Latvia and Estonia will engage with Russia in a spirit of mutual understanding and good-neighbourly relations with regard to cross-border cooperation on a wide range of issues including people-to-people contact; confirms that the EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement has to apply without distinction to all Member States, including the new Member States joining the European Union on 1 May 2004, and expects that the required technical adaptations will be applied in time;

36. Recalls that the EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement needs to be extended to the ten new Member States; calls on the Commission to pursue negotiations with Russia to this end, and to inform the European Parliament on a regular basis of all developments in this area; expresses its concern about unresolved border problems between some of the candidate countries and Russia which is due to the Russian refusal to sign and ratify the border treaties;

Czech Republic

37. Acknowledges the achievement of the Czech Republic in recent years in remodelling its politics, economy and society, the end result of which is that the country is now fit to join the Union;

38. Applauds the Czech Republic's good overall economic performance, in particular its real GDP growth of 2% in 2002 and 2.1% in the first half of 2003, as well as the slight drop in unemployment from 8% in 2001 to 7.6% in the first half of 2003;

39. Supports the government in its efforts to improve the living conditions of the Roma and combat their social marginalisation and discrimination against them in every walk of life; maintains that these efforts will need to continue for many more years; calls on the authorities to make full use of the resources offered by the EU for that purpose;

40. Is concerned about the trafficking in human beings and in particular **the alleged traffic** in children at the Czech-German border; calls on the Czech Government to support programmes dealing with special assistance to the victims and the creation of protective facilities and training for the police and border guards to increase awareness of the issue of people-trafficking; calls on the countries concerned to reinforce their cross-border cooperation on the basis of Interreg so as to promote common prevention programmes as well as further develop social action plans;

41. Calls on the Czech Parliament to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as this is a shared feature of the legal culture of the EU;

42. Welcomes the fact that, by and large, the Czech Republic has progressed with law-making to the point at which it will be able to enforce the *acquis* from the date of accession; calls on the Czech Republic, however, to make the further alignments still needed in some areas, in particular free movement of goods as regards foodstuffs and measures to combat money laundering;

43. Urges the Czech Republic, as regards mutual recognition of professional qualifications in the health care sector and financial control in connection with regional and structural funds, to align its legislation as required without delay; notes with concern that the lack of training, especially of local players, is making itself felt in the Czech Republic in the quality of project development; welcomes the fact that the amended law on public procurement has been adopted;

44. Expresses its disquiet at the Commission's finding that the Czech Republic is not yet in a position to fully transpose the *acquis* in the agricultural sector as regards standards in food-processing establishments; calls on the Czech Republic to remedy the situation immediately so as not to endanger European consumers;

45. Reiterates its demand to be fully informed by the Commission about the implementation of the Melk agreement of 29 November 2001 as regards the Temelin nuclear power plant;

46. Calls on the Czech Republic, in the light of the experience with the floods in summer 2002, to think again about the plans for the barrages on the upper reaches of the Elbe; endorses the Commission's call for this project to undergo an environmental impact assessment and for intermodal alternatives to be worked out;

Estonia

47. Stresses the determination and continuity in efforts made by the Estonian authorities in carrying out the preparations for accession throughout the whole period of transition, which are now nearly completed, to allow Estonia to become a member of the EU as of 1 May 2004; supports the recommendations of the Commission's monitoring report as to the need to remedy urgently the remaining shortcomings, especially in areas such as mutual recognition of professional qualifications, labour law and equal treatment of women and men;
48. Congratulates Estonia on a good result in its referendum for accession to the EU held on 14 September 2003, which shows strong public support in spite of widespread concerns about the possible disadvantages of membership; considers that this endorsement of EU-oriented policy is essential to pursue further efforts in order to achieve equivalent living standards to those existing in current Member States and extend the benefits of economic development to all sectors of society;
49. Calls on the Estonian authorities to proceed urgently with the transposition of EU legislation in the field of equal treatment of women and men and to ensure its effective implementation in order to address this important issue; recalls that gender equality should be regarded as a matter of democratic principle in political, civil and economic life at local, regional and national levels and, as part of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, is to be respected by all Member States;
50. Congratulates Estonia on a strong economic performance marked by steady high growth rates (6% for GDP in 2002), with a good forecast in the medium term, significant foreign direct investment, and a relatively low inflation rate; considers that the current account deficit is a cause for concern, but is confident that the Estonian authorities will tackle this problem with appropriate measures such as a tighter fiscal policy;
51. Supports the important trans-European infrastructure projects such as Rail Baltica, which would have an important impact on Estonia's further modernisation and would facilitate its integration into the single market; takes note of the Commission's readiness to grant financial and technical assistance to help Estonia in carrying out this project as soon as the necessary conditions are met;
52. Welcomes the measures which have been taken by the Commission, in parallel to the accession process, in the framework of the Europe Agreement, to liberalise trade in areas as important as agricultural and fishery products, as well as processed agricultural products, with a view to easing Estonia's integration into the single market;
53. Invites the Estonian authorities to enhance the policy framework for regional development and to back these policies with effective instruments at regional levels in order to diminish existing regional disparities (for example in the Ida-Viru region); considers that success in this area is essential to preserve socio-economic cohesion and to promote sustainable development;
54. Observes that the governmental programme for the integration of minorities into Estonian society is bringing positive results; notes, however, that the number of stateless persons (around 165 000 according to the Estonian Citizenship and Migration Board) is still a matter that requires further efforts and encouragement from the Estonian authorities as well as increased interest and motivation on the part of the stateless persons;
55. Notes that concerning the energy sector, security of supply for oil stocks seems to be guaranteed in compliance with the *acquis*; underlines the efforts made by restructuring the oil shale sector, but notes also in general, with regard to the competitiveness of the energy market, that Estonia needs to undertake further efforts to guarantee the liberalisation of the electricity and gas sectors in accordance with the transitional arrangement to implement by the end of 2008 the market opening provisions of Directive 2003/54/EC of 26 June 2003 concerning common rules for the internal market in electricity⁽²⁾;
56. Expects Estonia to play an important role in supporting EU policies in the framework of the Wider

