

Debate in the European Parliament on the applications for accession of Bulgaria and Romania (12 April 2005)

Caption: On 12 April 2005, a debate is held in the European Parliament on the accession of the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union.

Source: Debates concerning the applications for accession of Bulgaria and Romania. [ON-LINE]. [Strasbourg]: European Parliament, [18.10.2006]. Disponible sur

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do;jsessionid=14B386FE8677987C5DD78EFBDF57FE5A.node2?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20050412+ITEM-027+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.

Copyright: (c) European Parliament

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/debate_in_the_european_parliament_on_the_applications_for_accession_of_bulgaria_and_romania_12_april_2005-en-4e8d6a7c-1f0a-43c9-a829-eddf4a7651c4.html

Publication date: 24/10/2012

Debates concerning the applications for accession of Bulgaria and Romania (12 April 2005)

President. The next item is the debate

on the recommendation by Geoffrey Van Orden, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the application by the Republic of Bulgaria to become a member of the European Union [AA1/2/2005 – C6-0085/2005 – 2005/0901(AVC)] (A6-0082/2005),

on the report by Geoffrey Van Orden, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the application by the Republic of Bulgaria to become a member of the European Union [2005/2029(INI)] (A6-0078/2005),

on the recommendation by Pierre Moscovici, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on Romania's application for membership of the European Union [AA1/2/2005 – C6-0086/2005 – 2005/0902(AVC)] (A6-0083/2005),

on the report by Pierre Moscovici, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on Romania's application for membership of the European Union [2005/2028(INI)] (A6-0077/2005),

and on the report by Bárbara Dührkop Dührkop and Reimer Böge, on behalf of the Committee on Budgets, on the financial implications of the accession of Romania and Bulgaria [2005/2031(INI)] (A6-0090/2005).

Van Orden (PPE-DE), rapporteur. – Mr President, in the past five years under various governments we have seen an intensification of political, economic and social reform in Bulgaria during its negotiations for European Union membership. I have had the honour and pleasure of acting as Parliament's rapporteur for Bulgaria throughout this period. Bulgaria is now on the brink of accession. The most important role now to be performed by Parliament is to give its assent to Bulgaria's application to become a Member State of the European Union. I trust that tomorrow Parliament will warmly endorse the recommendation for accession.

The process of modernisation does not stop with the signature of the Accession Treaty, which we hope will take place on 25 April.

I note that the Accession Treaty for Bulgaria, and, indeed, Romania, differs from the treaties with the previous group of accession countries in two important respects. Firstly, there are the 'safeguard clauses', which would allow accession to be delayed by up to a year in certain circumstances. To my mind it is unfortunate that Bulgaria has been caught in the wake of concerns that are more acute in relation to another country. I have always insisted that Bulgaria should be judged on its own merits, in which case the invocation of safeguard clauses should be seen as a remote possibility. Nevertheless, they are a reminder that much still remains to be done in terms of modernisation and the practical implementation of legislation. It is only right that Parliament be fully involved in any consideration of application of the safeguard clauses. The Commission, therefore, must take full account of Parliament's views and I understand that Commissioner Rehn will give us further reassurance on this point.

The second difference is that ratification of the European Constitution becomes concurrent with ratification of the Accession Treaty. On a personal note, I should point out that my reservations about this are mollified by my expectation that the Constitution will fail, and so blushes will be spared.

I have just returned from Sofia. There is a pre-election mood in the country. All the political parties are in favour of EU accession and well understand that there is much work still to be done. The next government will have to mobilise resources and demonstrate real political determination to bring about the necessary reforms, in particular of the judiciary and the police services. There must be public confidence in the effectiveness and impartiality of the fight against corruption, organised crime and trafficking. The pre-trial phase and the role of the Public Prosecutor are two particular concerns that must be further addressed.

There are many other issues. The integration of the Roma community remains a priority. This is a matter of

resources and political will on the part of government and motivation on the part of the Roma community to adapt to the norms of mainstream society. I am not convinced by an amendment to my report calling for some new regulatory body with all its inevitable bureaucracy.

On the subject of Kozloduy, the Bulgarian authorities, assisted by the international community, have introduced exceptional safety measures and responded positively to the requirement for closure of certain units. A little flexibility should now be shown in return, bearing in mind the important contribution Bulgaria makes to regional energy needs. I am encouraged by the decision of the Bulgarian Government to relaunch the construction of the second nuclear power plant at Belene.

On 30 March members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs voted overwhelmingly for the text of my report as it now stands and I, therefore, do not recommend further amendment.

Finally, on a separate but nevertheless important matter, I welcome the invitation by Libya for a visit by the President of Bulgaria. I hope this will lead to the early release of the Bulgarian and Palestinian health workers arrested in 1999 and now under sentence of death. At the same time, we strongly support the practical assistance being given by the European Union to help relieve the suffering of children affected by HIV.

This is an exciting time for Bulgaria. We are on the eve of the assent vote for Bulgaria's accession and I strongly urge the House to vote in favour.

Moscovici (PSE), rapporteur. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, as I have said to you on several previous occasions, following the negotiation of the accession conclusions with Bulgaria and Romania at the European Council of 16 and 17 December 2004, the Commission issued an opinion in favour of this accession on 22 February 2005. It is now Parliament's turn to give its assent to the applications of the two countries. In this context, I think it is important – and I believe that Mr Van Orden shares this point of view – to avoid dissociating the votes on Bulgaria and Romania. We should therefore be equally welcoming in both cases, and resoundingly so.

The Committee on Foreign Affairs also voted in favour of Romania's accession by a very substantial majority, and today I am asking you to give your assent to Romania's accession. Why should you do so? I am doing so because I continue to champion a positive, clear and rigorous attitude. Positive because Romania's accession is a political objective of the European Union and is what the Romanians want. Positive because a great deal of effort and a great deal of progress have been made on the road to accession, and I believe that this has acted as a catalyst on Romanian society: the previous government had started to work, the present one is continuing the job and we are on the right track.

At the same time, I suggest being clear and rigorous because, let us not deny it, problems remain, and we are familiar with them. Much remains to be done in the field of justice and home affairs, in particular in connection with the fight against corruption, organised crime, border controls, and the recognition and protection of minorities, including the Roma and the Hungarian minorities, as well as in the fields of competition and the environment. The Romanian Government must, we will continue to say, focus in particular on actually implementing administrative and judicial reform, on the fight against corruption, on the fight against social exclusion and poverty, on freedom of information, which is of course decisive for us, and on strengthening local and regional governance.

I would add finally that there are safeguards or instruments that mean that we can continue to act. I am thinking, for example, of the possible recourse to the safeguard clauses, which should not be seen as a sanction but rather as a lever for action, as a way of exerting positive pressure to ensure that matters move in the right direction, particularly in the areas that I have just mentioned.

With this in mind, the debate in the Committee on Foreign Affairs focused on an absolutely decisive point, that is the role of our Parliament. You see, one question concerns us in this assent procedure: what is going to happen once the Accession Treaty is signed, since the Council is asking the European Parliament to give

its assent to an accession that will not take place for another twenty months? This procedure is actually unusual, since as a rule we give our assent further down the line. Many Members are concerned about this situation. They fear that by, as it were, signing a blank cheque, they will forgo any capacity to act in the period of time that separates us from the actual accession, and this when problems exist – and may even increase – and when there is a possibility of a safeguard clause being invoked. It is therefore important for the Commission and the Council to involve the European Parliament fully in monitoring the situation to ensure that Romania respects its commitments.

At a meeting of the committee concerned, Commissioner Rehn gave a political undertaking to involve Parliament in preparing for the accession of the two countries, and in particular to consult Parliament should the safeguard clauses be used. Several Members have worked on this issue and we have had amendments tabled on the citations and recommendations made in the reports on Bulgaria and Romania, because essentially Parliament has a role to play as a partner in these two situations.

President Borrell, who has been very active on this matter, has moreover written a letter to President Barroso on the subject, asking him to confirm the position adopted by Commissioner Rehn on 30 March, which he has done, but I imagine that he will mention this himself.

The President-in-Office of the Council, Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, has also had an exchange of letters on this subject with President Borrell. What can we expect today therefore, if not a confirmation of this undertaking not only from the Commission but also from the Council Presidency today or tomorrow? I hope, Commissioner and Mr President-in-Office, that you will be able to give us some reassurance on this point so that we can all vote in favour of this assent.

It will then be incumbent on the European Parliament, when the Commission publishes its next report in November, to assess whether this undertaking has been respected and to draw the necessary conclusions. In any case, what we want is for Parliament to be able to adopt this report by as large a majority as possible, for it to do so in an awareness that this marks a new phase in the enlargement of the European Union and in the completion of a joint project, but also for it to do so with the feeling that I detected when I spoke to many Members, the feeling that Europe needs to be protected, that it should be possible to vote in safety and that this Parliament should also be one of the guarantors of that protection and that safety.

Dührkop Dührkop (PSE), rapporteur. – (ES) Mr President, the European Parliament report approved unanimously last night has two fundamental origins. Firstly, the Council's statement in March 2004 that the financial package proposed by the Commission for Bulgaria and Romania is fair and balanced, entirely excluding the other arm of the budgetary authority.

Secondly, the Council intends to include fixed sums in the annex to the Accession Treaty, for 2007 to 2009, for non-obligatory expenses which are to become obligatory, thereby violating the institutional and budgetary competences of the European Parliament.

The European Parliament profoundly regrets that the Council has systematically refused to reach an agreement in order to produce a joint declaration with Parliament on the financial implications of the accession of these two countries. For Parliament, the lack of will on the part of the Council demonstrates a lack of honest cooperation within the spirit of the interinstitutional agreement.

Parliament firmly rejects this violation of its budgetary competences.

In this annex, in which the figures will be established, items that are entirely the competence of the European Parliament are becoming obligatory. So Parliament is calling on the Council to agree to this joint declaration. We are leaving this door open until the signature of accession: for the Council to agree to draw up this joint declaration.

Furthermore, it should be emphasised that the Council should be in no doubt that its refusal is sending a horrendous signal for the future negotiations on the financial perspectives.

Böge (PPE-DE), rapporteur. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Mrs Dührkop Dührkop and I would actually have preferred to put before you today a joint negotiated statement that would secure Parliament's rights in matters of budgetary policy and present a credible financial package in respect of Romania and Bulgaria. I would also have hoped that the Council would have learned something from the many and varied difficulties that we had with the last enlargement round, but, lamentably, the efforts of this House's delegation to the negotiations and also of the Luxembourg Presidency have not been crowned with success in this respect.

