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9 March 1998 A4-0087/98

REPORT

on the Commission proposals for Council Decisions on the principles, priorities, intermediate objectives, and conditions contained in the accession partnerships with the applicant countries (COM(98)0053 - C4-0130/98)

Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy

Rapporteur:⁽¹⁾ Mr Arie Oostlander

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Mrs Magda Aelvoet, Mr Jörn Donner, Mr Otto von Habsburg, Mr Ernesto Caccavale, Mr Frode Kristoffersen, Mrs Magdalene Hoff, Mr Carlos Carnero González, Mr Pierre Bernard-Reymond, Mr Roberto Speciale, and Mr Jan Marinus Wiersma

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By letter of 4 February 1998 the Commission forwarded to Parliament the proposals for Council decisions on the principles, priorities, intermediate objectives, and conditions contained in the accession partnerships with the applicant countries.

At the sitting of 9 March 1998 the President of Parliament announced that he had referred this communication to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy as the committee responsible.

At its meeting of 2 March 1998, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy had appointed Mr Oostlander rapporteur.

At its meeting of 2 March 1998, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy had appointed Mrs Magda Aelvoet rapporteur for Bulgaria, Mr Jörn Donner rapporteur for Estonia, Mr Otto von Habsburg rapporteur for Hungary, Mr Caccavale rapporteur for Latvia, Mr Frode Kristoffersen rapporteur for Lithuania, Mrs Magdalene Hoff rapporteur for Poland, Mr Carlos Carnero González rapporteur for the Czech Republic, Mr Pierre Bernard-Reymond rapporteur for Romania, Mr Roberto Speciale rapporteur for Slovenia and Mr Jan Marinus Wiersma rapporteur for Slovakia.

The Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy considered the draft report at its meetings of 2 - 3 March and 9 March 1998.

At the last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Spencer, chairman; Carrère d'Encausse, second vice-chairman; Oostlander, rapporteur; Aelvoet, André-Léonard, Barros Moura (for Baron Crespo), Berès (for Candal), Bertens, Bianco, Brok (for Lenz), Burestam Linder, Caccavale, Carnero Gonzàles, Cars, Daskalaki, De Melo, Ferrer (for Fernandez-Albor), Frischenlager (for La Malfa), Galeote Quecedo, Graziani, Günther (for Stenzel), Habsburg, Hänsch, Hoff, Imbeni (for Colajanni), Izquierdo Rojo (for Mendiluce Pereiro), Kristoffersen, Lambraki (for Mutin), Lambrias, Maij-Weggen (for Cushnahan), Newens, Piha, Poettering, Rinsche, Roubatis, Salafrañca Sanchez-Neyra, Schroedter (for Gahrton), Souchet (for Striby), Spasak (for Väyrynen), Speciale, Swoboda (for Balfé), Tannert (for Occhetto), Tatarella, Theorin, Tindemans, Titley, Trakatellis (for Gomolka), Truscott, Verwaerde (for Bernard-Reymond) and Wiersma.

The report was tabled on 9 March 1998.

The deadline for tabling amendments is 5 p.m. on Tuesday, 10 March 1998.

A
MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

Resolution on the Commission proposals for Council Decisions on the principles, priorities, intermediate objectives, and conditions contained in the accession partnerships with the applicant countries (COM(98)0053 - C4-0130/98)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission proposals for Council Decisions on the principles, priorities, intermediate objectives and conditions contained in the accession partnerships with Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia (COM(98)0053 - C4-0130/98),
 - having regard to its resolution of 4 December 1997() on the Communication from the Commission 'Agenda 2000 - for a stronger and wider Union',
 - having regard to its report on the proposal for a Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) on assistance to the applicant countries in central and eastern Europe in the framework of the pre-accession strategy (A4-0081/98),
 - having regard to the report of its Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy (A4-0087/98),
- A. whereas the accession partnerships are a corner-stone of the pre-accession strategy to the extent that they will help the applicant countries to satisfy the political and economic conditions laid down by the Copenhagen European Council,
- B. whereas the assistance to be provided by the Union should be organized on a single footing for each country, since this will enable the financial resources available to be administered more efficiently,
- C. whereas priorities as concerns the political criteria in the short term are lacking for many of the countries, despite the fact that problems with human and civil rights persist in all the applicant countries, including the ones that are judged by the Commission to meet both the political and economic criteria in the medium term,
- D. whereas the partnerships cannot be fully implemented unless the partners respect democratic principles, the rule of law, human rights, and protection of minorities; and whereas a partnership would have to be suspended if the country concerned failed to continuously approach the fulfilment to observe any one of the above conditions,
- E. whereas, given the great political significance of the instruments in question, Parliament should be fully briefed on the manner of giving effect to the individual partnerships and