Europe – New Neighbourhood strategy, making the EU benefit from Estonia's understanding and experience in relations with Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus; considers it essential for the political stability of the region to avoid new divisions in Europe after enlargement and to reinforce regional cooperation in a spirit of genuine partnership;

Cyprus

57. Notes that, under the Accession Treaty signed in Athens on 16 April 2003, Cyprus as a whole will join the Union on 1 May 2004 but the *acquis communautaire* will not be enforced in the northern part of the island until a political solution has been found;

58. Repeats that the Union is seeking to ensure that the whole of Cyprus can accede; notes with satisfaction that the negotiations were restarted on 10 February 2004 in New York under the auspices of the Secretary General of the United Nations and that the latter has fixed a strict calendar for the two sides to arrive at a definitive solution before 1 May 2004;

59. Recalls that in July 2003 the UN Security Council stated that the Turkish Cypriot leader, Mr Denktaş, was to blame for the failure of the negotiations conducted under United Nations auspices; notes that Mr Denktaş's uncompromising attitude is shared by some Turkish circles, whereas others have indicated that they are willing to accept the "Annan Plan" as a basis for negotiation;

60. Calls on the Greek Cypriots, who are on the verge of accession to the EU, to demonstrate their good faith (in accordance with the requirements of the Balladur initiative, which also apply to the government of Cyprus), and also calls on the Turkish Cypriot leader to fully engage in the negotiations on the agreed basis of the Annan Plan as a basis for negotiations so that, before Cyprus joins the Union, the Cyprus question can be finally resolved and a federal state established in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions, that is to say, a state consisting of two constituent parts and having a single international personality;

61. Notes that Mr Denktaş's attitude is at odds with the views held by the great majority of the original Turkish Cypriot population, which favours the accession of a reunited Cyprus to the Union; considers, therefore, that in the election on 14 December 2003 most of the voters supported the opposition parties, even though, because of the electoral system and the speedy granting of citizenship to settlers from Turkey, the victory of the latter does not translate into a majority of seats; calls on Turkey to seize the present opportunity and bring its full weight to bear to enable an agreement to be reached before accession;

62. Expresses its anxiety at the reports that the press is being intimidated in northern Cyprus; calls on the authorities concerned to guarantee the physical safety of journalists and safeguard the principles underlying the right of freedom of expression and the rule of law, especially at election time; commits itself to deepening its own contacts with Turkish Cypriot political parties, civil society and the media;

63. Agrees totally with the Commission's political assessment that a failure to reach agreement on Cyprus could pose a serious obstacle to Turkey's European ambitions; maintains that, although a solution does not constitute a condition for Turkish accession, the Cyprus question thus amounts to a major stumbling block in Turkey's path and a political test of its European resolve; hopes that the Turkish political authorities fully understand its significance; considers it hard to imagine that Turkey could join the Union when it refuses to recognise a Union Member State, has military forces occupying part of that state's territory, is boycotting that state's ships and is barring that state from its airspace;

64. Notes that the EU is ready, in the event of a settlement of the partition of the island, to promote an international donors' conference, to provide additional support itself of more than EUR 300 million, and to accept Turkish as an official language; hopes that a settlement will be concluded in time for the elections to the European Parliament to be held in the northern part of the island on 10 to 13 June 2004;

65. Calls upon the Commission to follow up closely the negotiation process and support actively the present intensive efforts of the Secretary General of the United Nations Mr Kofi Annan, aiming at finding a viable

and functional solution;