If I may allude to what Mrs Dührkop Dührkop said, Parliament's rights, whether in relation to the Budget or to anything else, are not peanuts; they may not just be infringed at any appropriate opportunity. To do so puts the next packages, on which – in the interests not only of the European Union's capacity to act – we are to negotiate together, in a poor and unfavourable light. For that reason, I want to reiterate, for the record, that we, on the basis of the figures and estimates that the Commission has made available to us, as well as of our own investigations, are taking it as read that the total sum of money set aside for Bulgaria and Romania from 2007 to 2013 is likely to amount to some EUR 44.3 billion, including EUR 16 billion in the period prior to 2009 – some EUR 12.5 billion has been agreed in the Accession Treaty – and EUR 28 billion for the period from 2010 to 2013. That is one thing. The problem with it, though, is that, if there is no Financial Perspective, these agreements infringe the European Parliament's budgetary prerogative, as they make non-obligatory expenditure into commitments and hence interfere to some degree with Parliament's room for manoeuvre and structuring options in the event of the failure of the Financial Perspective, especially in the areas of internal and foreign policy, in subsequent financial planning. With such a poor outcome to negotiations, that is something that every Member and every political group should consider very carefully.

(Applause)

Schmit, President-in-Office of the Council. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the founding fathers of the Community clearly stated in 1957 in the Treaty of Rome that they were, 'determined to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe'. In the preamble to this Treaty, the Member States call upon the other peoples of Europe – including the countries that were separated from it at the time – who share the same ideals of peace and liberty, to join in their project to build a united Europe. Tomorrow, by adopting the assents marking the completion of the Union's fifth enlargement, comprising Bulgaria and Romania, the European Parliament will enable the Union to take a decisive step forward in the process of unifying our continent. This is a further stage in the unification process, the Bulgarian and Romanian nations thus regaining their place within this Europe, whose history, heritage and culture they share. These two countries will thus find their proper place in a continent open to culture, learning and social progress, as the preamble to the Constitution underlines.

By giving your assent, you are making a vital contribution to a Europe without demarcation lines, a Europe of democracy, freedom, peace and progress, sharing the same values that have been embedded in the Constitution for Europe.

Furthermore, the accession of these two countries to the Union is first and foremost an accession to these values, to this European model to which the citizens of Europe, all European citizens, are attached.

Our most noble ambition, shared by the citizens of these two countries, who have won back their freedom after almost five decades of sometimes terrible oppression, is precisely to anchor these countries in these values.

I will ask a simple question, which is also addressed to the honourable Member: can any convinced European who wishes to move Europe forward along the path of democracy and human rights, but also of social rights, reasonably take the risk of rejecting the Charter of Fundamental Rights, an integral part of the Constitution, which marks a fundamental milestone in the building of our Europe, of a Europe based on common values?

(Applause)

These two countries have moreover been fully involved in drafting this Constitution, which will give Europe more solid foundations.

The success of this enlargement depends not only on the practical efforts made by Bulgaria and Romania in the process of reforming their societies. It also needs the support of our citizens, who must understand the significance of this enlargement for the stability of our continent. The European Parliament has a vital role to play in lending its political legitimacy and credibility to this process.

This fifth enlargement process, which was launched in 1997 by the Luxembourg European Council, has been comprehensive, inclusive and progressive. The twelve countries involved have all undergone the process under the same conditions and have been called on to join the European Union on the basis of the same criteria. It has taken place in phases, at each candidate country's own pace, depending on its degree of preparation. This has made it possible to ensure that each country has had the same opportunities to join the European Union, but also the same obligations to meet. At the European Council of December 2002, which decided on the accession of the ten new Member States, the declaration on a single Europe underlined the continuous, inclusive and irreversible nature of the enlargement process, clearly announcing our objective of wishing to welcome Bulgaria and Romania as new Member States in 2007.

The accession negotiations have not always been easy – as the Commission can certainly confirm – but I think that the results contained in the Accession Treaty are fair and appropriate and broadly in line with the results of the negotiations with the ten new Member States.

Bulgaria and Romania now have about twenty months to put the finishing touches to their preparations for accession. In its latest regular reports, the Commission considered that, given the progress made by these two countries, their track record in implementing their commitments and the preparatory work in progress, they should be ready to join the Union on 1 January 2007. The Commission confirmed this conclusion with its favourable opinion of 22 February on the accession of the two countries. The European Council considered that Bulgaria and Romania will be able to assume all of the obligations arising from accession, provided that the two countries continue their efforts within the time allowed, that they complete all of the necessary reforms and that they honour all of the commitments given in each of the areas of the *acquis*.

You are not unaware of the legitimate questions about the proper and timely implementation of the *acquis*, in particular in the field of justice and home affairs, in Romania's case, and also of the competition and environment policies. There is no short cut on the road to accession. The credibility of the process depends on the fact that each country can only join on the basis of the same political and economic criteria and its capacity to fulfil all of the obligations arising from membership. This implies the existence of the necessary administrative and judicial capacity to complete this task successfully.

Bulgaria and Romania are fully aware of what is expected of them as future Member States. Since the accession negotiations were opened, the Union has emphasised what accession to the European Union means: full acceptance of all of the rights and obligations, both current and potential, arising from the Union's system and its institutional framework, including the Constitution – for which I am more optimistic – as well as the real and actual implementation of the *acquis*.

Looking at the reports of Mr Moscovici and Mr Van Orden on the applications for accession of Bulgaria and Romania, I am convinced that we share the same analysis that these two countries should be in a position to join the Union in January 2007 and to assume fully the obligations arising from their accession.

In the meantime, the Union will continue to support Bulgaria and Romania in their preparations by all the means at its disposal. Until the day of accession, the Europe Agreements, which were concluded in 1994, will remain in force. They have functioned properly and been a key tool for preparing Bulgaria and Romania for accession. But it is clear that it is incumbent on Bulgaria and Romania to make every effort to be ready. It would be impossible to underestimate what this means in economic, social and political terms, and the work done so far certainly deserves all our respect.

The European Union will continue to monitor carefully the preparations made by the two countries and the results achieved, including the actual implementation of their commitments. I can assure you that the Luxembourg Presidency takes the work of monitoring very seriously. In fact it is vital to the two countries' own interests to be really ready. If they were not, they would run the risk of not being able to benefit fully from being members, if, for example, it were to prove necessary to invoke the safeguard clauses in certain sectors.

We are aware of the institutions' respective roles in this context. Let us be quite clear about this: assuming assents from the European Parliament to the applications for accession by the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania, if the Commission submits a recommendation to the Council seeking to implement one of the safeguard clauses in the Accession Treaty, the Council's decision will take due account of the position of the European Parliament.

The Council gives this assurance today to Parliament, which is right to wish to monitor developments in the two countries closely. As we have already heard, a letter to this effect has been sent by the President of the European Council to the President of the European Parliament. I would reiterate that enlargement can only succeed if it enjoys the broad support of the peoples of the Union. You represent these peoples. You represent the citizens of Europe. Your voice has to be listened to, your judgment deserves to be taken fully into account should any decisions have to be made about implementing safeguard clauses.

With this in mind, may I remind you that the work of the European Parliament does not end with your assent. Your political contribution to the enlargement process will continue to be valuable. We are grateful for the political support that you have lent to the process as it has unfolded, in particular by engaging in an open and constructive dialogue with your counterparts, the elected members of the Bulgarian and Romanian parliaments.

In conclusion, allow me to remind you that the historic project that you are debating today is the accession of Bulgaria and Romania. All of us agree that the accession of these two countries will constitute a decisive step towards putting the injustice and artificial division of Europe behind us.

I should now like to say a few words about the financial implications. Concerning the financing of this enlargement to 27 countries with Bulgaria and Romania, I should like to remind you that the negotiations with these two countries have been conducted on the same basis and in accordance with the same principles as those that were applied to the ten new Member States. On the basis of a proposal from the Commission, the Member States have approved a financial package setting out the only identifiable expenditure in favour of these two countries, which will cover a period of three years, as was the case for the ten. Afterwards it is the *acquis* that will apply, including the next financial perspective. It is a question of justice and fair treatment, but also of predictability for the two countries. We cannot negotiate without putting the cards on the table, particularly where the financial aspects are concerned for the first difficult steps that they will take as Member States.

It is clear that, given the date envisaged for the accession of these two countries, the situation in which we find ourselves is different from that experienced by the ten new Member States. For this reason, we already established an essential principle at the Thessaloniki European Council: discussions on the future political reforms or the new financial perspective must not stand in the way of continuing or concluding the accession negotiations with Bulgaria and Romania. In the same way, the results of these negotiations must not prejudice the discussions or agreement on the political reforms or the new financial perspective.

Like you, I regret that it was not possible to reach an agreement between the Council and Parliament. We were very close to an agreement. Was it the jangling of nerves – particularly, I think, in the Council, to be fair – before the difficult negotiations on the financial perspective, which prevented us from reaching this agreement? I would like to reiterate clearly that there may have been some misunderstandings. Perhaps certain technical considerations prevailed over a positive political approach. I can assure you, on behalf of the Presidency, that, for us, the European Parliament's institutional and budgetary powers and competences

are in no way called into question by the proposals tabled, and that the interinstitutional agreement remains fully valid. I cannot promise, as Mr Böge has asked, to seek an agreement on a declaration even before the agreement is signed, but we will make one final effort to do so, and who knows?

Rehn, Member of the Commission. Mr President, following your positive resolutions in December, in February the Commission adopted a favourable opinion on the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union. In fact, if they complete their homework successfully, these two countries will be represented in this House in less than two years' time. They will take their places here as observers after the Accession Treaty.

I wish to stress, as I did at the Foreign Affairs Committee on 29 March, that President Barroso and I have repeatedly underlined that while the conclusion of the negotiations and the signature of the Accession Treaty imply that agreement has been reached on the terms and conditions for the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, they do not mean that the preparations for membership are complete. In the remaining 21 months, Bulgaria and Romania must deliver on key reforms and fully meet the commitments they have made in the course of the negotiations. The clock is ticking. Every day, every week, every month counts from now on. Both countries are the subject of very close monitoring by the Commission, by the Member States and by Parliament. They will remain so until the eve of accession.