() on the Communication from the Commission 'Agenda 2000 - for a stronger and wider Union'. See Minutes of 4.12.1997 (Resolution A4-0368/97)

any measure seeking to alter them, including financial, economic, or budgetary control measures,

- F. aware of the necessity to exercise proper parliamentary control on the main aspects of the accession process, both by the European Parliament and by the parliaments of the candidate member states and underlining that the EU is expected to function as a model in this respect for the parliaments of the CEECs;
- G. whereas the accession partnerships appear to have been drawn up according to a general blueprint and consequently do not adequately match the circumstances and specific needs of the different countries,
- H. whereas a more decentralized management of structural funding and interventions will be necessary in order to tailor the level of investments to local and regional needs, to use structural measures more cost-effectively, more efficiently and with more sustainable results and to increase the absorptive capacity of the candidate States,
1. Regrets that the Commission and Council have refused formally to consult Parliament and hence, even though Parliament is the body that will be called upon to give its assent once the accession negotiations have been concluded, have debarred it from delivering a legislative opinion on the draft Decisions;
 2. Asks that, in future, before any decision entailing a possible change to the accession partnerships which affects the general principles, priorities and conditions, Parliament should be formally invited to give its opinion and should undertake to express its views within a period of six weeks;
 3. Fails to understand the Commission's choice of criteria regarding the separation of medium- and short-term objectives, since the reasoning underlying the distinction appears in some cases to be highly dubious;
 4. Regrets the fact that some of the points to which it drew attention in its resolution of 4 December 1997 are included among the objectives to be attained in the medium term, although the measures in question are a matter of high political priority and technically easy to implement (especially the measures relating to the rule of law and the workings of the democratic system, respect for the Constitution, the rights of the opposition and civil liberties, equal access to public services, the fight against corruption, police accountability, guarantees regarding the independence of the judiciary and the media), and asks the Commission to revise the various partnership agreements on this point in order to ensure that the applicant Member States make every effort to attain acceptable levels as regards their respect for the rule of law and democracy in the short-term;
 5. Calls for abolition of the death penalty to be inserted in the short-term objectives for all applicant countries concerned;
 6. Calls on the Commission to develop a strategy for human rights in each country and set clear targets, both short and medium-term, within the framework of its strategy;
 7. Regrets in addition that a great many points described in Parliament's above-mentioned resolution as essential or indeed a *sine qua non*, including for example more efficient public services, are not specifically mentioned in the accession partnerships;

8. Considers that to ensure compliance with the *acquis communautaire*, particular attention should be devoted to the workings of the legal system in the applicant countries, with particular regard to the revision of the civil and penal codes and the provision of new training courses for magistrates and barristers;
 9. Asks the Commission to introduce, where appropriate, as a short-term priority the creation of conditions to make the abolishment of visa requirements feasible;
 10. Asks the Commission that financial means will, where necessary, also be available for sectors which are of urgent interest to the people, as for instance public health care;
 11. Stresses the need for establishing efficient border management and control at external borders of the applicant countries;
 12. Underlines that the development and implementation of a fair policy regarding minorities should be a short-term as well as a medium-term objective;
 13. Calls for a new priority setting in the short term in the field of 'institution building' so as to strengthen regional and local authorities as well as to involve the population affected and the two sides of industry in the allocation of structural funding;
 14. Is aware of the great variety as to the economic conditions which characterise the applicant countries and calls upon the Commission to give proper attention to the comments from the Parliament;
 15. Points out that most of the projected measures will demand a very considerable legislative and administrative effort on the part of the applicant countries and the timetable laid down by the Commission will therefore be difficult to meet;
 16. Notes that, after 'Agenda 2000' was published, most of the applicant countries unveiled action plans setting out all of the measures to be taken to satisfy the Commission's observations; calls upon the Commission to take account of the reactions elicited from those countries in developing the accession partnerships;
 17. Takes the view that the accession partnerships should enhance cross-border cooperation in all sectors, especially with regard to the external frontiers of the Union, thereby demonstrating to public opinion the aims and benefits of enlargement;
- * * *
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, and the governments and parliaments of the Union Member States and the applicant countries.