66. Calls on the government and House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus to address without delay two problems related to agriculture, namely the future paying agency and external trade mechanisms; maintains, as far as the paying agency is concerned, that it is entirely in Cyprus's interest to have a system in place to enable it to pay farmers immediately on accession;

67. Calls on Cyprus to continue its efforts in the transport sector regarding maritime safety surveillance;

68. Notes with satisfaction, in addition, that the Commission states that "Cyprus has reached a high level of alignment with the *acquis* in most policy areas"; urges the authorities concerned to avoid slackening their efforts to prepare for accession;

Latvia

69. Welcomes the current reforms undertaken by the Latvian authorities aiming at restructuring and reinforcing administrative capacity, which should improve coordination, transparency and accountability of administrative actions; considers, however, that it is of the utmost importance to further strengthen the public administration, notably by ensuring a new salary system with a view to providing competitive remuneration in the public sector; draws attention also to the necessity of speeding up the implementation of the administrative territorial reform started in 1998;

70. Is concerned about the persistent high level of corruption, which continues to tarnish the country's international image and trust at home; therefore fully supports the strong commitments by the current government to increase the effectiveness of the anti-corruption measures, including in the field of public procurement, through a new strategy prepared by the newly-established Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau in cooperation with governmental institutions and NGOs; considers the work of the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau to be a positive step forward, in particular its first investigations into high-level corruption cases including violations of the law on political party financing; is, however, concerned about the lack of democratic control of this office, which is under the control of the Prime Minister; considers that to be effective, the fight against corruption must be accompanied by efforts to build up a good civil service culture so that respect for law and regulations is supported by individuals applying ethical standards of behaviour in daily practice;

71. Welcomes the reform of the judicial administration to clarify legal competences as well as simplifying judicial procedures; stresses in particular the substantial improvement of prison conditions for convicted minors; refers to the qualification requirements, the remuneration system and the social guarantees of judges, which constitute a positive move in the right direction; considers of the utmost importance the improvement of citizens' access to legal aid as well as the promotion of it; is concerned about extended pre-trial investigations, overcrowded prisons and the low prioritisation given to investigating human trafficking; welcomes, therefore, the elaboration of the National Strategy for the Combating of Human Trafficking completed by 1 November 2003 and invites the Cabinet of Ministers to adopt it without further delay;

72. Is concerned about the situation of people in Latvia suffering from poverty and social exclusion who, despite being long-time inhabitants of the country, have no clear status due to changes in citizenship legislation and are held without any access to free legal aid in the prison-like Olaine detention centre; consequently urges the Latvian authorities immediately to grant these people a status of residence and make efforts to integrate them into Latvian society; calls for the Latvian authorities to take humane decisions in the area of asylum and migration policy based on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union;

73. Recognises that, in terms of their legal framework, citizenship, language and education policies have been brought into line with international standards; calls, however, on the Latvian authorities to ensure bilingual school education, including the final exams, according to the current rules, which envisage 60% of teaching in the state language and 40% in the minority language; stresses the necessity of maintaining adequate scope for minority language teaching; considers that flexible application of the education law could

contribute to social and economic integration of the Russian-speaking minority in Latvian society and promote dialogue so as to soften tensions with this minority, which represents a significant part of the population;

74. Welcomes the increase in the naturalisation rate in 2003 mainly due to the referendum campaign for the EU accession, even if the naturalisation process remains too slow; therefore invites the Latvian authorities to promote that process and considers that minimum language requirements for elderly people may contribute to it; encourages the Latvian authorities to overcome the existing split in society and to favour the genuine integration of "non-citizens", ensuring an equal competitive chance in education and labour; proposes that the Latvian authorities envisage the possibility of allowing non-citizens who are long-time inhabitants to take part in local self-government elections; welcomes the continuing dialogue between representatives of government and civil society regarding the ratification of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities as well as the establishment of a specific subcommission on society integration in the Saeima's Human Rights Commission; recommends that the Latvian authorities quickly ratify this Framework Convention;

75. Recognises the substantial efforts made by the Ministry of Agriculture to close the remaining gaps by the time of accession; calls, however, on the Latvian authorities to make sure that all necessary measures will be taken to finalise national procedures to ensure full operation of a paying agency that will carry out EU-financed rural development projects;

76. Invites the Latvian authorities to further improve the policy framework for regional development and back these policies with effective instruments at central and regional levels, bearing in mind that success in this area is crucial for socio-economic cohesion and sustainable development; considers it important to take seriously into account the preparations for managing the European Social Fund as well as all Structural Funds; considers that before these policies bring results and funds are channelled, it would be suitable to create alternative employment opportunities in the less developed agricultural and former industrial regions and to use redistributive mechanisms to avoid growing income inequalities; stresses the need to continue the organisation of training related to local and regional social and environmental partners to strengthen their ability to participate in the monitoring committee for the implementation of the Structural Funds;

