

## **Summary of activities/achievements of the Division Europe during the legislative period 1999 - 2004.**

### **Background**

The Enlargement of the European Union to the countries of Central and Southern Europe was the principal theme of the 5th legislature of the European Parliament. It was the European Parliament which, in its Resolution on Enlargement of October 2001 proposed "that the EU Institutions, the Member States and the candidate countries with which negotiations have been started, do everything in their power to ensure that the EP can give its assent to the first accession treaties before the European Parliament elections in 2004. Following the Helsinki European Council's decision in 1999 to open negotiations with the remaining six candidate countries (1) and to grant a candidate status to Turkey, and, in the beginning of the Commission's term in September 1999, the new President of the European Commission Romano Prodi set the goal of the new Commission to complete the largest-ever enlargement in the history of the European Union before the end of his Commission's term of office in 2004. At the Copenhagen Summit of December 2002 ten of the twelve negotiating candidate countries completed accession negotiations with the EU. On 9th April the European Parliament gave its assent to the application for membership of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. These countries became Member States of the EU on 1 May 2004. Closely linked to the work on enlargement, the work on the future constitution of Europe became increasingly important in this legislature.

Following the EP's resolution of 5 June 2003 on the Stability Pact, the Thessaloniki Council in 2003 has made an important commitment to fully and effectively support the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries, which would become an integral part of the EU once they meet the established criteria. Following the Commission's Communication "Wider Europe-Neighbourhood: a New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours", the Thessaloniki Council also endorsed the commitment to develop closer ties and bridges of co-operation with the new neighbours and develop policies towards "Wider Europe, our New Neighbourhood". All these developments have greatly influenced the work of the Europe Division.

- (1) The negotiating countries after the Helsinki Summit decision were: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Malta, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia

#### **Areas of Activity of the Europe Division**

**Organisation of Joint Parliamentary Committees (JPC) with:** Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, EEA, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey. The Joint Parliamentary Committee Meetings with each partner delegation took place twice a year, in the country concerned and in the European Parliament respectively. Additional ad-hoc meetings and debates took place, such as the debate on the consequences of floods in 2002, debates on Roma integration, etc.

**Organisation of the Parliamentary Co-operation Committees (PCC) with** Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The Parliamentary Co-operation Committee meetings took generally place one a year alternatively in either European Parliament or in the respective country. In addition to that several Working group meetings and ad-hoc delegations were organised. *Election Observations* took place in Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and Russia.

**Organisation of Interparliamentary Meetings (IPM) with:** South-East Europe, comprising

interparliamentary relations with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia-Montenegro), and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Meetings took place generally once in a year alternatively in either European Parliament or in the respective country and several ad-hoc Delegations and election observation delegations went to the countries concerned. Further to that Inter-parliamentary Delegation meetings with SIN countries (Switzerland, Iceland, Norway) were organised. These meetings took place once a year.

**Organisation of the Meetings of the President of the European Parliament with the Presidents of the Parliaments of the Countries participating in the enlargement process (PPCC):**

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**A. The Joint Parliamentary Committees, Parliamentary Co-operation Committees and Interparliamentary Meetings/ Role, Aims and Achievements**

The European Parliament's network of interparliamentary exchanges is unique, giving the European Parliament an unusual role in international relations inside and outside the EU. The delegations system provides the institution with an effective tool for influencing not only third countries, but also the other institutions of the European Union itself. By offering the parliamentary bodies of countries around the world a focussed interlocutor at the heart of the European Union, the European Parliament has helped to heighten awareness of the EU's role and policies and provided a valuable partner particularly in relation to European countries not in the Union.