I want to reassure you that if the Commission judges, on the basis of its monitoring, that either Bulgaria or Romania are manifestly unprepared for membership, I would not hesitate to recommend the use of the remedial tools. This includes the clause allowing us to postpone accession by one year until 2008. I am convinced that the honourable Members of Parliament will agree to this approach. I therefore look forward to a regular dialogue with you on the implementation of Bulgaria and Romania's commitments.

As President Barroso confirmed in a letter to President Borrell last week, the Commission will seriously consider the views of Parliament before issuing any recommendation on this issue, in particular after the release in November of our Comprehensive Monitoring Report on the progress towards accession made by Romania and Bulgaria. For this, I would like to thank especially the Committee on Foreign Affairs, its chairman, rapporteurs, and the coordinators for their cooperation and for a very sound solution. In my view, this respects the Treaty and at the same time gives the European Parliament a voice in the process in the spirit of true European democracy.

I visited Sofia in mid-March and Bucharest at the beginning of March. Let me give you a brief outline of the Commission's current assessment of the progress made by the two countries.

Mr Van Orden's report on Bulgaria welcomes the conclusion of the accession negotiations. The country has indeed made steady progress in recent years. Nonetheless, Bulgaria needs to keep up the momentum in its preparation for accession. We are watching this closely through our intensified monitoring mechanism. Bulgaria needs to make sound and solid efforts to reform the judiciary, and to fight against corruption and organised crime. The reform of the judiciary, in particular of the pre-trial phase, is the overarching priority until accession. This is the priority of all priorities for Bulgaria.

Let me turn to Romania. In its opinion on Romania, the Commission called on the country to pursue with determination the reforms that still need to be made. In particular, this covers the effective implementation of reforms of the public administration and the judiciary, the fight against corruption and the fulfilment of the commitments made in the field of competition and state aid, as well as the environment. In his report, Mr Moscovici adds to these priorities organised crime and the control of external borders. I fully share his views. These must be among the critical conditions when we evaluate Romania's progress towards accession.

Romania has started to tackle the accession requirements seriously, especially in the field of justice reform and the fight against corruption. I am glad to say today that all the key strategic documents required as a result of the negotiations have recently been transmitted by the Romanian Government to the Commission on time. These concern the fight against corruption, reform of the justice system and border security. The

documents are currently being assessed by the Commission.

In another key area which we will be watching very closely, that of competition and state aid, Romania has inter alia fulfilled its obligation to submit its national plan for steel restructuring, and has done this on time before the deadline.

Progress is also being made in the areas of police cooperation, where new laws on the Gendarmerie and the National Police have been adopted. Romania is engaged in discussions to determine the shape of its future funding commitments regarding border management.

The political determination now has to be further translated into concrete actions. Based on my frequent meetings with the Romanians in both Bucharest and in Brussels, I have a strong belief that the new government has understood the scope and the importance of the monitoring exercise, as well as the urgency to deliver concrete results in the first semester of 2005.

In my view we have reason to be cautiously optimistic as regards Romania's preparation for accession. Let us have a fair game. The jury is still out and it is now time to give Romania the benefit of the doubt in terms of its preparations for accession as a fully-fledged member state of the European Union.

Before concluding, let me briefly touch upon the financial implications of the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, to which Mr Smith referred in his speech. Commissioner Grybauskaitė has worked closely with the two rapporteurs Mr Böge and Mrs Dührkop Dührkop, my former colleagues from the Committee on Budgetary Control. The Commission's position on the matter is as follows. The amounts agreed in the accession negotiations with Bulgaria and Romania for the period 2007-2009 are included in the Accession Treaty. The financial perspective for 2007-2013 is to be broken into broad categories of expenditure for the EU-27, not on distinctions of allocations between certain groups of Member States, some of which can only be very indicative anyway. The Commission believes that distinguishing indicative amounts by certain groups of Member States is not in line with the spirit and the letter of the interinstitutional agreement.

To conclude, both the European Commission and our financial assistance programmes will continue to support the efforts of the two countries to intensify their necessary preparations. The timely signature of the Accession Treaty is important with a view to sustaining the momentum and ensuring the successful preparation for the accession of Bulgaria and Romania. I count on your support in this respect.

Maat (PPE-DE), draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Agriculture. – (NL) Mr President, I am very touched by what Mr Schmit said, on behalf of the Council, about the EU's social values. It is in the light of those values of the EU that we should view this enlargement. There is no doubt that Romania and Bulgaria should, in time, form part of the European Union, but from the point of view of agriculture and the Committee on Agriculture, I have to conclude that there is no sign of the funding having yet been sorted out. It is a complete mystery how we will be funding the accession of those two countries. I would remind you of the social rights you mentioned and the values we uphold. I assume that it is not the Council's intention that the 25 current Member States' rural areas should fund this accession. That is inconsistent with the EU's high values and so I assume that the Council will pay cash on the nail.

The second point concerns the functioning of those countries in a new European Union. The Commission was right to raise questions about border control. I would note that our excellent food safety policy has enabled the European Union to achieve a high standard, and that is an area in which Romania leaves a great deal to be desired. You have to realise that, if we were required to take a decision now, large parts of Romania would not be able to join the common European market when the time comes, while we do sell products on their market; the fact that 30% to 40% of the population still lives in the countryside and has to make a living from it means that Romania is not far enough advanced in this area. I may be putting it bluntly, but honesty compels me to do this if I study the countryside's social structure.

I would like to congratulate Bulgaria on its reform programme and on what it has done about ownership

rights. It has also managed to make a good job of implementing its rural development programme, in contrast to Romania, which I have to criticise for failing to spend sufficient SAPARD funds to get rural development underway. It would therefore be valuable if Parliament were to have some extra time to take a decision, because the new government has made a good start, but results are at present thin on the ground. Those who draw a comparison with previous accessions must be realistic. Bulgaria is moving towards the ten countries that joined most recently, but Romania is lagging behind in respect of rural development, agricultural policy, the risk of animal diseases and legislation in the area of food safety. That helps determine our European values which we hold dear, which we uphold, and which, in our view, benefit society, provided we can enforce them. Unfortunately, at the moment, I have to conclude that there are many points of criticism to be made about Romania in terms of its agriculture.

Millán Mon, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, tomorrow will be a very important day for this Parliament, for Romania, for Bulgaria and for all EU citizens. We will effectively be approving the signature of the Accession Treaty for both countries; this will conclude the process of the fifth enlargement, south-eastern Europe will gain in terms of stability and progress and also the dream of reunifying Europe will become a reality.

The opinion on Romania that we will vote on tomorrow is consistent with the first Moscovici report, approved by this Parliament last December. In it we said yes to the timetable established for the accession of Romania and we called for the implementation of a series of reforms in well-known areas.

This opinion is also consistent with this Parliament's desire to remain closely involved in the process leading to accession in January 2007. I am talking about the monitoring of reforms and also this Parliament's desire to remain involved in the event of the activation of the so-called safeguard clauses.

In this regard, I am pleased that the Commissioner, Mr Rehn, has repeated his commitment to fully involve Parliament in the rest of the process until January 2007 and I also take note of the commitments made in this regard by the Presidency-in-Office of the Council.

These are crucial times in the history of Romania, of course. I would like to emphasise the immense support amongst the Romanian people for the integration of its country into the Union. It is an historic objective which has enormous support amongst the Romanian citizens and is also supported by the political forces in that country. I have witnessed this once again this morning in a meeting with distinguished parliamentarians from several Romanian political parties.

I trust that the Romanian authorities, stimulated by this broad support, will continue to comply with the commitments in the Accession Treaty with complete determination and rigour, as Mr Rehn has just explained to us.

The time has come for Romania to join Europe. This is the priority and I hope that tomorrow Parliament will express its confidence that the Romanian Government will meet these expectations and thus issue its favourable opinion. Parliament will follow Romania's progress towards integration very closely. It deserves to be in the Union, not just because of its history, its geography and its culture, but also because of its European will and conscience.

Wiersma, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, tomorrow, this House will be delivering its verdict on Romania's and Bulgaria's accession to the European Union. We are still 20 months away from the currently planned date of accession, though, and quite a few of the questions which have been discussed at length in this House remain unanswered. Our key concern is the state of affairs in Romania. A number of necessary reforms in public administration and the administration of justice must be carried out as a matter of priority. The fight against corruption deserves more decisive action, and better guarantees are needed for the freedom and independence of the press. These aspects, along with many others, have been mentioned in Commission reports and those of our own rapporteurs. Like the Council and the Commission, we want to keep the pressure on in Bulgaria and particularly in Romania, so that the necessary reforms can actually take place within the agreed timeframes.

The shortcomings in Romania are so severe that our 'yes' at the moment amounts to conditional consent. There is still the option of activating the safety clauses in order to protect the European Union against the adverse effects of possible shortcomings. Should either country's shortcomings be too serious, then its accession can even be postponed. As this House should not simply stand by during monitoring and during the process of deciding whether to use safeguards or to postpone accession, we have asked the Council and the Commission to be actively involved in the monitoring and decision-making process right up to the day of accession, and the speeches we have heard this afternoon indicate that they are prepared to do so. This puts the European Parliament in a better position and, above all, benefits democratic control of the enlargement process, and I also see it as a political agreement. Should a large majority of this House have cause to cast doubt over Romania's or Bulgaria's progress or state of readiness at a later stage in the process, then the Council and the Commission could hardly ignore it if they want to avoid major political confrontations. Our consent tomorrow will therefore be conditional. It is also a political agreement of some sort with the accession candidates. It sends a message to them that in the next 18 months, they will be high on our list of priorities, and that it is their own commitment that will eventually be decisive.

Lambsdorff, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, Parliament will tomorrow be voting on whether or not to welcome Bulgaria into the European Union, and I would like to congratulate Mr Van Orden, on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, on his report on the subject, which is thorough and does a good job of striking a balance between, on the one hand, the enormous progress Bulgaria has made, and, on the other, the problems that still – as we know – remain to be resolved. What is beyond doubt is that the country is on the right road towards achieving membership of the European Union by 2007. Our group, that of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, will therefore be voting in favour of Bulgaria's accession, and will be assuring the country of its critical but constructive support as it continues on its way.

The Bulgarian Government has proved itself capable of fulfilling the accession criteria and of credibly complying with the demands made of it. This positive momentum must continue to be maintained in future, and, with elections due to be held in June, must not be allowed to slow down efforts at reform, particularly with regard to matters already referred to, such as the privatisation of Bulgartabak and the reform of criminal law.