77. Takes note that especially in rural areas the unemployment rate remains at a very high level and deplores that the statistics from the Commission brought forward by Latvia for Objective 1 count Latvia as a whole and did not reflect the serious regional disparity of unemployment; aware that the main problem in the regions is the lack of opportunity to work, invites the Commission to pay particular attention to the most disadvantaged regions such as Latgale, and encourage the Latvian Government to concentrate on measures to tackle unemployment, social exclusion, poverty and inequality in the framework of the single programming document through the Structural Funds; considers that investment in welfare projects is necessary to preserve socio-economic cohesion and enable the poorest sectors of Latvian society to benefit from economic development;

78. Asks Latvia to do more to integrate ethnic minorities; regrets the shortcomings in the autonomous bilateral social dialogue between employer and employee representatives and the lack of collective agreements; urges Latvia to transpose the working time regulations in some sectors;

79. Insists that the *acquis* for food hygiene standards serves solely to protect consumers and to ensure that foodstuffs are of good quality; it should not bring about either a deliberate structural concentration in the food-processing industry which might provoke additional unemployment in rural regions; encourages the Latvian Government to make use of the rural development programmes to diversify production and to support decentralised high quality food production;

80. Welcomes the Commission's decision to include the infrastructure projects, such as Rail Baltica, in the "priority list", which would help Latvia's further modernisation;

81. Points out that freedom of expression for all citizens and for Members of Parliament in particular must

be guaranteed entirely beyond suspicion, in every candidate country, and that Members of Parliament must invariably be protected from any form of retaliation on account of views expressed in the performance of their duties; stresses its disquiet, therefore, at the recent attempt by the Latvian Parliament to remove one of its members from office as an observer in the European Parliament.

Lithuania

82. Welcomes the overwhelming public support in the referendum for accession (91% in favour, with a turnout of 64%, which confirms the attractiveness of the European project for Lithuanian society and shows its willingness to contribute to its further development;

83. Recognises with satisfaction the enormous progress made by Lithuania during the last three years in the economic field; points out that starting as one of the slowest developing among the candidate countries, Lithuania grew into one of the most dynamic European economies with a very high rate of growth (9.4% of GDP in the first quarter of 2003), a low inflation rate and a substantial volume of foreign direct investment;

84. Notes that according to the monitoring report Lithuania has reached a high level of alignment with the *acquis* in most policy areas and has managed, to a large extent, to fulfil its commitments, which places it in the lead among the ten acceding countries; is confident that Lithuania will meet the EU requirements in the remaining areas before the date of accession; recalls, therefore, that special and urgent attention should be paid to the unresolved problems identified in the monitoring report (inter alia in the area of fisheries, as regards inspection and control in relation to resource and fleet management and to problems of mutual recognition of qualifications);

85. Considers that the fight against corruption should continue to receive high priority; recognises that the legal framework and institutional setting are being strengthened but additional efforts are required to tackle corruption in a systematic and effective way ensuring adequate prevention and expanding the sense of civic responsibility among economic and political actors;

86. Encourages the Lithuanian authorities to further address the problem of high and persistent unemployment by implementing active labour market policies and to pursue pension and health reforms and try to remedy the social security deficit, bearing in mind that these areas are particularly important to the well-being of Lithuanian citizens;

87. Takes note of the satisfactory level of integration of minorities in Lithuania, which is an important factor for social cohesion and political stability;

88. Stresses the importance of adequate preparations for the effective use of structural funds, which would give an additional boost to Lithuanian economic growth, would help to create new jobs and would benefit business as well as individuals (education, professional training, etc.); welcomes the advanced state of preparation of the single programming document, which should help to avoid a build-up of delays in implementing the Structural Funds in the first year after accession;

89. Welcomes the good-neighbourly relations with Russia and the ratification of the 1997 border agreement between Russia and Lithuania as well as the recently concluded readmission agreement; notes the effective functioning of the transit of people across Lithuania's territory to and from Kaliningrad;

90. Stresses the importance of ensuring security on the Lithuanian borders which will become the external border of the enlarged EU; calls on the Lithuanian authorities to pursue their struggle with illegal trafficking and organised crime, adopting energetic measures to investigate crimes and punish offenders; calls for special attention to be paid to the Kaliningrad-Lithuania border line, where the situation is particularly fragile, as proved by the recent case of corruption implicating some high-ranking customs and border officials;

91. Is aware of the Lithuanian concern about the exploitation of oil by the Russian company Lukoil in the

Baltic Sea (Kravcovskoye deposit) situated 22 kilometres from the Curonian Spit included in the Unesco World Heritage list; calls, therefore, on the parties concerned for a joint effort to ensure the safety of operations and minimise the risk of pollution in this particularly vulnerable area;