Members of the national parliaments of the non-member countries took part in various interparliamentary formations (Joint Parliamentary Committees, Parliamentary Co-operation Committees and Interparliamentary Delegations) with members of the European Parliament and met on a regular basis to debate and learn more about European issues and about the political, economic and social situation in each of the partner countries. These encounters gave both sides the opportunity to learn about each other's political priorities and concerns and to exchange views. The meetings also provided, in themselves, a test of how deep parliamentary democracy and pluralism have taken root. Throughout the process a number of controversial issues arose with each country. Interparliamentary meetings provide a framework within which these controversial issues can be aired. They can send messages to the governments, national parliaments, the Council, and the European Commission. This parliamentary dimension exists at various levels and both reflects and stimulates the necessary and inevitable debate amongst a wider public on the contents of the issues discussed. Since the meetings are open to the public, the parliamentary cooperation provides an element of transparency. By close involvement of the EU institutions such as the Commission, Presidency-in-Office, rapporteurs and draftsmen of opinions from EP committees, most notably the rapporteurs of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the issues debated, the opinions aired during the meetings and the final declarations and recommendations had a direct impact on the work of the institutions and bodies involved and have often been reflected in the reports and resolutions elaborated by those bodies.

The following description outlines the work of the Interparliamentary Delegations of the Division Europe under four headings: a. *Joint Parliamentary Committees* for countries

that have signed the Europe Agreements and the EEA agreement; b. *Parliamentary Co-operation Committees* and *Interparliamentary Delegations*, countries, which include countries of Western Balkans, countries within the concept of *Wider Europe*, some of which may aspire to become EU members some time in the future and Interparliamentary Delegation with SIN countries (Switzerland, Iceland, Norway). The fourth heading deals with the *Meetings of the President of the European Parliaments with the Presidents of the Countries participating in the Enlargement Process*.

### **1. The work of the Joint Parliamentary Committees: an important contribution to the process of enlargement**

The fifth enlargement has been an unprecedented transformation of the European Union on an unique political and historic scale, providing an opportunity to further the integration of the continent by peaceful means with the aim of creating an area of peace, freedom and prosperity. The European Union supported the new democracies that emerged in central and eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, by offering them the prospect of EU membership, a task that presented many substantial challenges for both the European Union and the acceding countries. Even though the European Parliament was not a party to the negotiations and its main official role was to give its assent before the Treaty was signed, it had been in its interest to ensure its participation from the beginning by its resolutions, reports, delegation meetings and other activities. In the European Parliament, it is the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which has been responsible for co-ordinating the work on enlargement and ensuring consistency between the positions adopted by the Parliament and the activities of its specialist committees, as well as those of the Joint Parliamentary Committees. *The Joint Parliamentary Committees*, the majority of which have been created in the nineties, played a role in establishing new relationships between the associated/candidate countries and the EU, particularly after the entry into force of the various Europe Agreements. Their role became vital once accession negotiations got under way. The JPCs, as foreseen in the relevant articles of the Association Agreements, are an integral part of a structured political dialogue between the EU and the countries that have signed such agreements.

#### ***1.a. The Joint Parliamentary Committees with the negotiating countries***

The JPC meetings took place twice a year in order to exercise parliamentary oversight of all aspects of bilateral relations and to examine in detail the progress in the accession preparations and negotiations. Joint Declarations and Recommendations, which reflect the progress achieved and the commitments for future work and which are addressed to the Parliament, the Governments, the Council and the Commission, concluded the JPC meetings. At the beginning of each JPC meeting these institutions were obliged to report on the developments in EU- candidate country relations. Since the beginning of formal negotiations it has become an established custom to invite in addition the respective Team Leaders from Commission's services and the chief negotiators from the candidate states. The active participation of the Commission and the Council in the work of the JPCs has been a confirmation of their usefulness as a framework for sending clear messages outside the diplomatic framework and into the heart of the candidate countries' political systems. In this way there has been a steady flow of information between institutions and the Council Presidency-in-Office. The Commission Delegations and the Member States representatives have actively contributed to the activities by preparing and organising briefing sessions in the countries concerned for visiting European Parliament delegations. The relevant country rapporteurs of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the draftsmen of opinions of the

specialist committees have attended the meetings and the discussions were taken into account in the reports of those bodies.