B

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Bulgaria

Having regard to the proposals of the Commission for the Council decisions on accession partnership with regard to Bulgaria, we would like to make the following considerations:

- points out that short and medium term priorities are not well defined and tend to overlap each other;
- takes note as regards, in particular, the setting up of structures needed for regional and structural policy that Bulgaria has not yet adopted the National Programme for Regional Development which is basic to it and that this will cause a further delay;
- believes that as to energy a global strategic plan must be set up so as to phase out the Kozloduy nuclear power plant, with regard in particular to the first units, and provide alternative sources so that Bulgaria can satisfy its needs;
- calls on the Commission to provide figures as regards chapter 4 on 'Programming' so as to have a clear view of the current and next years;
- calls on the Council to delete Bulgaria from the Negative List concerning visa regulations and to apply to this country the same treatment as all the other applicant countries.

Estonia

The proposals made by the Commission cover globally the objectives and priorities, both on a short-term and a medium-term scale, the programming, the conditionality and the monitoring of the actions to be taken by the candidate country (Estonia) in this first stage of the 'Accession Partnership'. It should be pointed out, however, that these identified objectives for Estonia (par. 3) are elements that need to be mutually discussed and accepted by both parties, since we are dealing with a 'partnership'. Has this been done?

The proposals and objectives, divided into two groups, are confusing - the document is confused. There is a lack of clarity in the wording, first, within the groupings - e.g short-term political criteria - 'take measures to facilitate naturalisation procedures' (what an earth does that mean?) 'and to better integrate non-citizens including stateless children' (which implies that many non-citizens, amongst them stateless children, will not become citizens at all). There is also a lack of clarity between the groupings - e.g short-term political criteria mention 'non-Estonian speakers' while medium-term political criteria refer to 'Russian-speakers'. As another example, in the short-term we have 'naturalisation procedures' and in the medium-term 'naturalisation process'.

There are two major things that need to be reconsidered in the Commission's proposal: In its resolution 'Enlargement - Agenda 2000', (par. 93) Parliament spoke of 'extending citizenship to members of minority groups'. Therefore, the Commission should ask Estonia to set up, in the short-term, a sustainable strategy for integrating their Russophone non-citizen populations. Furthermore, non-Estonian speaking people find the language courses very expensive - the costs should be reduced. One would expect the Commission's proposal to suggest enhancing contacts between the two language groups, since fostering pride in Estonia as a nation requires a sense of identification. It is a question of finding a common identity, which is not helped by calling minorities 'aliens'. These abovementioned points all boil down to a proposal to change the Estonian Law of Citizenship.

Moreover, Estonia should increase the possibilities of training in foreign languages to prepare the candidate country for the huge demand for translators and interpreters in the future Union. By the way, this goes for all the candidate countries.

Parliament states in its resolution par.10 'that only a country which has abolished the death penalty can become a member of the European Union'. One would have expected this to be mentioned in the Commission's proposal! The Estonian Government is probably working on this, since they claim to abolish the death penalty by spring this year. There are still many prisoners on death row - why cannot they be given amnesty? This should be asked immediately of President Lennart Meri.

In its resolution on 'Enlargement - Agenda 2000', the Parliament spoke specifically of the economic inequalities between Tallinn and the rest of the country and the alarming trade imbalance (par. 94). One should expect there to be something mentioned about the economic-social inequalities in the Commission's proposal. How can the EU help?

The Parliament invites the Commission to reconsider its proposals and it claims its right to be fully involved in all aspects of the accession negotiations until Estonia's adhesion to the European Union.

Hungary

Notwithstanding the general remarks about the Accession Partnership arrangements and their bias as far as the EU is concerned, your rapporteur endorses the short and medium-term priorities specified in the accession partnership with Hungary.

It should be stressed that Hungary can be considered as a consolidated democracy and totally fulfils the political conditions for entry into the EU. Because of Hungary's exemplary policy towards minorities the reference in the Accession Partnership to the need for further efforts to integrate the Roma cannot be considered as appropriate.