92. Supports the important infrastructure projects, Rail Baltica and the Lithuania-Poland power grid, which could have an important impact on Lithuania's further modernisation and would ease the integration of Lithuania within the European energy system; welcomes the Commission's decision to include them in the "priority list" and calls on the Commission to give technical and financial assistance to help Lithuania to carry out these projects, provided that all previous necessary conditions are met;

93. Takes note of recent progress made by Lithuania in various fields of nuclear safety, including, inter alia, its preparation for the closure and decommissioning of the Ignalina nuclear power plant, safety improvements, and the new law on social guarantees; recalls Lithuania's commitment, at the EU's request, to closing unit 1 of the Ignalina power plant before 2005 and unit 2 by 2009 with financial help from the EU; in this regard expects the Commission to fulfil its commitment to Lithuania in the most satisfactory manner for both parties concerned;

94. Welcomes Lithuania's active and positive role in enhancing cooperation with the Eastern European-neighbours of the enlarged Union and thus supporting the EU Wider Europe - New Neighbourhood policy, which is of particular importance for preserving existing economic and cultural links among neighbouring countries and ensuring the stability of the whole region; takes note of various initiatives of the Lithuanian authorities in the framework of regional cooperation and Lithuania's readiness to cooperate closely with southern Caucasus countries by sharing experience and achievement in economic, political and security areas;

Hungary

95. Welcomes the fact that efforts have continued and that preparations for accession have maintained their momentum; notes the determination of the Hungarian authorities to fulfil all their commitments in time; endorses the conclusions of the Commission's monitoring report, which has identified the problems still to be resolved by 1 May 2004; draws attention in particular to the urgent need to remedy the shortcomings in the agricultural sector by setting up a paying agency and the integrated administration and control system, providing for measures to promote rural development, and bringing agri-food establishments into line with the required plant health standards;

96. Notes that the performance of the Hungarian economy, which has been one of the most buoyant in the region throughout the transitional period, has slightly declined over the past year (the growth rate was approximately 2.9% in the third quarter of 2003 compared with 3.3% in 2002) and the fiscal and trade deficits must be tackled; notes with satisfaction that the draft budget entails tighter budgetary management combined with substantial cuts in administrative expenditure (to slim down public services) and new tax measures;

97. Points to the steps taken by the Hungarian authorities to strengthen judicial capacity and calls on them to provide the necessary financial resources and establish procedures for selecting judges in accordance with clear-cut standardised criteria making for the utmost transparency, as is essential in order to foster a professional judiciary; welcomes the fact that a law was adopted on 20 October 2003 to improve judicial assistance;

98. Notes that the law on the advantages to be accorded to citizens of Hungarian extraction in neighbouring countries was amended on 19 June 2001 and 23 June 2003 in such a way as to tone down the initial provisions, which Romania and Slovakia regarded as discriminatory, contentious and unacceptable, especially where the extraterritorial effects of the law were concerned; welcomes the agreement already reached and urges the parties concerned to intensify their dialogue in order to resolve all outstanding issues and enable Hungary and its neighbours to sign a comprehensive agreement at an early date; calls on the Hungarian authorities to ensure that the secondary legislation is properly enforced; points to the importance

of preserving and consolidating good-neighbourly relations with Hungary's neighbours, since this is a key factor for regional stability;

99. Notes that an "anti-discrimination" law has been adopted and a minister appointed to deal with the matter; believes that, if they are to be effective, measures to combat discrimination, intolerance, and exclusion (especially where the Roma minority is concerned) must go hand in hand with the method already proposed by the European Parliament whereby, under broader social and development policies, the people concerned would be given the opportunity to become increasingly more involved in planning, implementing, and assessing projects and specific measures to promote their integration;

100. Hopes that the reform of health care will reconcile greater efficiency and better management of health services with the legitimate expectations of citizens as regards access to a decent standard of care; notes that many measures have since been taken to develop home care and outpatient treatment and to promote private health insurance and nursing schemes;

101. Draws attention to Hungary's advocacy of a stronger CFSP; trusts that Hungary will play an active part in developing the policy; believes that Hungary's experience in relations with the Balkan countries will be particularly useful from the point of view of forging ties between that region and the Union;

102. Notes that the legal framework for fighting organised and economic crime has been improved, breakthroughs have been achieved in combating money laundering, and an anti-corruption programme and a whole series of measures (including the "glass pocket" programme adopted in April 2003) have been implemented to bring greater transparency and control to bear in the management of public money; points, however, to the seriousness of corruption leading to misappropriation of public funds and hopes that the proper authorities will take every step required to investigate and shed light on this matter;

