

**European Union**

**COMMITTEE**

**OF THE**

**REGIONS**

Brussels, 8 December 2003

**RESOLUTION**

**OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**ON ENLARGEMENT**

*The Committee of the Regions,*

HAVING REGARD TO the Comprehensive Monitoring Report of the European Commission on the State of Preparedness for EU membership of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia (adopted by the European Commission on 5 November 2003);

HAVING REGARD TO the document entitled Continuing Enlargement – Strategy Paper and Report of the European Commission, on the progress towards accession by Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey (adopted by the European Commission on 05 November 2003);

HAVING REGARD TO the Treaty of Accession signed on 16 April 2003 by ten candidate countries, and its subsequent ratification;

HAVING REGARD TO the application for membership of the EU by Croatia;

HAVING REGARD TO its opinion 325/2002 on the document entitled *Towards the enlarged Union - Strategy Paper and Report of the European Commission on the progress towards accession by each of the candidate countries [COM(2002) 700] and the Report from the Commission to the Council: Explaining Europe's Enlargement [COM(2002) 281final- CdR 325/2002 fin<sup>1</sup>]*

*adopted the following resolution by a majority vote at its plenary session on 20.11.2003:*

#### **I. ON THE TEN ACCESSION COUNTRIES:**

1) **Welcomes** the Commission report and the conclusion that, “*on the whole, the acceding countries are expected to be ready for accession in the very large majority of areas*”;

2) **Congratulates** the accession countries and the candidate countries on the substantial progress achieved;

3) **Notes** however that much remains to be done, and there is reason for serious concern in some areas; **encourages** the acceding states to step up their efforts to comply as much as possible with the Community *acquis* at the moment of accession, so as to be able to enjoy the full benefits of EU membership from the moment of accession;

4) **Notes** particularly the need for enhanced efforts to implement the Structural and Cohesion funds, considering that actions will be eligible for EU funding as from 1 January 2004;

5) **Points out** that many of the measures called for by the Commission, require active input from local and regional authorities: eliminating corruption, strengthening administrative capacity, arrangements for the processing of EU funds, public procurement rules, internal market, and so on;

6) **Is of the opinion** therefore, that local and regional authorities must be specifically included in the support measures and the Transition Facility; **recommends** furthermore, that local and regional authorities be consulted by the Commission and by their respective governments;

#### **II. ON BULGARIA, ROMANIA, TURKEY AND CROATIA**

7) **Believes the progress made by Bulgaria and Romania** has to be evaluated individually. One country should not be dependent on the progress of another country;

8) **Takes note of** the progress made in Turkey, at the same time as it demands more progress, particularly in the field of human rights. Welcomes the Commission in its conclusions that failure to solve the Cyprus problem might become an obstacle to Turkey's membership of the EU;

9) **Welcomes** the application for membership from Croatia. Strongly believes that the enlargement to EU-25 is not the final shape of the European Union;

10) **Urges** the Commission and the governments of Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Croatia and possible future candidate countries, to closely involve local and regional authorities and their associations from the outset, with a view to successful and rapid preparation for accession;

11) **Welcomes** the creation of a joint consultative committee of the CoR with Bulgaria as a useful instrument for assisting local and regional authorities to prepare for accession; **encourages** the government of Romania to request the creation of such a committee;

### III. GENERAL:

12) **Reiterates** the importance of democratic legitimacy of local and regional government, through direct elections; **supports** any reforms to this effect;

13) **Stresses** the key role of local and regional authorities in the implementation of EU policies, and hence for the preparation for accession; **considers** therefore unfortunate, the near absence of any reference to local and regional government in the reports; **calls** on the Commission to include local and regional authorities more explicitly in its monitoring;

14) **Points out** the importance of capacity building at all levels of government and in particular at local and regional government levels;

15) **Proposes** that the CoR organise a hearing on this subject, in the presence of observers and guests from Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia, and requests its RELEX commission to make the necessary arrangements.

Brussels, 20 November 2003.

The President  
of the  
Committee of the Regions

The acting Secretary-General  
of the  
Committee of the Regions

**Albert Bore**

**Gerhard Stahl**

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 128 of 29.5.2003, p. 56

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