As in the case of other countries, measures to combat crime and corruption should not only be a medium-term objective and greater attention should be devoted to them at the very beginning of the accession process.

Latvia

The proposal for a Council decision on a closer accession partnership with Latvia sets out a number of objectives to be achieved in accordance with different timescales. The Commission divides the proposed measures into two separate groups. The first group of measures is to be completed by the end of 1998 or shortly afterwards, so that the Council can be informed by the end of the year on the results obtained. The second group of measures is to be completed in a longer term with no specific deadline.

Your rapporteur shares the Commission's views with regard to the enormous progress achieved by Latvia in developing a market economy, forging ahead with privatization and consolidating democratic institutions, and to the basic objectives to be pursued under the partnership. However, Parliament does not consider that sufficient emphasis is placed on the important question of meeting the political criteria, which are a *sine qua non* for accession to the Union. The proposal should therefore be amended to ensure that respect for these criteria is given top priority in the accession process. One of the partnership's tasks must be to guarantee democracy in terms of effective operation of the public administration and the legal system, the protection of human and minority rights and, in particular, resolving the question of non-Latvian citizens. Indeed, respect for democratic principles and human rights is an essential principle in the construction of Europe. However, the Commission does not appear to recognize that this is the real and most pressing problem for Latvia to resolve. It is also of vital importance to set the objective, for the short to medium term, of ensuring the proper functioning of the public administration and the legal system - with regard, for instance, to the training of new judges, lawyers and civil servants and the drawing-up of new legal codes - as a precondition for future economic growth.

Your rapporteur would also criticize the Commission's decision to set deadlines within which solutions to the problems listed can and should be found. In this connection, the problem may arise of why certain objectives have been included in one group rather than another, or of the fact that it is impossible to anticipate how much time will be needed to settle questions of such complexity. In addition, little has been done to assess the scale of the demands made on the applicant country. On the question of dividing the objectives into two groups, it must be said that the absence of objective criteria for this decision limits the scope of the proposal. By way of example, with regard to the question of integrating non-Latvians, in the short term the tests and procedures for obtaining naturalization should be simplified, while in the medium term the conditions and measures for speeding up the process itself should be completely overhauled.

As far as the deadlines are concerned, it seems inconceivable that tangible results can be achieved by the end of 1998 or in the months immediately following, particularly as regards the complex problem of protecting human and minority rights. The Commission's attempt to set such an early deadline is therefore rather hazardous. It is also dangerous to subject a country such as Latvia to pressures of this kind at a time when it is slowly attempting to consolidate its institutional structures, bearing in mind also the Commission's view that the country is lagging behind other applicant countries such as Estonia. Attempts by the Union to accelerate these changes could be seen by the Latvian people as interference in their internal affairs.

The present analysis is deliberately brief, since the details of the actual content of the partnership are not available. It should also be stressed that Parliament must be fully involved in the implementation of this process and in any subsequent adjustments by means of appropriate legislative procedures. In particular, Parliament intends to monitor closely developments concerning civil rights and progress made as regards the situation of non-Latvian citizens.

In conclusion the European Parliament considers integration of non-nationals to be a key issue and a *sine qua non* for Latvia's accession to the Union and calls on the Commission to include a review of naturalization procedures among the short-term objectives.

Lithuania

The draft Council decision for each of the applicant countries recalls that the Accession Partnership is to be a new instrument, the key feature of the enhanced pre-accession strategy.

The only new element in the annex on Lithuania is a list of short-term and medium-term 'priorities and intermediate objectives' which 'have been identified for Lithuania'. Have these been 'identified' by both the Commission and the Government of Lithuania? We are speaking, after all, of a 'partnership'.

The lists seems to be relatively comprehensive, though it is not always clear on what basis certain elements figure under short-term rather than medium-term, and vice versa. We note that elements specifically mentioned in the Lithuania section of Parliament's resolution on Agenda 2000 (paras 99 and 100) have been taken up: reform and strengthening of public administration and concrete steps to combat corruption. That resolution also drew attention to the need for important measures to be taken in the application and enforcement of the rule of law. This is wide-ranging, of course, and the medium-term aims of 'improved operation of the judicial system' and 'reinforcement of justice and home affairs institutions' go some way to covering it.