103. Calls on Hungarian citizens to participate actively in the European Parliament elections, in which Hungary will be electing its representatives for the first time; expresses concern about a recent proposal to have a common election list for the parliamentary parties at the European elections and believes this to run counter to the basic principle of the democratic election of the European Parliament and the right of European citizens to elect their representatives by direct suffrage; urges the Hungarian authorities to build on the very positive contribution that Hungary and its representatives have made to the constitutional process in the Convention and the debate on the future of Europe to engage citizens in the European political process;

Malta

104. Welcomes the fact that, following the clear result of the referendum and the general election, all parties now unreservedly support Malta's membership of the Union; expects that Malta, politically united on that basis, will be able to make a success of integration into the Union for the good of all concerned;

105. Welcomes the fact that the Maltese Government has managed, under difficult political conditions, to align Maltese legislation with the Union *acquis* in virtually all legislative areas;

106. Encourages Malta to keep up the efforts so that it is fully prepared to take up the obligations of membership upon accession;

107. Notes that Malta has completed most preparations in the area of mutual recognition of professional qualifications;

108. 108 Welcomes the fact that, as regards state aid, Malta has largely fulfilled the Treaty obligations incumbent on it and supports the efforts of the government to take rapid steps to restructure shipyards so as to enable the remaining commitments to be met upon accession;

109. Supports the Maltese Government in its efforts to fulfil the Treaty requirements in agricultural policies

and in particular in the area of public health in the food processing industry, of the paying agency and the integrated administration and control system;

110. Calls on the Maltese authorities to speed up the examination of the asylum requests so as to be in full compliance with the *acquis*; calls also on the Commission to further support Malta in its efforts to reinforce its administrative capacity, including the human resources dealing with the asylum procedure until accession and later in the framework of the transition fund;

111. Welcomes the fact that Malta has met virtually all of the Treaty requirements regarding environmental protection and looks to it to continue the reforms in the areas of waste management, nature conservation and water and air quality;

112. Assumes that after accession, and notwithstanding certain transitional arrangements, the provisions of Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds⁽³⁾ in particular will be fully transposed and implemented in keeping with European species conservation;

113. Reiterates its recommendation that Malta should be accorded six seats in the European Parliament, which would be in proportion to the population of the country;

Poland

114. Notes the desire and determination of the Polish Government to make every effort required to remedy the shortcomings identified in the comprehensive monitoring report so as to fulfil the commitments entered into during the negotiations and enable Poland to be ready for accession on 1 May 2004; notes that in areas in which Poland is lagging behind (the audio-visual sector for example), the time lost can quickly be made up given the progress achieved since the Commission report was completed;

115. Considers it essential for the reorganisation and modernisation process to continue; recognises, however, that political decision-takers have difficult choices to make because they have to reconcile the demands of workers in danger of losing their jobs on account of restructuring and company closures with the economic viability of sectors as sensitive as steel-making or the mining industry;

116. Hopes that greater security will also be provided for foreign investors;

117. Calls on the Polish authorities to act quickly to transpose as soon as possible the remainder of the *acquis* relating to mutual recognition of professional qualifications, so as to align legislation in the area of free movement of persons, as is necessary in order to enable members of the professions concerned to take up job opportunities on the European market;

118. Notes the far-reaching reform of public finances, which was necessary in order to reduce the deficit and stabilise the budgetary system by rationalising public spending and preparing public finances for accession; recognises the increased effort by particularly vulnerable strata of Polish society, which have to suffer the immediate consequences of the reform for welfare benefits (retirement and other pensions, and allowances);

119. Notes with satisfaction that macroeconomic indicators improved markedly in the second half of 2003 compared with the two preceding years, the rise in the growth rate amounting to 3.8% of GNP as a result of an upsurge in exports and domestic demand, which rallied to some extent; hopes that this recovery, once consolidated, will help to reduce unemployment, which remains worrying, and calls for sustained joint efforts by the government, regional and local authorities, and economic and social players as a whole; notes with concern that especially in the poorer parts of Poland, there are not enough co-financing resources available at local level to enable sustainable development concepts to be implemented as actively as is needed;

120. Expresses its anxiety at the delays in setting up paying agencies and the integrated administration and control system, which have to be properly in operation to enable direct payments to be made to farmers;

notes, given the complexity of the procedures, that the Commission needs to provide greater technical assistance, to be combined with the efforts of the Polish authorities, which, in accordance with the government decision of 6 November 2003, will significantly raise the number and skill levels of personnel working in this sector; insists that information policy and the involvement of civil society in rural development measures need to be substantially improved in order to stabilise the rural economy and to avoid further massive unemployment in rural regions; urges the Polish Government to fully implement the agro-environmental measures and to support the Leader-type local action groups in their integrative rural development efforts;