It is true to say that this is a significant day for the European Union, and so I would like to make use of this opportunity to say something about the fundamental characteristic of the forthcoming enlargement round for the European Union as a whole; I refer to the actual compliance with the performance criteria set out in the report. The European Union's credibility – on which depends the necessary public support not only for the accession process, but also for the work of the European Union as a whole – must be maintained, and it will be so only by the consistent assessment of the candidates for accession, based on their own performance and their own merits. It is for this reason alone – and this I say for Mr Moscovici's benefit – and not out of any doubt about the European prospects of the two candidates, that my group regards the individual assessment of candidates as so fundamental.

In this respect, the consistent line taken by the Commission is to be welcomed. Commissioner Rehn has made it clear that he will not hesitate to recommend the application of the safeguard clause if he thinks it appropriate. We will see to it that what he has announced he will actually do if the need for it becomes apparent. My group is glad that this House will have a full part to play in this. I also believe – particularly having seen the inglorious behaviour of many Members of the Group of the European People's Party this lunchtime – that we should be having this debate in Brussels rather than in Strasbourg.

Legendijk, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, in December last year, my group voted against Mr Moscovici's report because we felt that it took far too positive a view of Romania and that there was no indication whatsoever to suggest that the fundamental problems would be addressed, such as fighting corruption and guaranteeing independent media and a free press. I will be quite honest: if Mr Nastase's party had won the elections in December last year, then it would have been quite straightforward for my group. We would be voting 'no' tomorrow against Romania's accession. Romania's old government was part of the

problem rather than of the solution, but fortunately, there is now a new government whose priorities are in line with this Parliament's concerns. Since this new government came into office, it has made it clear that it is serious about tackling the very problems that I mentioned a moment ago. Since then, former ministers and former members of parliament have lost their immunity from prosecution. Twenty-five high-ranking police chiefs who are suspected of corruption have been dismissed, and it is expected that criminal proceedings will be initiated against former ministers on account of corruption.

In short, this government, particularly the Justice Minister, deserves our support. I would like to say to all those who intend to vote 'no' that voting 'no' to this present government would be to penalise it for the old government's mistakes. It would destabilise this government and if there is something I do not want, it is the old government back in power. To this government, then, I would urge you to say 'yes', but a conditional 'yes'. It is crucial that this House continues to keep a grip on the enlargement with Romania and that is why I have taken the initiative to demand an undertaking from the Commission and the Council that this House will definitely continue to be involved in the enlargement, even after tomorrow. I am pleased with the rapporteur's cooperation, and also pleased that cooperation with the Members of this House was a success. I am particularly pleased with the undertaking Mr Rehn gave today, which was also included in a letter by Mr Barroso to Mr Borrell.

Should it prove necessary in future, in the next 18 months, to refer to the postponement clauses, Parliament will have full involvement in this. If this House is of the opinion that too few reforms are being carried out in 2005 or 2006, and that it is therefore necessary to start the postponement procedure in very specific areas, including the fight against corruption, that is then possible and that then creates a political fact which will require a reaction from the Commission and the Council at European and at national level. After all, we should not overlook the fact that the Treaty with Romania and Bulgaria will be subject to ratification and that, in future, their parliaments will be taking into account what is said in this House.

My, or rather our, message to the new government is: yes, we will give you the benefit of the doubt. By all means, continue carrying out reforms, but bear in mind that this House will continue to monitor you with a very critical eye and, as the Commissioner already stated, we will not hesitate to avail ourselves of the postponement procedures should this prove necessary.

In the Chair: MR TRAKATELLIS Vice-President

Meijer, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (NL) Mr President, Bulgaria and Romania were not immediately admitted during the large enlargement round in 2004 because negotiations with those countries were falling behind.

The point I would like to make about Bulgaria is that it indulges in building large roads and airports without giving any consideration to public health, nature, the environment or current EU rules. In addition, the large Roma population, despite projects subsidised by the European Union, is far from being treated on an equal footing. Poverty and unemployment are rampant. The current government is in power thanks to the temporary popularity of one person: the man who wanted to be king but does not have any organised and cohesive backing to speak of. This strange situation will probably come to an end after the elections of 25 June. Since Bulgaria is no worse than some states that were admitted in 2004, that criticism cannot be a good enough reason to wait any longer than 2007.

Romania's membership is much more controversial. In recent years, there were no guarantees for the independence of the press, justice and non-governmental organisations. Although Romania has signed up as candidate member of the European Union, I get the impression that it has a higher regard for the US and Turkey. Romania is in such a bad state that neighbouring Moldova's initial eagerness to return to it has completely evaporated. Government tasks have been neglected, but room has been created for a wild-west economy. In a bid to extract minerals cheaply, the country hires foreign freebooters who use dangerous chemicals which can seriously pollute the soil, groundwater and river water. In neighbouring Hungary, which has previously been hit by toxic river water from Romania, people are anticipating with fear the gold extraction project in Rosia Montana in the Romanian province Alba, which will involve the use of cyanide.

Moreover, Romania has concluded an agreement with the United States to sabotage the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Romania is US Defence Minister Rumsfeld's shop window of the 'new Europe'.

Romania's performance is worse than that of any of the countries that have been admitted to date. That could, in itself, be a reason to reject Romania's membership for the time being. My group, however, defends the right of European countries with a low standard of living to join the European Union quickly, provided they waste no time in complying with requirements in terms of human rights, democracy and the environment. Romania's unconditional admission would make it more difficult to bring pressure to bear on Turkey to become a decent democratic country before being admitted to the European Union. Moreover, it takes away any serious argument to delay negotiations even further with the former Yugoslav republics Croatia and Macedonia, which had hoped to join at the same time as Romania. We do not know what Romania's short-term development will be like under a new government; nor do we know whether a solution to the existing problems is in sight. That is why it is appropriate that the option of postponement should continue to exist as a lever. Not only the Council, but also this House, should possess that prerogative.

Belder, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (NL) Thank you, Mr President, Mr Moscovici's report on Romania's application to join the European Union excels because of its clarity and honesty. It covers both the results and shortcomings in this crucial phase of Bucharest's long and arduous road to Brussels. In paragraph 6, the rapporteur underlines the European obligations that the Romanian Government has not yet met. Not for nothing do judicial and administrative reforms, as well as the fight against corruption feature so high on that list. According to a well-informed spokesperson, we should in any event not doubt the integrity and commitment of the new Romanian Justice Minister, Mrs Monica Macovei, although she meets with much resistance even within her own ministry. I would welcome the open expression of support to her on the part of the Commission. Such a positive message could even have a double effect through being received both in Romania and elsewhere. I therefore also endorse what Mr Lagendijk had to say on this subject. In addition, the Commission could prompt the Romanian Government to launch a new drive against corruption in imitation of the 'No backhanders to anyone' campaign, for, in the final analysis, this evil affects the whole of society.

I sincerely hope that Mr Moscovici's report contributes to Romania, *deo volente*, joining the European Union as a responsible member on 1 January 2007. In fact, I would express the same wish with regard to Mr Van Orden's excellent report on Bulgaria.

Vaidere, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (LV) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is important for Bulgaria and Romania to be able to assume obligations deriving from membership of the European Union. In the same way it is important for the European Union, so that enlargement does not pose risks to the Union itself.

In view of the situation in Transdniester and in the Balkans, especially regarding issues such as smuggling and trafficking in people, it is important that external borders fully conform to European Union standards. That is why I also proposed that the European Parliament resolution should call upon the Romanian and Bulgarian Governments to pay particular attention to the security of the new external borders. The Committee on Foreign Affairs has supported my proposal.

As a representative of Latvia, I am clearly aware of the huge amount of work that states have to accomplish and what important decisions they have to take, particularly in the final years before joining the European Union. Romania and Bulgaria have made considerable reforms on the path towards European Union membership. In my view, it is now important not to slow down the speed that has been taken and to continue the reforms that have been begun, paying particular attention to domestic affairs and the improving of the legal system, observance of human rights, and especially, and I would like to give this point particular emphasis, the combating of corruption, as well as the guaranteeing of secure external borders for the European Union. The reforms in Romania and Bulgaria will have a positive influence not only on the welfare of the citizens of these countries but also on development in the western Balkans. I would like to

draw particular attention to the situation in the neighbouring state of Moldova, where, as a result of Bulgaria and Romania becoming European Union Member States, the values of peace, stability and prosperity might be translated into reality in the near future. In connection with Bulgaria and Romania I believe that we should look ahead to the future constructively. If some issues are still not settled, the support that is needed must be provided in order that they may be able to fulfil the legal requirements from the first days of membership. The European Parliament's political support for Romania and Bulgaria will only reinforce these countries' determination and will serve as political capital for the active continuation of reforms.

Battilocchio (NI). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am speaking on behalf of the New Italian Socialist Party and also as a member of the delegation to the EU-Romania Joint Parliamentary Committee. We need to reiterate the previous requests made by this Parliament and strongly demand that the Bucharest Government should tackle the unresolved problem of suspended cases of international adoption of Romanian children, who have had to wait a long time – too long – to be united with their new families. To date, despite the many promises and expressions of goodwill, nothing definite has been done and time is passing with no formal measures taken by the competent authorities.

The children concerned have often endured horrifying experiences and are being held in public institutions, which I had the opportunity to visit. These are old, dilapidated and lacking in any affection or human warmth. Let us avoid these children being given yet another slap in the face.

Meeting their new families has given these children hope of a different life and a better future. Let us do everything in our power to prevent this hope turning to disappointment and to avoid these children ultimately being denied the right to a peaceful and happy childhood.

Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra (PPE-DE). – (ES) Mr President, having congratulated the rapporteurs, Mr Moscovici and Mr Van Orden, I would like to say that the debate we are holding here this afternoon is even more important than the accession of Romania and Bulgaria.

The statement today from the Commission and the Council substantially strengthens the powers of this Parliament and extends its validity beyond the strict limits of the assent procedure. This statement represents a very significant precedent which we cannot and must not ignore in the future.

It is clear that the political and budgetary prerogatives of this Parliament must be preserved and I believe, Mr President, that this Parliament must not be afraid to demand compliance with the commitments made here this morning — in the event of any non-compliance — but I do not believe there is currently any reason for us to have any doubt or suspicion in this regard.