Parliament spoke specifically of the need to improve 'the system of rules governing the labour market'. The implementation and enforcement of labour legislation had been criticized by the ICFTU, as unions had claimed that employers persistently broke the labour law and the government's labour inspectors were either unable or unwilling to enforce it. The section, under 'medium-term' on employment and social affairs, does not address this matter satisfactorily.

We are pleased to note that the question of the safety of the nuclear power plant Ignalina is addressed and that a decommissioning plan is to be drawn up this year. However, there is no mention of any follow-up to such a plan. What help will the EU be prepared to offer here? What help, indeed, will it be prepared to offer to its Lithuanian 'partner' in the achievement of the other identified objectives?

The European Council decided to maintain a distinction, as the Commission had wished, between 'fast-track' and 'slow-track' applicants. Parliament was basically against this - and the three rapporteurs on the Baltic States drew attention to the need not to proceed with negotiations in any way which could stifle the growing cooperation between them. Reading this Commission document, there seems to be little distinction between the fast five and the slow five other than the brief mention that the latter are eligible for support from the 'catch-up' facility and that the Commission Opinions had highlighted certain serious difficulties.

It is clear that the economic development of Lithuania has increased dramatically compared to the other applicant countries and that Lithuania has made a great effort to meet the requirements of the *acquis communautaire*. The preparation of an economic policy to achieve real convergence therefore should be a short-term priority of the accession partnership. We should not forget the potential importance of the cultural identity of the applicant countries during the negotiation process.

Poland

Notwithstanding the general remarks about the Accession Partnership arrangements and their bias as far as the EU is concerned, your rapporteur endorses the short and medium-term priorities specified in the Accession Partnership with Poland.

However, in the context of industrial restructuring, particular attention should be devoted not only to the steel sector but also to the mining sector with which it is linked.

It is important that the desired administrative reform aimed at reducing the number of 'voivodships' should be considered as a short-term priority, especially in order to make the distribution of PHARE resources and other financial aid easier and more transparent.

As in the case of other countries, measures to guarantee freedom of the press and equal opportunities for access to public services should not merely be a medium-term objective but must be introduced at the very beginning of the accession process, as must measures to combat crime and corruption. The recent criminal law and constitutional changes in this field are therefore to be welcomed.

Czech Republic

The recent severe political and institutional crisis suffered by the Czech Republic does not seem to have cast any doubts on Prague's decision to apply for membership of the European Union. The institutional unrest following the scandals involving the previous Centre-Right government and the tension surrounding the re-election of Vaclav Havel as President of the Republic, have of course taken up valuable time in the Czech Republic's preparations for accession to the European Union.

This must of course in mind when considering the section devoted to the Czech Republic in the Commission document on the Accession Partnership, because the semi-technocratic composition of the present government might well be an obstacle to progress in preparations for the Czech Republic's accession for many months to come. The decisions facing the present government are extremely political in nature (we need only mention, for example, privatization , customs cooperation and cooperation over border checks) and we can only hope that the pro-European outlook of almost all Czech politicians will be enough to push forward the short and medium-term reforms contained in the Commission document.

Basically, we can agree with the approach to the Czech Republic taken in that document which indicates the necessary reforms which the Czech Republic must carry out by the end of 1998 and states that these will be monitored. It is, however, incumbent upon the European Parliament to insist that the political criteria mentioned under the heading ' Medium-term ' must be fully incorporated in the reforms under the heading 'Short-term' required by the end of 1998. The Commission's approach to the reforms laid down as priorities is based very much on commercial and economic issues. In any case, the legislative task of transposing all the 'acquis communautaire' which the Czech Republic is facing is enormous, and we can only hope that the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis due to be laid down by the end of March will indicate specific measures and time-limits in this respect.

In particular, further work on the integration of the Roma and strengthening of the laws which guarantee press freedom must be included in the short-term priorities and produce results by the

end of 1998. Although the Czech Government had already announced specific measures on several occasions, especially in favour of the Roma, subsequently, for a variety of reasons, no action was taken. The European Parliament cannot accept this situation and must call on the Czech Republic to provide evidence of not only its economic and commercial but also its political support for the European Union. In this context these two areas (the Roma and the press) are a sort of litmus test to ascertain whether there is a genuine political will on the part of the government and parliament to achieve real progress in increasing the civil and political rights of all citizens of the Czech Republic.