### ***The issues discussed***

Once the negotiations were launched with the candidate countries, the agendas of the JPC meetings reflected the process of the negotiations in a structured manner. The primary focus became the close monitoring of the negotiation process, the financial impact of enlargement, the area of JHA, regional co-operation, the PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD instruments and agriculture. The implementation of the acquis and monitoring of the commitments undertaken by the future Member States have been high on the agenda, as have the reforms of public administration and the judiciary. Integration of the Roma population was one aspect of the continuing discussions on human rights in some of the countries and so were the issues of combating corruption. In the JPCs with Bulgaria and the Lithuania, the planned closures of the unsafe Units of the nuclear power plants led to heated debates and the JPCs urged the Commission and the Council to find additional financial resources to help to alleviate the negative social consequences of the closures. Also discussed were the ways in which the candidate countries could be involved in the institutional and policy reform of the EU. Security in the South East European region and the roles of Bulgaria as well as Romania as stabilising factors in the Balkans remained an important issue, especially in the context of the crisis in Kosovo.

***Public Opinion:*** In order to engage opinion makers and the general public in the debate on EU membership and the future of the EU, new elements were introduced into the programme during this legislative period, such as debates with the general public, the representatives of interest groups, the European Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC), the non-governmental sector, media and academic circles. The issues of public opinion in support of membership and enlargement, free movement of labour, the future of Europe, the referenda on EU membership gained in importance during those debates. In the case of Lithuania, some EP Members participated actively in the pre-referendum campaign.

The work of the Joint Parliamentary Committees with the ten acceding countries drew to a close during 2003/beginning 2004 as their membership of the EU was approaching. In one case, Cyprus, a final JPC was held in March 2004 to review the progress in the search for a solution to the Cyprus problem.

### ***1.b. The Joint Parliamentary Committee meetings with Turkey***

The EU-Turkey JPC was established on the basis of the decision by the EEC-Turkey Association Council of 1965. At the end of 1999 the European Council meeting in Helsinki agreed that Turkey should be granted the status of candidate for EU membership. On 2 December 1999 the European Parliament also adopted a resolution recognising Turkey's eligibility for EU membership but insisting that she should abide by the same criteria for membership as all other candidates in terms of respect for human rights, democracy and the participation of civil society in the process of preparation for accession.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting followed closely the developments of EU-Turkey relations, looked closely at the Commission's 2001 Progress Report and the Parliament's Lamassoure Report. Critical views of Turkish MPs were heard. The MEPs welcomed the initiation of the process of constitutional reform in Turkey and urged Turkey to adopt as soon as possible a precise timetable for the fulfilment of the political criteria established in Copenhagen

and supported Turkey's right to be involved in the debate on the future of Europe. The meetings also considered the situation in Cyprus and the problems with regard to Turkey's concerns about the EU Security and Defence Policy. Whilst both sides expressed their views very strongly the common objective to advance Turkey's objective to EU membership was also emphasised.

During the visits in Turkey, the EP delegation has always taken the opportunity to meet with representatives of a wide spectrum of non-governmental organisations, ranging from representatives of the industrialists to human rights activists. Several *Ad hoc delegations* took place, such as the visit of the Sacharow Prize winner Leila Zana.

The new Government of Turkey invested great energy in trying to convince the European Council to decide on a date for the opening of accession negotiations. In December 2004 the European Council will have to take a decision on this matter.

### ***1.c. The EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee:***

The EEA JPC consists of parliamentarians from the EP and the EFTA countries participating in the EEA (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway). The main objective of the EEA Agreement is to boost the competitive position of the countries covered by the agreement by removing barriers to the four freedoms and thus to increase prosperity in the area. The task of the EEA JPC is to contribute, through dialogue and debate, to a better understanding between the Community and the EEA states in the fields covered by the EEA Agreement. The EEA JPC adopts resolutions, which are sent to EEA bodies. *Issues discussed* ranged from debates on the functioning of the EEA agreements, role of local and regional authorities in the EU and the EEA, enlargement, future of Europe and other topical issues.