As well as stating that Parliament's prerogatives must be preserved, Mr President, I would also point out that Romania and Bulgaria cannot be held hostage to the budgetary or political quarrels amongst the different institutions currently making up the European Union. In my opinion, therefore, Mr President, this Parliament must tomorrow approve, with the agreed reservations, which I believe to be more than sufficient, the favourable opinions proposed by the rapporteurs, according to the terms approved in the Committee on Foreign Affairs, so that the Accession Treaty can be signed, as scheduled, on 26 April.

Having said this, Mr President, according to the statements made here today, the European Parliament's powers remain intact so that, if necessary, it can play the role it deserves, and in the mean time I would insist that tomorrow we must approve the favourable opinions expressed here today with all the reservations, which I believe to be sufficient.

Dobolyi (PSE).– (HU) Mr President, we have almost reached the conclusion of a process which, for Bulgaria, has been a very long one. The path that leads to membership of the extended family of the EU has been regarded by Bulgaria as a priority, a priority that has spanned several governments, supported by popular mandate. The decision that now lies in our hands continues the reunification of Europe that was initiated two years ago by the European Parliament in this very same building in the case of the ten new Member States.

This enlargement enables us to extend the domain of stability, peace and prosperity to Romania and Bulgaria. It enables us to spread the values of Europe, which is based on democracy, pluralism and the rule of law. As Mr van Orden mentioned in his balanced report, Bulgaria still has some work to do to fulfil its obligations. Also, as Commissioner Rehn, Mr Wiersma, and other honourable colleagues have mentioned, I am delighted that Parliament will play its part in monitoring the preparatory process in future too. This is why I would like to call upon our Bulgarian friends to continue the excellent work which they began a good many years ago and which will enable us to conclude this period on 1 January 2007.

On behalf of the PSE Group, I would like to say that we are ready to welcome the people of Bulgaria into the association to which they have always belonged, since they share our history, culture and values. In so doing, we mark the end of an artificially created break, just as in the case of Romania. I am also delighted to be able to take this opportunity to say a few words about Romania as a Hungarian MEP, because I believe that this enlargement will provide a solution for the 2 million Hungarian people living in Romania, and that from 2007 onwards we will be able to live in a common Europe without borders.

Neyts-Uyttebroeck (ALDE). – (NL) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to start by paying tribute not only to the rapporteurs, Mr Van Orden and Mr Moscovici, but also to those fellow Members who have guided both Bulgaria's and Romania's efforts over the past few years. I would like to mention Baroness Nicholson, in particular, who has done this for Romania with unflagging zeal.

As a large majority of my group will be consenting to the Accession Treaty with Romania, it is to this subject that I should like to devote my speech. Although there are still questions surrounding its state of readiness in the areas of justice, the fight against corruption and external border control, we appreciate and unreservedly support the major efforts the current government is making in order to catch up. I should also like to express our appreciation for the assurance which the Commission and the Council have given that Parliament will remain involved in subsequent progress that is yet to be made. In the past, cooperation between Parliament, the Commission and the Council, in the persons of either their shadow rapporteurs or their coordinators, has been exemplary and they have thus removed our biggest doubts. As you know, those doubts mainly concerned the long 20-month period that will separate the signing on 25 April next and the actual accession on 1 January 2007.

Having now been given the assurance that we, as an institution, will be involved in the possible activation of the safeguarding clause, we reiterate our full support to Romania, a country that currently has what it takes to ensure that this clause need not be resorted to. That aspiration is certainly very dear to me. In any event, it can count on our support and sympathy.

Horáček (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, although we are in favour of Bulgaria's accession to the EU, for its membership will be of considerable political significance, there must be no letup in the efforts towards reform. We will not, however, be voting to endorse the Van Orden report in its present form, for some things are absent from it and others too indistinctly outlined – human rights, for example. The Bulgarian authorities must draw up a clear plan of action for combating people-trafficking and put it into practice. Conditions for patients in psychiatric homes must be improved. There is a need for further improvement in the integration of minorities, particularly of the Roma. Democratic rights and the free expression of opinion, as well as the principles of the Aarhus Convention and access to information must be guaranteed, for we have been shocked by the threats made to representatives of environmental NGOs and citizens' initiatives. My colleague Mrs Harms will have something to say about the environmental problems in connection with the nuclear power stations at Kosloduj and Belene.

Corruption, in its many and varied forms, must be combated with vigour, and everything possible must be done to shed light on the fate of the 14 Bulgarian seafarers who have been missing since the Hera went down in the Black Sea in February 2004.

Remek (GUE/NGL). – (CS) As a citizen of a new Member State that has already been given the opportunity to join the Community, I should like to express my support for the future accession of Bulgaria and

Romania, as outlined in today's recommendations by our rapporteurs. I believe that both Bulgaria and Romania should be given the same opportunities as us, provided their citizens decide to take advantage of them. The necessary requirements must be met, of course, but these countries should then be given the chance to demonstrate that they have something to contribute to the EU, particularly since there have recently been increasing signs that countries will join the EU in future that are situated rather further away from Europe as such. Waiting at the gates of the EU is a powerful motivation, and evidence of this can be found in the increasing levels of activity in Bulgaria and Romania. What is more, we should not forget that Bulgaria and Romania belong to the Balkans. I believe that there is a far greater chance of peace in this region if the two countries belong to the EU than if they do not.

Piotrowski (IND/DEM). – (PL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, at its most recent meeting in Brussels the Committee on Foreign Affairs voted by a clear majority to support the applications by Bulgaria and Romania for membership of the European Union. The members of the Independence and Democracy Group within the Committee on Foreign Affairs were among those who voted to support the applications, as we have no intention of thwarting the ambitions of these two European countries to be integrated with the rest of Europe. We are well aware that Bulgaria and Romania have made huge progress in terms of political and economic reform, yet at the same time we feel it is our duty to warn the citizens of these two countries against being overly optimistic.

Although official Commission documents state that one of the goals of the European Union is to enhance solidarity among its peoples whilst respecting their history, culture and traditions, this is in fact far from the truth. Solidarity is no longer a priority for the European Union, and what really counts is a peculiar brand of competitiveness that has been enshrined in the latest version of the Lisbon Strategy. The new EU Member States have not received enough funding, which means that current policies will result in even greater differences between regions and countries. There is a substantial risk that instead of receiving real development aid, Bulgaria and Romania will merely pay for the upkeep of the European Union's bureaucratic structure through their contributions to the EU budget.

Libicki (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I regret to have to say that today's debate has been dominated by accountants and bureaucrats. It is for this reason that I was delighted to hear Mr Schmit, the Council representative, draw our attention to something that should in fact be obvious, namely that this is a truly historic moment, in particular for Bulgaria and Romania. The accession of these two countries will mean that the divisions created by the Yalta agreement, and that ran counter to European culture, tradition and justice, will at last be totally erased from the map. At the same time, the two countries we are welcoming into the European Union have traditionally belonged to European culture. When they gained independence over 100 years ago, they made great efforts to establish themselves as modern states in order to become part of Western European culture. There can be nobody here today who is not familiar with names such as Brancusi, Eliade and Carmen Sylva, a pseudonym used by the Romanian queen 90 years ago to publish extremely well-known writings.

Similarly, Bulgaria freed itself from Ottoman domination when it gained independence by inviting the Western European Saxe-Coburg-Gotha dynasty to take its throne. A representative of this dynasty, the current Bulgarian Prime Minister, is now successfully leading Bulgaria into the European Union. We should welcome these countries and be glad that they are entering into our family of European nations.

Martin, Hans-Peter (NI). – (DE) Mr President, during the European election campaign held in Austria less than a year ago, the major parties' lead candidates, Mr Swoboda and Mrs Stenzel, were asked, by members of the public worried about the 10-country enlargement that was in progress at the time, what the situation was as regards future candidates for enlargement. Their reply was: 'That is not a live issue right now.'

Just how much this statement deceived the electorate – as it was intended to do – is apparent from these reports, if it was not already. Burying one's head in the sand has become a matter of consistent policy, for the arguments in favour of stopping these premature additional accessions are growing in number: corruption, administration, the fact that the story of the EU's Constitution is not yet over. We ourselves are not in a position to take this step.

What we, in this House, are supposed to be adopting tomorrow is, in terms of enabling Europe to function and actually be democratic, irresponsible and will end up being to the detriment of the countries that are now pressing to be admitted to the EU.

Ferber (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council – I am glad to see you here, even if you are not listening – Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, in our role as MEPs, there are two things we have to examine, and the first is whether the enlargement process safeguards our rights as such. As my group’s spokesman in the Committee on Budgets, which yesterday evening unanimously adopted the Dührkop Dührkop report, I can tell you that, as I see it, no account has been taken of the European Parliament’s budgetary rights in connection with this enlargement.

Commissioner, your saying, ‘I will consider a request of the European Parliament’ is not, for me, a binding statement with which we can do anything in legal terms. Nothing is guaranteed. It is clear to me, when I analyse what is going on here, that due heed is not actually being paid to this House’s rights.

Secondly, we have to examine whether or not Bulgaria and Romania comply with the criteria for accession. When, if not at the vote prescribed as mandatory by the Treaty, which is to be held tomorrow, are we meant to make a statement about this? Am I supposed to call to mind what this House has said, year in and year out, in the progress reports, particularly with regard to the situation in Romania? I can find no evidence of progress having been made. If I try to scroll forward to the end of 2006, I cannot envisage the goal being reached. I had proposed that we in this plenary should vote on Bulgaria’s and Romania’s applications for accession only after the next progress report had been presented to us, but that, unfortunately, has not proved possible.

So let me make it abundantly clear – and I can say this also on behalf of a number of Members from my own country – that we cannot, at present, give our approval, particularly where Romania is concerned.

(Applause)

Swoboda (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, I would like to begin with warm thanks to the rapporteurs for the very careful and comprehensive work that they have done. These reports are very frank, one consequence of which may be that they appear to be more critical than ought to be the case, but it is right that these things should be mentioned.

I would also like to thank the President-in-Office and the Commissioner, for both Mr Schmit and Commissioner Rehn have made a considerable effort to accede to Parliament’s wishes and take on board its ideas. I know that they had many legal obstacles to overcome. Whilst I endorse in principle what Mr Ferber said about Parliament’s rights, it is clear from what the President-in-Office and the Commissioner have said today that it does not appear possible to them that the Council and the Commission should simply disregard any explicitly negative position delivered, in the autumn, by Parliament, which is the representative of Europe’s peoples. It was in fact on the basis of that alone that many of our Members feel able to vote in favour.