In conclusion:

- a. Calls on the Commission to ensure that work on integration of the Romani minority and the drafting and implementation of laws guaranteeing press freedom both become short-term rather than medium-term priorities;
- b. Considers that it may be desirable also for the improvement of the operation of the legal system to take place in the short term, as in most other applicant countries, rather than in the medium term.

Romania

The accession partnership with Romania proposed by the Commission consists of a set of short-term (1998) and medium-term priorities and objectives intended to create the necessary conditions for the subsequent opening of accession negotiations between Romania and the EU. In parallel, the Commission calls on Romania to adopt, by the end of March 1998, a national programme for the incorporation of the *acquis communautaire*, with a view to initiating the enlargement process to begin on 30 March 1998. The Commission also calls on Romania to satisfy, in 1998, a certain number of priorities, of which account will be taken in the report to be submitted by the Commission to the European Council at the end of the year.

The priorities set by the Commission for the **short term (1998)** concern *economic reform*, the *reinforcement of institutional and administrative capacity*, the *internal market* and the *environment*. For the **medium term**, those fields are to be supplemented by *political criteria*, *economic policy*, *internal affairs and justice*, *agriculture*, *transport*, *employment*, *social affairs* and *regional and cohesion policy*.

To implement this programme, Romania will continue to benefit from PHARE (with an allocation of ECU 284 bn for 1995-1997), and from the catch-up facility. From 2000, financial assistance will include aids to agriculture and a financial instrument similar to the Cohesion Fund. It would also be desirable for financial assistance to be targeted on sectors not covered by the *acquis communautaire*, such as certain aspects of public health (e.g. hospital renovation). Community aid will be conditional on respect by Romania of its commitments under the Europe Agreement and the Copenhagen criteria. The implementation of the accession partnership will be monitored in the framework of the Europe Agreement. The accession partnership may be modified if necessary, and will be the subject of an assessment in 1999.

Conclusions

The accession partnership with Romania reflects the concerns expressed by the Commission in its opinion on Romania's request for membership, as well as those set out by Parliament in its resolution on Agenda 2000. The measures proposed are most certainly necessary, but it would have been preferable to undertake a prior detailed consultation on the partnership with the applicant country. Romania will quite absolutely have to act on the objectives set out if the partnership is to be more than a catalogue of pious wishes. What was needed was for the partnership to represent a genuine commitment by the Romanian authorities to carrying out the economic, administrative and political reforms which are necessary for accession, with a timetable, and for the EU, on its side, to have clearly set out what financial and technical aid could be provided by it for the implementation of such a programme.

The European Parliament therefore:

- a. Urges Romania not to slacken its efforts to implement its economic and political reforms so as to create the conditions to enable accession negotiations with the Union to open in due course;
- b. Hopes that the funds to be allocated to Romania under the enhanced pre-accession strategy can also be channelled into areas not necessarily falling under the *acquis communautaire*, including public health (hospital modernization, for example), so that the public will immediately realize that the moves to join the Union can benefit a sector in which needs are especially pressing.

Slovenia

The proposal for a decision: the Commission, in setting out the principles, priorities, intermediate objectives and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership for Slovenia, has largely complied with Parliament's position set out in its resolution on Agenda 2000. On that occasion Parliament recognized that Slovenia fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria in maintaining the stability and democratic character of its institutions and an open economic system. The Slovenian Government for its part has already included the reforms suggested by the Commission in its overall accession strategy. It is to be hoped that the Slovenian Parliament will give it its full support. It is clear, however, that this strategy will require a considerable effort of Slovenia, which will only be crowned with success if the Union reciprocates with understanding and cooperation. Although the Commission text is too brief to be examined in detail, it nevertheless calls for a number of comments:

(i) an imprecise agenda: Parliament takes the view that the division of the Partnership into the short and medium term is likely to cause problems because of its arbitrary, ill-defined nature. The short-term programme, which is limited to the current year, is far too ambitious and takes no account of local reality. This is particularly true in the case of economic reform, where some sectors (banking, finance) need a more gradual approach in order to retain the markets developed to date and incorporate them in wider European networks.