121. Welcomes the measures taken by Poland to increase security at its eastern border by raising staffing levels, improving management and surveillance resources as well as meeting the visa requirement as regards its eastern neighbours on 1 July 2003 in a way which allows a simple procedure for inhabitants of the border regions; considers that it would be desirable, in this connection, for Poland to continue to take diplomatic initiatives aimed at preserving good-neighbourly relations and economic and cultural ties with its eastern neighbours, which should be supported by the Union; therefore stresses the necessity of setting up a cross-border programme in the framework of the reform of Tacis and within the neighbourhood instruments; also draws attention to the necessity of decentralising the Interreg programme towards cross-border regions;

122. Welcomes the agreement between the Polish and Ukrainian governments to support the project to extend the Odessa to Brody pipeline as far as Poland;

123. Notes with anxiety that corruption is continuing to damage the various spheres of economic and political activity, at both national and local level, undermining the prestige of the political community and leading to considerable social malaise; believes that measures to combat corruption, which the Polish Government has included among its priorities, must be pursued resolutely and in accordance with the law, using the appropriate resources;

124. Considers that the effectiveness of judicial machinery needs to be improved; welcomes the fact, therefore, that laws have been adopted to amend the codes of criminal and civil procedure (and entered into force on 1 July 2003 and 14 August 2003 respectively) on the one hand with a view to simplifying and accelerating procedures, which should help to clear the backlog of cases, and, secondly, to enable judgments to be satisfactorily enforced; points to the need to improve judicial assistance to citizens;

125. Repeats its recommendation that an effective professional civil service be set up to help citizens and that it must be capable of undertaking the tasks falling to modern public administration and providing proper interministerial coordination; notes that the number of officials recruited by competitive examination is still very limited (about 1% of employees as a whole) and that the Civil Service Act, adopted in 1999 in accordance with European Union standards, is not being enforced satisfactorily; urges the Polish authorities to adopt horizontal legislation to harmonise every aspect of the operation of the civil service;

126. Notes the plan to reform the health care system, the operation of which has, in recent years, been sharply criticised and caused disquiet within Polish society; hopes that the new reform will serve to reconcile the standard of health care needed in the interest of patients with the requirements of sound economic management;

127. Welcomes the initiative of a draft law on reproductive rights; stresses also the significance of the newly proposed provisions on registered partnerships as a step forward against discrimination because of sexual orientation;

128. Notes that on 13 February 2004 the President of Poland signed the electoral law for European Parliament elections; urges the authorities and non-governmental organisations to relaunch the campaign to inform and galvanise Polish voters in order to prepare in the best possible way for a historic occasion, the first election following Poland's accession to the Union;

Slovenia

129. Welcomes Slovenia's significant economic progress, in particular the real GDP growth of 3.2% in 2002 and 2.6% in 2003; expresses concern at the rise in the unemployment rate from 6% in 2002 to 6.8 % in 2003; notes that the market economy is functioning and that Slovenia has lifted the restrictions on direct foreign investment; believes that, to achieve economic competitiveness, the government should implement certain structural reforms by privatising the financial sector, including the insurance institutions; notes that, according to the information compiled by the Commission, Slovenia is the country which records the fewest shortcomings among the ten candidates;

130. Welcomes the fact that Slovenia has adjusted virtually all of its legislation so that it will comply with the Union *acquis* from the date of accession; points out to Slovenia that if it is to benefit to the full from European structural and regional funds, it will need to ensure compliance with European rules on procurement; notes, however, regarding the chapter on free movement of persons, that mutual recognition of professional qualifications must be speeded up in some specific sectors; welcomes the fact that the laws in the health care sector implementing the Community legislation on mutual recognition of professional qualifications were recently adopted;

131. Notes that in the debate on constitutional changes, the Slovene Parliament is discussing the adjustments to be made in some areas still to be aligned and that the subjects under discussion also include pensions, equal opportunities, territorial division, and certain additional measures in the judicial sphere;

132. Notes that the law on the operation of public administration entered into force a few months ago and it is too early to ascertain the benefits; welcomes the fact that the law is intended to reduce the number of political appointments and a 12-member Civil Service Council is ensuring that senior officials are selected on a politically impartial basis; supports Slovenia in its efforts to strengthen the capacity of the judicial system, not least with a view to eliminating the backlog of cases in many courts;

133. Notes that, according to official studies, the average citizen is not involved in corrupt practice but the phenomenon is more prevalent at high levels; points out that privatisation has raised a number of thorny issues and that Slovenia is closer to the sociological profile of developed countries than to the very widespread corruption in transition countries;

134. Notes that inflation remains one of the concerns for the government, but that the rate was reduced from 7.2% in 2002 to 5.6% in 2003; welcomes the fact that the government has set itself the goal of bringing the figure down to match the euro area eligibility requirement; notes that, to bring Slovenia into line with the Union Member States, its economy has to be made more competitive, which can be achieved only by relaunching privatisation and giving full effect to the reforms laid down by the European *acquis*;