There is still much to be done. Contrary to what was said by Mr Lagendijk – for whom, let me add, I have high regard – it is not the case that everything was formerly black or red or in any case bad, while everything is now fine. The former government, too, did a certain amount – too little, I admit – and so we have high hopes of its successor stepping up its efforts.

I was myself in Romania a week ago last Friday and was able to see how seriously the government and the various members of parliament are taking the implementation of reforms. With reference to the combating of cross-border crime, let me add that Romania’s efforts are gaining strength from what is now happening in Ukraine, from which we are for the first time getting a positive response. I would ask the Council and the Commission to take great care that Ukraine helps Romania to win this battle against international crime, and if the fight against corruption in Romania itself is won, it is very likely that the battle will in fact be won. I

would, though, ask both of you to take this, and our views, as very seriously as we take your promises.

Jensen (ALDE). – (DA) Mr President, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe also wishes to complain in the strongest terms about the lack of respect for Parliament and the violation of the European Parliament's budgetary powers that we are seeing here in connection with the negotiations concerning the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU. Unfortunately, it is not the first time this has happened. We of course saw the same thing in connection with last year's enlargement to include the ten new countries. Here, too, the Council acted entirely unilaterally in writing the estimated costs of enlargement into the annex to the Accession Treaties. One would think that what happened afterwards and the subsequent negotiations between Parliament and the Council would have stuck in the Council's mind. The indications are, however, that the Council has a pretty short memory.

How hard can it be? All we asked was that the Council – as agreed with the Luxembourg Presidency – make a joint declaration emphasising that the three institutions must reach agreement on the financial consequences of accession by Bulgaria and Romania, just as they should do. But no: it does not want to sign such a declaration. This is a clear illustration of an unwillingness to cooperate and comes such a short time before we must get in step as regards an agreement on the financial perspectives for the multiannual budgets for the years following 2006. The lack of a joint approach could have particular consequences, here; that is to say, if agreement on financial perspectives is not reached before the current perspectives expire.

I should like to thank the Commissioner for detailing the status of the financial perspectives and for his support for the presentation of Parliament's opinion. I should also like to thank Mr Schmidt for his promise that he will once again attempt to get the joint declaration signed by the Council. I wish him the best of luck with this task.

Harms (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to say something else about Kosloduj. My group's expectation is that this power station be decommissioned in the manner laid down in the protocol agreed on the subject. We had the impression that, on this point, the Van Orden report could well be clarified, as Mr Van Orden left this very much open. I am very glad of support from Mrs Stenzel and Mr Swoboda, which I trust will be backed up by broad support for this amendment on the part of their groups.

I learned yesterday that the Bulgarian Government has now come to a final decision to build a new power station at Belene, and on this, too, we have submitted an amendment. Bulgaria is a major exporter of electricity. I cannot see that there is any need to continue with building work at Belene, thereby bringing hazards into the country and sending electricity out of it. To my mind, that does not make sense, and nor does the investment of European money in it. My colleague Mr Horáček has made reference to the great difficulties that citizens' rights activists face at Belene in particular. It is not a good sign when Greenpeace International reports that opponents of nuclear power in Bulgaria face such extreme attacks that they need personal protection.

Karatzafelis (IND/DEM). – (EL) Mr President, is the question which arises whenever new countries join merely numerical and financial? In other words, is it only a question of cost, deficit, growth and production or is it also a cultural question? Is it perhaps also a social question? Romania and Bulgaria clearly do not have the European rate of growth or social justice. They lost forty-five years, which we signed away when we sent them to the Soviet Union. Roosevelt and Churchill both put their signatures alongside that of Stalin. We therefore owe them forty-five years' backlog in social development and economic growth. We must now therefore give them back what we owe them without grumbling; we must stretch out our hand and pull them into European society. We owe it to the civilisation, to the culture of Europe. Let us not only look at the dry figures. Dry figures are for technocrats. Numbers do not build republics, they build banking institutions, but we here are building the European republic, the European idea. Let us therefore vote in favour, because it is necessary for the breadth of Europe, it is necessary for these new ideas with which we need to endow Europe.

Tatarella (UEN). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am speaking on behalf of the Union of

Europe of the Nations Group and the Italian delegation of Alleanza Nazionale. Tomorrow we shall be voting in favour of the resolution, and we applaud the signature of the Treaty and the subsequent accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union.

Since 1989, all successive Romanian Governments have set as their sole and overriding aim the country's accession to the European Union. The path has been tortuous and difficult, but there is no doubt that significant progress has been made. Above all, in recent years the Bucharest Government has made great strides. The Commission is aware of this and, in its 1997 report on compliance with the political criteria, acknowledged the huge reform efforts made by that country – the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law and respect for minorities, as well as reforms in the area of public administration. Problems undoubtedly still exist, but we must have confidence.

Masiel (NI). – (PL) Mr President, Romania and Bulgaria are European countries. The aftermath of the Second World War was very unfortunate, and the accession of these countries to the European Union will not only be a form of reparation for the catastrophic Yalta Agreement, but will also satisfy the wishes of a great many people, Pope John Paul II included. It is irrelevant whether these countries join the EU on 1 January 2007 or at a later date, as even if we waited 40 years they would still not be ready in economic and social terms. Yet the genuine desire to build a common and just Europe on the basis of a Christian heritage is our key criterion, and I would therefore suggest that Romania and Bulgaria should join the EU on 1 January 2007, and no later. We should not dampen their pro-EU zeal, in fact we should be doing quite the opposite. We should put it to good use to ensure that the last reforms needed before accession are carried out.

Podestà (PPE-DE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, this Parliament's delegation to the EU-Romania Joint Parliamentary Committee visited Bucharest last week. We held meetings with our parliamentary colleagues, the new Head of State, the Prime Minister and other ministers. Our overall impressions were favourable. Even on the Romanian side there was no attempt to hide the problems which still exist, a fact I view as highly positive as it enables us to assess the efforts made to date.

A short time ago, a fellow Member stated that these countries have not made any progress. That is simply not true. Romania and Bulgaria have made enormous strides. With particular reference to Romania, especially in the last few months following the change of government after the November elections, this progress has responded to recent requests from the European Parliament – for example when this House adopted Commissioner Verheugen's report last November. I believe the European Union must be consistent: it would be genuinely strange to have to explain to Romanian and Bulgarian public opinion that their countries may become hostages to the inability of the Council and Parliament to find a consensus on issues concerning the budget and financial perspectives.

I believe sincerely that we must take notice of the great commitment made by these countries. There will be no shortcuts; achievement of the standards necessary for accession depends solely on their own efforts. However, we cannot jeopardise a priori the goal which these countries are striving to achieve.

Hänsch (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, having been in favour of Bulgaria and Romania joining the European Union from the word go, I still support their accession, and will continue to do so. I am delighted at the progress that both countries have made over recent years.

Today, however, Parliament is being asked to vote in favour of Accession Treaties when the negotiations on these treaties have not been brought to a proper close. There are key aspects of the Copenhagen criteria that have not been met, and, by threatening to use the safeguard and postponement clauses, the Commission and the Council have revealed the political bankruptcy of the negotiations. To all intents and purposes, we are being asked to agree to an artificially propped-up accession.

At the same time, however, the Council is pushing for the treaties to be signed in a hurry, and snubbing Parliament by nullifying its budgetary rights. We should not punish Romania and Bulgaria for this, though,

and the exchange of letters between Mr Barroso, the President of the Commission, and Mr Borrell, the President of Parliament, has at least made it possible for us to cast our votes in favour, even though we are far from happy at having to do so.

The President-in-Office of the Council and the Commissioner should, however, be aware that we are rapidly losing our faith in the willingness and ability of the Council and the Commission to conduct the forthcoming enlargement negotiations in the necessary fashion, or in other words fairly, responsibly and in the interests of everyone. I would advise you not to rely on this House's constant forbearance and, above all, would ask you to confirm to the House in November, when you submit your report, that the countries are ready to join, rather than presenting yet another interim assessment.

This House has always looked favourably upon enlargement in the past, but there is nothing to say that this will not change in the future.

Nicholson of Winterbourne (ALDE). – Mr President, in Helsinki in 1999 the Council, the Commission and Parliament tasked Romania with three key topics she had to address.

I can report most favourably on one topic today: the progress on children's rights. Since that date, the Commission has dedicated EUR 60 million to the implementation of children's rights. The Commission, with the Romanian Government, has created family-style care for children in need through the implementation of day-care centres, family-type homes, mother and baby units and centres for special needs children.

Year on year, the Commission has run a major public awareness campaign with the government and has set in hand and implemented large training programmes for professionals on the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and on the exceptionally powerful new Romanian legislation.

As a result, the number of children in residential care has dropped from 85 000 to 35 000. Conditions in institutions have changed dramatically and 15 000 children are now in foster care. Some 30 000 children have been reintegrated into their own families. Only last year, 1 800 children were adopted domestically and two or three years ago 25 000 special needs children were restored to normal schooling for the very first time.

The Commission has worked powerfully on new legislation for 6.5 million children in Romania. That new law is well in advance of other laws in the region and indeed of some nations in the European Union. It is a very modern law. It supports the family; it is against violence towards children and it forbids the institutionalisation of children between nought and two years old. In European Union Member States, there are many thousands of children in institutions, including between the ages of nought and two years old.

As regards contact between parents and children, the new law is particularly strong and very modern. The Commission set up a special group from Member States, led by a Belgian judge, to assist in the formation of this new legislation.

In conclusion, Romania now has more advanced law and greater reform on children's rights than many of the Member States, as some Member States announced in a meeting on Friday 8 April in Greece. I congratulate Romania. This is just one success and there are many others. Romania has well earned her place in the European Union and I shall be delighted to vote for her accession.

Borghesio (IND/DEM). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I send my best wishes to Romania – a country where thousands of Po valley companies are operating – although a few still sensitive issues remain: illegal immigration, human trafficking and the previously-mentioned issue of child foster care.