## **2. Interparliamentary Delegations and Parliamentary Co-operation Committees**

The work of the Interparliamentary Delegations and Parliamentary Co-operation Committees was mainly focused on the development of the relations between the countries concerned and the European Union, the issues relating to justice and home affairs, the internal political and economic situation, relations with neighbours and the EU assistance programmes. The Delegations have also encouraged the further development of cross-border co-operation, including the fight against organised crime and illegal immigration, and regional co-operation with and among neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe.

### ***2.a. The European Parliament's delegation for relations with South-East Europe***

The European Union has included in its enlargement programme intensified co-operation with the countries of the *Western Balkans* "to promote their fullest possible integration into the political and economic mainstream of Europe, in view of the status of these countries as potential candidates for EU membership".

On 21 February 2003, Croatia submitted its formal application to join the European Union and would like to start negotiations by the end of 2004 with the aim of joining the EU at the same time as Bulgaria and Romania, probably in 2007. Croatia has already concluded a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU, as has Macedonia. Macedonia applied for EU membership on 22.03.2004. Albania is currently negotiating a SAA. Bosnia and Herzegovina have received a feasibility study from the European Commission, stating that negotiations on a SAA could be opened by the end of 2004, provided the country fulfils certain conditions. Serbia and Montenegro are not according to the Commission in a position to start the process. During the visits of the EP Delegation,

the Commission Delegation, the Presidency-in-Office and the Member States representatives have actively contributed to the activities by organising briefing sessions in each of the countries of South East Europe for visiting European Parliament delegations. The main emphasis of the work of the South East Europe Delegation was on the stabilisation of the region.

***The issues discussed:*** For all countries were common the following topics: developments in Stabilisation and Association process, reforms in the field of judiciary and public administration, regional co-operation, fight against organised crime and corruption, process of economic revival in Western Balkans, functioning of local institutions, democratisation and minorities, role of the international community in Western Balkans, etc. In Croatia the perspectives for EU accession were high on the agenda. Following the NATO action in Kosovo and launching of the Stability Pact in June 1999, the EP delegation visited several times Kosovo to examine, on the spot, the implementation of the EU reconstruction programmes. As a result of Parliament's activity, a considerable improvement in the EU's approach to aid management in Kosovo was noted. A number of *Ad hoc Delegations* and *election observations* took place in the region, in addition to the regular work of the South East Europe Delegation.

## **2.b. Interparliamentary Delegations and Parliamentary Co-operation Committees in the context of Wider Europe/Near neighbourhood initiatives**

With the fifth enlargement the EU will have borders with a number of new neighbouring countries and this gives an important opportunity to deepen relations with them. The experience with the process of preparing for membership gave a strong impetus to export the common European values beyond the territory of the EU with the objective of promoting democratic and economic reforms, sustainable development and trade, thus helping to ensure greater stability and prosperity at and beyond the new borders of the Union. The development of relations with the countries concerned will, of course, depend on their implementation of further reforms and their willingness to respect international commitments, common values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. In March 2003, the Commission published a Communication on 'Wider Europe - New Neighbourhood: A new Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours', which examines the possibilities for an enlarged EU to enhance its relations with its eastern and southern neighbours. Looking ahead, the European Parliament underlined long ago the need to avoid new dividing lines in Europe and to promote peace and stability beyond, as well as within, the new borders of the Union. In this context, it placed a great emphasis on *relations with, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, which should be seen in conjunction with the EU's strong commitment to deepening co-operation with the Russian Federation.