135. Calls for further efforts to bring about the law on rail transport, including trans-European networks; calls also, as regards the common foreign and security policy and the existing arrangements, for Slovenia to take part in the dialogue and move into line with the declarations issued and the sanctions and restrictive measures imposed by the Union;

136. Notes that one of the main questions in the relationship with Croatia is that Croatia has unilaterally declared an ecological zone in the Adriatic Sea, which runs counter to the position of the Commission; considers it a necessity to reach first an agreement on all questions with all interested countries before such a zone can be declared; notes that it is in the interest of all parties to find a mutually acceptable solution;

Slovakia

137. Welcomes the continuing reform of the judicial sector and supports its main aims, namely reducing the heavy workload of judges by recruiting higher court officials, applying case management systems, reinforcing training and combating corruption in the judiciary; recognises the first positive results of this long-term reform; supports the view that the effective implementation of the legal and administrative framework of the EU will continue to require further efforts over several years;

138. Calls on the Commission to ascertain to what extent the Slovak law on the registration of religious communities is contrary to international conventions on fundamental freedoms;

139. Refers to the latest reports of Transparency International and calls on the government to continue the fight against corruption as one of its priorities; welcomes the fact that recently introduced legislation has led to a number of high-profile cases, which should facilitate further efforts in the fight against corruption; looks forward to the speedy adoption of the laws on illegally acquired property and on conflicts of interest, both currently being drawn up in parliament;

140. Calls on the government to take appropriate measures so as to improve the economic and social living conditions of the Roma quickly and on a sustainable basis and to fight against their social exclusion as regards education, employment, access to public services and discrimination in general; notes that all levels of the administration need to make efforts to implement strategies and action plans; emphasises that such efforts need to be continued for several years to come; calls on the administration to endeavour to utilise all means put forward by the EU to the full; urges the government to strengthen the implementation of the plans put forward to the European Parliament; supports the recommendation of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe concerning certain aspects of law and practice relating to sterilisation of women in the Slovak Republic; welcomes the proposed changes to the legislation concerning sterilisation;

141. Welcomes the constructive cooperation between the political representatives of the Hungarian minority and their partners in the ruling coalition, which has improved the situation for the Hungarian minority, as can be seen from the fact that, for example, the minority's demand for its own university has been met, the Hungarian-language János Selye University having been founded in the town of Komárno;

142. Welcomes the steadily improving macroeconomic performance of Slovakia, in particular the real GDP growth of 4.4% in 2002 and still 3.9% in the first three quarters of 2003 and the slight fall in unemployment from 18.6% in 2002 to 17.5% in the first three quarters of 2003; is adamant that economic growth needs to benefit the whole of the population and calls on the Slovak Government to continue the fight against unemployment and its efforts to reduce regional disparities; asks the government to take care that it is not the most vulnerable in society who carry the burden of reform;

143. Welcomes the continuing reform of public administration in Slovakia and asks the government to implement this as quickly as possible;

144. Welcomes the fact that Slovakia largely has all legislation in place to implement the EU *acquis* from the date of accession; is, however, concerned about the four problematic areas highlighted by the Commission and urges the government to address these before 1 May 2004;

145. Calls on Slovakia to make sure that it fulfils the conditions which it accepted in the accession negotiations in order to benefit from a transitional period during which fiscal aid can be granted to one particular company in the steel sector until 2009 at the latest; notes that the condition attached concerns production limitations and reminds the Slovak Government that the steel sector is a particularly sensitive sector for producers in other countries;

146. Welcomes the fact that the legal basis for the paying agency for agricultural funds has been adopted and calls on Slovakia to have the agency operational and fully functioning as soon as possible; considers that in particular a failure to have the agency up and running at the time of accession could greatly harm Slovak farmers; asks Slovakia to implement the integrated administration and control system and to improve public health protection in agri-food establishments, which is – as in other new Member States – a serious concern for the EU;

147. Reminds Slovakia that there are still some problems in the area of actions under the structural and cohesion funds, in particular in the area of task allocation and coordination of institutional structures at central and regional levels and in the area of financial management and control; points out that failure to

reach the necessary standards would force the Commission to retain funds destined for Slovakia;

148. Welcomes the measures adopted by the Slovak Government to improve the protection of the country's eastern borders and calls on further increasing safety on the Slovak-Ukrainian border as a key to the successful integration of Slovakia into the Schengen Agreement;

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149. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission, and the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the future new Member States.

(1) OJ L 303, 2.12.2000, p. 16.

(2) OJ L 176, 15.7.2003, p. 37.

(3) OJ L 103, 25.04.1979, p.1.