With regard to Bulgaria, we must take account of a new development, namely yesterday's revelations in a leading daily newspaper by the ex-director of the East German secret service, who finally revealed the truth

that the attack on the Pope was organised, directed and implemented by the Bulgarian secret services. Mr President, Commissioner, let us take advantage of the present situation and request the Bulgarian authorities to reveal the truth! We ask them to open up the files and finally explain to Europe what really happened and who it was that supplied the weapon to Ali Agca, a man trained in Bulgaria. We are asking what happened because there are still people with the blood of that attack on their hands, placing a heavy burden of responsibility on the leaders of that period of history, which is fortunately now behind us since the collapse of the Berlin wall. Let us draw attention to this grave responsibility; let us get to the truth and not turn the page without first establishing clearly and truthfully what really happened.

Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Mr President, according to the advocates of enlargement, the Balkans would become more stable if Romania and Bulgaria were to join the European Union in a little under two years' time. There is no doubting their status as members of the European community of nations, and Austria in particular welcomes the prospect of the EU being enlarged to include large swathes of a country that was an integral part of the Austrian family of nations before the First World War. At the same time, however, this does not alter the fact that both countries continue to face serious problems which have not yet been resolved in spite of all the efforts towards reform, and which are not confined to the economic and social spheres. Romania and Bulgaria are also experiencing major problems relating to the export of crime, a far from negligible cause of which is corruption within these countries. What is more, given that 30% of Romanians still live on the poverty line, there is a risk that the EU labour market will come under immense pressure.

In our opinion, the above-mentioned problems are evidence that it may well be too early for Romania and Bulgaria to join the EU. Romania and Bulgaria – that is, the authorities in Sofia and Bucharest – will have to get on top of the fight against crime before they are granted entry into the European Union.

Gál (PPE-DE). – (HU) Mr President, when I assent tomorrow to the accession of a Romania that is able to comply with and apply European norms and practice, I am doing so while drawing attention to the importance of being able to keep track of how commitments are being honoured.

Romania has undergone a great transformation in the past fifteen years. In a short period of time it has changed from a backward country quite literally shrouded in darkness, and a brutal dictatorship, into a NATO member and a candidate for EU membership. Hopefully, thanks to its new government, the foundations of a system genuinely based on the rule of law will also be laid in the coming months.

Alongside the successes, however, the transition is also hampered by some unresolved issues. As a Hungarian MEP, I must point out particularly the numerous transitional exemptions requested by Romania in the field of environmental protection, some of which have a direct impact on the state of Hungary's natural environment. Sensitive, unresolved matters include corruption, the independence of the judiciary, restitution of church and community property, the issue of the State Hungarian University, the cultural rights of the Csango people, initiatives by the Hungarian community and the Székely region to achieve autonomy, and provisions in the electoral legislation – also criticised by international organisations – that discriminate against minority organisations.

We cherish hopes of progress in these areas too in the coming months. This moment is a historic one for the citizens of Romania and for the Hungarian community in Transylvania, which is of special importance to me. I believe that accession will strengthen the ability of the one-and-a-half million indigenous Hungarian minority to shape its future and provide a chance of achieving self-government, autonomy and independence. By approving the signing of the Accession Treaty, we are giving Romania an opportunity. This is why I would like to place particular emphasis on strict monitoring during the period between the signing of the Accession Treaty and the actual accession date. The European Parliament must have a role in this process so that everyone's misgivings can be allayed by the time the actual accession date arrives.

Working in the European Parliament has made it clear to me that the future shape of Romania, including that of the Hungarian community, depends on us in many respects. Let us be decisive in calling Romania to account, even if the delegation of the government in power at any given time is otherwise inclined, because covering up problems would have a demoralising effect on the population of the Member States. This is

particularly important for the citizens of Romania, whose only concern must be to emerge as the winner from accession. This is what my yes-vote is about. Let it be a chance for these people.

Rouček (PSE). – (CS) A year will soon have passed since the historic enlargement, when ten new Member States joined the EU. It is apparent that the results of this enlargement have on the whole been positive, and that this is true not only for the Member States that became part of the European Union a year ago, but also for the old Member States. I am quite sure that the round of enlargement involving Romania and Bulgaria will be equally successful. The mere prospect of accession has proven to be a powerful motivation for both Romania and Bulgaria to reform their political systems and to implement a number of reforms relating to human rights and civil liberties, to the political system and to the building of a stronger economy.

Much remains to be done, of course, and our rapporteurs have given a clear, unambiguous and extremely objective account of this in their reports. I believe that both Romania and Bulgaria will continue to be as successful over coming months as they have been to date, and that they will be able to join the European Union in 2007. I am aware that there has been some controversy over the division of competences between the various European institutions, but we should not lose sight of our main goal, which is the further enlargement of an area of democracy, freedom, stability and prosperity. This area should be enlarged to include South-Eastern Europe, so that not only Hungary and the Czech Republic, but in future also Romania and Bulgaria, can set a strong and positive example to such countries as Serbia, Montenegro or the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Varvitsiotis (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, I should like first to congratulate the two rapporteurs on their detailed reports. Last December, the European Council announced the completion of negotiations with the two countries with the assent of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which was absolutely clear. Today, we have also had statements by both the Council and the Commissioner, Mr Rehn. Everyone has pointed out that these two countries have made remarkable progress within the framework of their efforts to harmonise with the *acquis communautaire*. However, both these countries still need to do more, mainly on the chapters of corruption, justice and combating organised crime. These shortcomings, in my opinion, can be overcome in the period of over eighteen months remaining. Furthermore, the progress being made will be very closely monitored by the Commission, as Commissioner Rehn has stated. I should also like to point out that the amendment on the basis of which the European Parliament will take full part in the accession procedure of both these countries and in the decision-making process, in the event that safeguard clauses need to be used, is also very important because, to put it one way, it also safeguards control by Parliament. We Greek PPE-DE MEPs strongly support the integration prospects of Romania and Bulgaria, knowing full well that this will strengthen stability and security in the Balkans. We also believe that a negative result would send the wrong political message and would discourage these countries from making all the necessary efforts at a rapid pace.

Tabajdi (PSE). – (HU) Mr President, for Hungary, Romania's accession is a matter of national interest given that, historically, Hungarian-Romanian relations have been fraught with conflict. The EU can provide a framework for resolving these conflicts definitively, but this will not happen automatically. Romania's one-and-a-half million-strong ethnic Hungarian community has a keen interest in becoming a member of the EU as soon as possible; support for the EU within this group stands at over 90%. In a spirit of political good neighbourliness, Hungary would like to offer its assistance to the Romanian Government to enable the country to comply completely with the requirements set out in detail in the present report, so as to avoid postponement of Romania's accession and ensure that the safeguard clause does not need to be invoked.

The work still to be done includes important areas such as creating genuine local self-governance and implementing genuine decentralisation. It is important that the European Parliament should remind the Romanian Government to continue improving the situation of the Hungarian minority, to implement special measures, and to emphasise the need for subsidiarity and local self-governance.

Self-governance is synonymous with autonomy, and a minority of one-and-a-half million people is in great need of it. I refer both to the need for personal, individual autonomy for Hungarians scattered throughout the country, and the need for territorial autonomy for areas densely populated by Hungarians. In this regard,

Romania's regions should be constituted on the basis of historical linguistic traditions. Thank you, Mr Moscovici, for your report. It provides great encouragement and considerable help to Romania's minorities. With the aforementioned provisos, I wholeheartedly support the speedy accession of Romania.

Beazley (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I too took part in the EU-Romania Joint Parliamentary Committee visit to Bucharest last week and I am very grateful to the President of Parliament, and indeed to our Vice-President Mr Podestà, for making it possible, in extraordinary circumstances, to hold the vote this week.

The main point I would like to report back to Parliament was how impressively open members of the Romanian Government – from the President to the Prime Minister to the ministers – were in recognising the difficulties that they have inherited. There was no attempt to cover them up. Yet in a very short space of time they have produced detailed programmes to deal with these difficulties, which they have also costed. So this was not just a wish list, it was a very practical approach to the difficulties.

We all know the issues involved: the fight against corruption, independence of the judiciary, the protection of the environment. It is very clear that the European Union will have to support Romania in terms of inward investment and cooperation in order to restore civil society. A look back at the history books and the pictures of Bucharest at the beginning of the last century show how prosperous and cultivated Romania was at that point in the society of European countries. It is my belief that Romania will rejoin Europe and deserves to do so.

There are concerns, particularly about the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, which was not treated well in the past; but I believe we received important reassurances on that count.

Therefore I will be voting in favour. It is most important to give the right message not only to the Romanian authorities but also to the Romanian population. This is not the end of the story, of course; after accession we need to continue to work. But I would like to thank our Romanian hosts who welcomed us to Bucharest and also point out that the EU embassies – in other words representatives of the Member States – are working hand-in-hand with the Commission to make sure that this very difficult task is accomplished.

Leinen (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, this House has always been in favour of Romania and Bulgaria joining the EU. Having repeatedly stated that this accession should take place on 1 January 2007, we would very much welcome a decision to this effect tomorrow.

As a member of the EU-Romania Joint Parliamentary Committee, I have seen for myself what progress this country has made, in spite of all the problems bequeathed by the Ceausescu regime. It cannot be denied, however, that Romania still has a great deal of work to do before its accession, including fighting corruption and securing the independence of the judiciary, to both of which reference has been made on many occasions. I am delighted to see that the new government is working to achieve these goals, and that national action plans have been produced for the period until 2007. Corruption amounts to nothing more than stealing from the national economy and from the people; it is an evil that must be eradicated from society.

Romania must be a functioning state under the rule of law. No matter what problems are encountered with regard to filling senior posts in constitutional bodies, the constitution must be observed, and I would also note that Romania is a member of the European family and is not stepping out of line in any way. The idea of a Washington-London-Bucharest axis is perhaps somewhat presumptuous, but, as we look forward to this country joining us in the EU, I believe that it will cooperate effectively and well with us.

McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Mr President, firstly, I welcome the progress made by Romania on its path towards membership of the European Union. In a short amount of time a lot has been achieved and I want to congratulate the Romanian authorities on this.

We have heard this afternoon about the areas where more progress is required and our genuine concerns about how it will all be financed. Despite Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne's very positive report on the improvement in childcare in Romania, the care of children and young adults in state institutions is an issue. I

am talking particularly about those children and young adults with disabilities. Less than a year ago, Amnesty International launched a disturbing report on the tragic deaths of a number of patients in a psychiatric hospital in Romania. The report indicated that the deaths were mainly due to malnutrition and hypothermia and were sadly not an exception in the Romanian mental health care system.