### ***2.b. Parliamentary Co-operation Committee with Russia***

The relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation reflected a more active and constructive policy approach from which both sides have drawn advantage. The Russian political representatives have agreed to intensify political dialogue with the EU institutions in the spirit of the provisions of the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement which came into effect in December 1997. Article 95 of this Agreement provides the legal basis for the work of the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee. The EU- Russia PCC comprises an equal number of deputies from the European parliament and the Duma and has specific rights and responsibilities, which are set out in the agreement - notably the right to receive information from and make recommendations to the Co-operation Council. Compared to the former interparliamentary meetings, its role and function has been

enhanced. The significance of the Parliamentary Co-operation Committee is fully recognised by the Russian authorities and co-operation between the European Parliament, the Russian Federal Assembly, the Cooperation Council and the Russian Government has become more structured and regular. Typically, visits by members of the European Parliament delegation to Moscow include meetings with Russian Parliamentarians, ministerial meetings and, in particular, the Foreign Minister responsible for relations with the EU, other meetings with prominent political personalities such as party leaders, and meetings with representatives of significant institutions such as the Central Bank. The European Parliament, for its part, regularly receives visits from the Russian government and other institutions, in addition to hosting the formal meetings of the Parliamentary Co-operation Committee. Contacts between the European Parliament and the Commission and Council are also close as far as EU - Russia relations are concerned. The Commission Delegation, the Presidency-in-Office and the Member States representatives in Moscow have actively contributed to the activities by organising briefing sessions in Moscow for visiting European Parliament delegations. *Issues discussed* included topics such as current political and economic developments in Russia, EU-Russia Summits, EU convention, enlargement and its impact on Russia trade policies, Kaliningrad, Kyoto protocol, the situation in Chechnya. In addition to the regular work of the EU-Russia PCCs, *several ad hoc delegations* travelled to Chechnya and *Working groups* held their meetings on specific sectoral issues either in Russia or in the European Parliament.

### ***2.c. Relations with Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus***

As with the other countries of the former Soviet Union, the EU negotiated Partnership and Co-operation Agreements with Ukraine Moldova and Belarus (the PCA with Belarus has never been initiated). These were designed to provide a clear framework for the development of political and economic co-operation and are based on the assumption that the countries concerned proceed with market reforms and enable their political institutions to function on the basis of democratic principles. Two main features influence the nature of the relationship between the European Union and the three countries for which this Delegation is responsible: their relationship with the Russian Federation and their frontier with the post-enlargement European Union. Although the three countries are neighbours, they are nevertheless very different in terms of their culture, their political priorities and their economies. Throughout the last legislature the European Parliament endeavoured to maintain a political dialogue with the parliaments of Ukraine and Moldova and with the democratic forces in Belarus. The delegation has also provided a focus for the expression of concerns about human rights abuses. Both Ukraine and Moldova have let it be widely known that they have ambitions of becoming members of the European Union. In addition to the regular Delegations' meetings, frequent *ad-hoc Delegation* visits took place.

#### ***Belarus***

Since the Partnership and Co-operation Agreements were originally negotiated in 1993/4, the underlying parameters of functioning of democratic institutions in Belarus failed to provide any comfort to the democratic political forces and therefore public confidence in democratic, progressive and reformist practices has been seriously undermined. The EU has not ratified the PCA with Belarus, it has therefore practically no formal relations with the EU. Consequently the Parliamentary Co-operation Committee (PCC) with Belarus - which provides a framework for parliamentary involvement in the Agreement - is not operational. Nevertheless the Delegation has sought to maintain engagement with the opposition and representatives of civil society.

### ***Ukraine***

Ukraine seeks to maintain close links with both Russia and the EU. The delegation addressed the following issues: Ukraine's special link with NATO; Ukraine's long frontiers with Poland and Slovakia, Hungary and Romania mean that such crossborder cooperation in an enlarged EU is an absolute necessity. The disastrous state of its energy sector since the Chernobyl catastrophe, although the problem is not limited to nuclear energy, continued to merit special attention. Other issues included the functioning of democracy and freedom of the media. The EP members of the delegation took part in an ***election observation*** mission in 2002.