The description 'medium-term' is too vague to allow an effective action plan to be drawn up. For example, in requiring a rapid increase in institutional and administrative capacity, the Commission has overlooked the fact that the Slovenian machinery of state is relatively small and that its reinforcement will thus require a lengthy and considerable educational process. In the

case of reform of the judicial system, the Commission proposal does not seem to take account of the fact that Slovenia is still operating within two parallel systems, one of which was inherited from the former Yugoslav federation and continues to be the essential basis of transactions with South-Eastern Europe.

Finally, the Commission's intention of leaving the applicant countries free to develop partnerships without giving them a timetable of accessions, far from helping Slovenia, narrows its margin of manoeuvre in choosing the most suitable pre-accession strategies.

(ii) insufficient guarantees of funding: the cost of the projected reforms in Slovenia will be extremely high. In order that this cost should not become a political issue, Slovenia not only needs firmer guarantees of structural aid, but also the assurance that this aid will be granted in a way that keeps pace with the absorption capacity of each sector of the economy.

(iii) the needs for parliamentary controls: Parliament calls on the Commission to make good these shortcomings and reserves the right to monitor the progress of the Partnership with Slovenia at regular intervals until such time as it accedes to the European Union.

In conclusion the European Parliament:

- a. Considers that the Commission proposal fails to lay sufficient emphasis on the efforts which Slovenia must make to approximate laws in the transport sector and improve infrastructure, not least with a view to extending the trans-European networks;
- b. Calls on the Slovenian authorities to ensure that the introduction of VAT can take place very shortly.

Slovakia

The Commission's proposal for an accession partnership with Slovakia contains a set of short-term (1998) and medium-term priorities and objectives intended to help the country prepare for accession to the European Union on the basis of the observations contained in the Commission's opinion on the country's application for membership. With the enlargement process due to begin on 30 March 1998 the Commission has asked Slovakia to adopt a National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis before that date and to achieve a number of priorities in 1998 which will be taken into account in the report to be submitted by the Commission to the European Council by the end of the year.

The **short-term (1998)** priorities laid down by the Commission relate to *political criteria* (free and fair presidential, national and local elections, effective participation by the opposition in supervisory committees and the adoption of legislation concerning minority languages), *economic reform, the strengthening of institutional and administrative capacity, the internal market and the environment*. The **medium-term** priorities include, in addition to the above, *justice and home affairs, agriculture, energy, transport, and employment and social affairs*.

So as to be able to implement this programme, Slovakia will continue to be eligible for the Phare programme (from which it received ECU 95 million for the 1995-97 period) and it will also be able to use the catch-up facility. With effect from the year 2000 the financial assistance will include agriculture aid and a financial instrument similar to the Cohesion Fund. Community aid will be conditional upon Slovakia's honouring the commitments it made under the Europe

Agreement and its fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria. Implementation of the accession partnership will be monitored under the Europe Agreement. The partnership may be amended as necessary and will be reviewed in 1999.

Conclusions

The accession partnership with Slovakia is a response to the priorities identified by the Commission in its opinion on Slovakia's application for accession and the concerns expressed by Parliament in its resolution on Agenda 2000.

Although we may subscribe to the above-mentioned priorities and objectives (in particular the one concerning free and fair presidential, national and local elections, which is a minimum requirement for a country applying for membership), we may question the method adopted for achieving them, which is not based on the spirit of a true partnership.

Be that as it may, the emphasis is rightly placed on political criteria: by means of the Phare programme for democracy the Commission must encourage the development of civil society, the spread of a democratic culture and the promotion of free and independent media in Slovakia. As regards the economic objectives, these should be striven for in accordance with a precise timetable laid down by the Slovak authorities, whilst the European Union should specify the financial and technical assistance it could provide to help secure those objectives. Particular attention should be devoted to the banking sector so as to ensure that economic reform is properly launched. Parliament has already expressed its concerns regarding the law on business revitalization.

Advantage must be taken of the application of the measures envisaged in order to create a proper partnership between the European Union and Slovakia, so as to ensure that the latter does not feel excluded. Slovakia should also do all in its power to ensure that political criteria cease to be an obstacle to the opening of accession negotiations; this involves making sure that the elections to be held in 1998 are free and fair and that the functioning of the country's institutions is not marred by practices which fall short of what one is entitled to expect from an applicant country.