I know that the European Union, working with the Romanian authorities, has been involved in very important work to reduce the number of children and young adults in institutionalised care. However, Amnesty International has pointed out that not enough account has been taken of the many young adults who have been inappropriately transferred from the state institutions that were closed down and have ended up in psychiatric hospitals, where they may well languish for the rest of their lives.

I accept that things have greatly improved in Romania. The Commission recently informed me of all its work in this regard, but a lot more remains to be done in this area. It is simply not acceptable that children and young adults in Romania are held in inappropriate care. Indeed, it is not acceptable that this should happen in any EU Member State.

I support the accession of Romania to the European Union, but I would urge the Romanian authorities, the Commission, this Parliament and all relevant bodies not to forget the real people I am talking about: those who do not have a voice. Their situation needs to be carefully monitored and improved in the run-up to accession and thereafter.

Salinas García (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, the Committee on Agriculture emphasises the political and economic importance of the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that we have a serious problem in terms of the financial perspectives.

We cannot deal with the Accession Treaties without taking account of the financial perspectives, particularly with regard to the common agricultural policy. We must take account of the financial cost of the application of the CAP in these two candidate countries. In the case of agriculture, we do not find it sufficient to say that the funding of these two countries will be carried out within the sums agreed by the Council. This agreement referred solely to the spending for the Union of 25 and only included the 10 new countries, and not Romania and Bulgaria.

We in this Parliament want the agreements of the Brussels Summit of October 2002, which offered the assurance that the progressive introduction of new countries would be carried out within the framework of financial stability, to be respected.

In order to include these two new countries, something with which we agree, the sum calculated for that purpose must be increased in order to accommodate Romania and Bulgaria within the common agricultural policy. That is what Parliament wants and we hope that the Council and the Commission will both agree.

Itälä (PPE-DE). – (FI) Mr President, Romania and Bulgaria must become members of the European Union, but how is it going to happen and when is it going to happen? First of all I would have welcomed more willingness for cooperation on the part of the Council with respect to financing issues. We have heard here today that there is still a very great number of uncertainties, and that is why it would be preferable if we gave further consideration to what could be the common view on these issues.

In particular, we have problems with regard to Romania, and the questions is whether it fulfils all the criteria. If it is not a requirement for Romania to fulfil all the criteria, which all Member States have had to do so far, it will be a bad example to set for future new Member States, such as Turkey. I was pleased to hear Commissioner Rehn's suggestion that the safeguard clauses must be applied, if the conditions are not adequately met and if Romania is not making sufficient progress. I strongly support this view.

Now it would have been more sensible to wait for the next progress report and only vote on these issues then, not tomorrow. Above all, the question is about public trust in how the institutions follow rules and agreements. A short time ago the Stability and Growth Pact was watered down, because it was considered to

be politically important. If membership criteria are now to be watered down, because it is considered politically important, it is difficult to imagine how the public can trust in these institutions.

Riera Madurell (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, while we support the reports that we are debating, we in the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy wish to emphasise that in the research, energy, industrial policy and telecommunications sectors, both countries need to make additional efforts. They need to change their industrial policy; they need to eliminate the structural obstacles to investment and excessive bureaucracy and they also need to create a stable legislative framework to ensure an effective strategy for small and medium-sized businesses, the true creators of employment and source of technological innovation.

They must also continue working on an energy safety policy. Bulgaria has already adopted measures to achieve a high level of safety at the Kozludzy nuclear power station, and we are pleased about that. But energy generation capacities are expected to be considerably reduced, and it is therefore urgent to create new capacities and guarantee security of supply. We call on the Commission to monitor this issue closely and to provide any necessary technical assistance.

In the case of Romania, the abandonment of inefficient thermal power stations and non-viable coal mines are key challenges that require the immediate adoption of social policy measures to deal with the serious difficulties created in terms of employment. For all these reasons, they need our support, Mr President.

Christensen (PSE). – (DA) Mr President, Romania has had difficulty casting off the yoke of the Soviet empire. Romania was one of the countries that experienced the most violent transition from dictatorship to democracy. The country has therefore had a more difficult journey towards membership. Consequently, the progress made by Romanian society is impressive, although the work is far from complete. Romania still has problems with infringement of the freedom of the press, poor safeguarding of the rights of the child and suppression of the Roma population, and there are also still problems involving corruption. I am therefore satisfied with the action plan on corruption published recently by the Romanian Government. Although Romania still suffers from serious problems, it is important that we approve Romania's membership tomorrow since we want to encourage the efforts of the Romanian people to meet the conditions for accession on 1 January 2007.

In the Chair: Mr COCILOVO Vice-President

Schmit, President-in-Office of the Council. – (FR) Mr President, I will be brief. Your debate has uncovered a number of very useful and very interesting pieces of information. I thought I detected, through all of the interventions, that Parliament is able to give broad support to the accession of these two countries, Bulgaria and Romania.

Stop and think for a moment. If there had not been the prospect of accession for these two countries, where would they be today? Would they have developed in the way that they have? Would democracy have made the progress that it has done in these two countries? The prospect of accession, the prospect of becoming fully-fledged members of the European family, has acted as a powerful catalyst for the reform of these two countries.

Today, then, we should certainly not – as has been said – demoralise or discourage these two countries. That is why the road to accession should now be made tangible.

It is also true that there are areas requiring improvement and action. Some of you mentioned the very serious issue of corruption. We need to urge the governments of the two countries – of one of them in particular – to fight even more effectively against corruption. We should encourage, even oblige, these governments to put in place more independent and more effective judicial systems.

I am sure that the Commission will be more than an observer: it will take effective action; it will monitor developments in these countries; it will not take the easy option, as the Commissioner has plainly said.

Nevertheless, today we must send out an important political signal to Bulgaria and Romania. We must have a degree of confidence in these two countries, while showing them that the way ahead is clear. The commitments must be respected. Moreover, that is why the safeguard measures laid down for these two countries differ slightly from those that were provided for at the last enlargement, and the differences are not purely stylistic. These are practical measures that can be applied. And they will be applied all the more effectively if your Parliament monitors developments in the two countries, as I am sure it will.

I should like to comment on the doubts expressed in particular by Mr Hänsch about the Council's willingness to listen to Parliament. I think that you made an important point. Parliament has always been a valuable ally in enlargement processes and the Council wishes to keep this ally with a view to future enlargements. Everyone is fully aware of this, and it is not empty words when the Council says clearly that full account will be taken of Parliament's position if it expresses a view on the possible invoking of the safeguard measures. I therefore believe that you can be more reassured than you appear to be.

I have already commented on the financing. I believe that the Presidency has one regret: not to have resolved the issue of the joint declaration more satisfactorily. But I would also reiterate what I said before: be quite sure that Parliament's rights will remain intact, because they arise from the treaty, and Parliament's rights will also remain intact in the context of the interinstitutional agreement.

Rehn, Member of the Commission. Thank you for a very serious and substantive debate. You raised several concerns as to the two countries' ability to fight corruption and in general to live up to the commitments made in the field of the environment, reform of the judiciary system or the rights of minorities. I share these concerns. That is why it is so important to sustain a positive momentum, to encourage these countries to stick to their reform agendas to the full.

The Commission will closely monitor progress and keep the European Parliament properly informed. If the Commission should find it necessary to recommend invoking the safeguard clause we will, as I said in my introductory speech, seriously consider the views of Parliament before issuing any such recommendation, in line with the exchange of letters between Presidents Barroso and Borrell.

I should like to comment on the rights of minorities. In the case of Romania, there was reference to the situation of the Hungarian minority. We can note positive developments with regard to this issue, at the level of both the government and the citizens. The Hungarians became part of the governing coalition in 2004 and Prime Minister Tariceanu chose Budapest as his first destination for a state visit abroad. Moreover, since 2000, the Hungarians have gained significant rights in the administration, education and justice. In particular, it is provided by law that they have the right to express themselves in their mother tongue before the courts. Furthermore, in areas where the Hungarian population is above 20% – in more than 1 000 municipalities – the signs are bilingual.

The Hungarian minority also enjoys educational facilities: the private Hungarian university, Sapientia, has more than 1 400 students. We welcome this positive trend and will continue to monitor the improvements in this area in our comprehensive monitoring report this autumn.

Concerning the situation of the Roma, another issue related to the rights of minorities, both Bulgaria and Romania have started to implement the national strategy on the improvement of the situation of the Roma, as set out in the Union's PHARE Programme. Although the results are still limited, important progress has been made. In particular, the improved access to education and local projects for community development can be counted as successes.

The Roma Inclusion Decade was recently launched in Sofia, covering several current and future Member States and potential candidates. The Commission fully supports this important initiative. Moreover, we are following the situation of the Csango minority in Romania very closely.

Concerning the Kozloduy nuclear power plant, I wish to remind you that the need to ensure a high level of nuclear safety is a priority for the Union as a whole and its Member States. In this context, the need to close

down certain nuclear facilities was highlighted in the case of three countries: Lithuania, the Slovak Republic and Bulgaria. The framework negotiated with Bulgaria is clear and it involves firm and unambiguous respect for the commitments regarding closure on agreed dates. The issue is settled; the case is closed; the dates for closure will not be discussed again.

In conclusion, I gather that there is general support for giving assent to the signature of the Accession Treaty with the two countries, in line with the arrangement outlined in President Barroso's letter to President Borrell. In other words, the European Parliament is fully associated and the Commission is committing itself seriously to considering the views of the European Parliament.

Let me just say how I see the role of the European Parliament in regard to the postponement clause. I would call this an 'extended assent' vote, which is not legally binding because the Treaty does not allow that, but is certainly a weighty political statement once it has been made by the European Parliament. There are both quantitative and qualitative reasons for this. In the first place you have to vote more than 20 months before the accession takes place, which is exceptional. In the case of the EU-10, the period was around 12 months and in the case of the enlargement in 1995 it was roughly 6 or 7 months. That is very different from 20 months.

Secondly, numerous criteria, especially in the field of justice and home affairs, as well as competition, state aid and the environment, are included in the Accession Treaty itself. Therefore it is clearly important to monitor this process and ensure that it is democratic. This respects the spirit of the Treaty and European democracy, and it is very important that the European Parliament be fully involved in this decision.

We are on the eve of a historic decision. I am very glad that we have had sound and productive cooperation with the European Parliament. I trust this will be a good omen for future cooperation. Now the final outcome is in the hands of the Romanians and Bulgarians. I hope they succeed and we will support them so that they will be ready to become fully-fledged Member States by January 2007.

President. The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow at 12 noon.