### ***Moldova***

Moldova enjoys a special relationship with Romania. Nevertheless this fact makes it especially concerned about the implications of the EU enlargement. Moldova is still faced with the presence of Russian troops on its territory, stationed in the Transnistria region since civil war ended in 1992 and which has since enjoyed de facto independence.

### ***2.d. The Parliamentary and Co-operation Committees with South Caucasus***

The relations between the European Parliament and the parliaments of the republics of South-Caucasus are conducted within the framework of the Delegation for relations with the South Caucasian Republics: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The Partnership and Co-operation Agreements between the three states of South Caucasus and the European Union and its Member States entered into force on 1 July 1999. There are three, formally separate Parliamentary Co-operation Committees (PCCs), the main purpose of which has been to exert parliamentary control over the implementation of the agreements and to be an open forum for debate on questions of mutual interest. As with other delegations, the PCC has the right to receive information from the Co-operation Council and the Co-operation Committee (executive) and it can adopt recommendations to the Co-operation Committee. Several ***Ad hoc Delegations*** and ***election observation missions*** took place in the 1999 - 2004 legislative period to the South Caucasian Republics in addition to the regular PCC meetings.

- ***Armenia***

The debates in the Armenia-EU PCC stressed the importance of a functioning judicial system and economic development. It called for the closure of the Medzamor nuclear power station, although the Armenian side stressed that the plant would be closed down as soon as alternative reliable and secure sources of electrical power could be brought into service. Other issues addressed included the problem with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, the possibility of implementing the Rehabilitation Programmes, democratisation process, cross border cooperation.

- ***Azerbaijan***

The debates during the PCCs included topics such as EU- Azerbaijan relations in the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, political and economic developments in Azerbaijan, EU assistance programmes, human rights and the freedom of the media, energy corridors, cross-border cooperation, prospects of resolution of the conflict in and around Nagorno Karabakh.

- ***Georgia***

The debates during the PCCs included topics such as Georgia-EU relations, new neighbourhood policy, EU assistance to Georgia, trade issues, human rights and democratic development, internal conflicts in Georgia, energy corridors.

The EP Delegation travelled to Georgia to observe the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2003 and 2004. In 2003, the Delegation directly witnessed the Georgian "velvet revolution".

### **3. Interparliamentary Delegation with SIN countries (Switzerland, Iceland, Norway)**

The SIN delegation has been responsible for the relations to the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, meeting every second year. The delegation also has a permanent seat in the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, which is representing the Conference between the Conference sessions. The main task of these bodies has been to contribute to the Northern Dimension Action Plans and arctic issues. Furthermore the delegation has been responsible for the EP's relations to the Nordic Council.

*The issues discussed:* common to all three delegation were the following topics: enlargement of the EU, future of Europe, illegal immigration and trafficking, wider Europe, economic and trade issues. In Norway and Iceland the EEA agreements, the CSFP and ESDP, the Northern Dimension and the fisheries policies were of common interest. The IPM in Switzerland debated various trade issues and Switzerland's role in the UN and other international organisations.

### **4. Meetings of the President of the European Parliament with the Presidents of the Parliaments of the Countries participating in the Enlargement Process (PPCC Meetings)**

Following the meeting of the European Council in Essen in 1997 and the establishment of the Structured Dialogue between the EU and the Associated countries, Klaus Hänsch, President of the European Parliament, initiated a series of meetings with his counterparts from the Parliaments of the Associated countries. The meetings took place on a biannual basis in the capitals of one of the candidate countries or in Brussels. They included the Presidents of the Parliaments of all the 13 countries participating in the enlargement process. The main issues on the agenda of these meetings were closer co-operation between the European Parliament and the parliaments of the Associated countries, the reforms of the EU policies, developments in the enlargement process and the constitutional development of the EU. The 16th meeting took place on 4th February 2004 in Budapest. At this meeting the presidents of the Western-Balkan countries were present for the first time.