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Van Orden, the European Parliament's Rapporteur on Bulgaria, on Commission's Progress Report: Reforms in Bulgaria and Romania must continue with determination

Let me again thank the Commissioner for the serious way in which Bulgaria's progress towards accession is being monitored.

According to the Accession Treaty, Bulgaria will accede on 1 January 2007 unless Council unanimously decides, on a Commission recommendation, to postpone for one year. The Commission has made no such recommendation. Let us be clear on this.

Bulgaria fulfils the political criteria for membership.

She has a functioning market economy. Economic progress has been maintained - the Bulgarian unemployment rate, while still high, is now lower than that of Germany.

In relation to other matters, I note that the 16 areas that had been marked as of "serious concern" in October have now been reduced to 6. These must not, in any way, be underestimated.

Firstly, there is the need for more effective action against organised crime, fraud and corruption. This is the area which most perturbs the people of Bulgaria as well as our own citizens.

There has been progress since October. I spoke about this in Plenary last month. But most of the crime bosses are still at large and there is concern about how far their tentacles spread. Over the coming months we need to see dramatic results as well as further steps to improve the effectiveness and resources of the police, investigative and judicial services. The Commission must specify more precisely what outcomes are required.

Secondly - not unrelated to the first - is the need for strengthened financial controls for the future use of structural funds. This is vitally important. There must not be any possibility of what is effectively our taxpayers' money going into the wrong hands or being wasted. As we have seen from the consistent refusal of the Court of Auditors to sign off the EU accounts, it is an area where the EU itself still needs to put its house in order.

It is up to the Commission to ensure that effective financial management structures to guarantee the integrity of the funding system are in place and, if necessary, to withhold funding until that is the case. I believe the European Council, at its Summit in June 2006 should endorse the decision for the accession of Bulgaria on 1 January 2007, at the same time confirming the remedial action that is required by Bulgaria in the months ahead, and the modalities of possible post-accession monitoring measures. In other words, YES.....BUT. To some extent, I think that is what the Commission is trying to say. For its part, the Government of Bulgaria must take urgent action to deliver tangible results, particularly in the fight against organised crime. Much has been achieved in the past six months. Let's see even better results in the next 6 months.

Socialist Government fails to guarantee Bulgarian EU entry on 1 January 2007 Strasbourg, 17.05.2007

The EPP-ED Bulgarian Observers in the European Parliament have blamed the Socialist-Liberal Government for its incapacity to guarantee 1 January 2007 as the actual entry date of Bulgaria to the EU. They called the European Commission's report on Bulgaria objective and agreed on all areas of serious concerns it points out. According to Geoffrey Van Orden MEP, the European Parliament's Rapporteur on Bulgaria, the most pressing issue is to see effective action against organised crime, fraud and corruption. This is the area which most perturbs the people of Bulgaria.

Dimitar Abadjiev considers the 2007 date as a possible but not feasible date for accession due to the government's lack of political will and capacity to carry out the reforms.

Martin Dimitrov sees the report rather as a warning than a reward to the Bulgarian Government for a possible postponement of Bulgarian accession to 2008, in the case that it does not convince the Commission of proper management and control of EU funds.

Addressing the Chamber, Geoffrey Van Orden MEP stressed: "There must not be any possibility of what is effectively our taxpayers' money going into the wrong hands or being wasted. The Socialist Government has failed to ensure the proper use of the structural and cohesion funds which are in the direct interest of all Bulgarian citizens to fully benefit from the EU funds."

At a press conference with EPP-ED Group Chairman Hans Gert Poettering, Maria Cappone reconfirmed that the opposition in Bulgaria, together with the EPP-ED Group, stands for accession of Bulgaria to the EU on 1 January 2007. "Unfortunately, Bulgarian people now have to wait until October to know the exact date of the country's accession", said Cappone. "All kinds of pressure and monitoring on the ruling three- party coalition did not pay off. Brussels expected a transparent judicial system eradicating money laundering, which is linked to terrorist activities and might be a threat for the security in Europe. " Cappone also announced the visit of the EPP-ED Group to Sofia on 8 and 9 of June which will monitor the work of the relevant ministers.

The EPP-ED Bulgarian Observers will demand urgent reactions from the Socialist Government to the Commission's critics starting with the resignation of the responsible Ministers.

EPP-ED Group Chairman Hans Gert Poettering, on Commission's Progress Report: Reforms in Bulgaria and Romania must continue with determination Strasbourg, 16 May 2006

"The reform process in Bulgaria and Romania must continue with determination in order to fulfil the membership criteria by autumn and to reach a decision on accession by 1 January 2007," said Hans-Gert Poettering, Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament, during a debate with the European Commission on its Progress Report for Bulgaria and Romania. The Commission's proposals are a step in the right direction.

Poettering appreciated the enormous achievement accomplished by the two countries after 45 years of Communist mismanagement in order to build a functioning society based on the rule of law, democracy and freedom: "We do not wish to lecture, but together we want to bring the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to a successful conclusion," said Poettering.

Now is not the time to question dates already set, but to encourage the countries to implement the necessary reforms in a way to make sure that a decision can be made this autumn on the accession of Romania and Bulgaria by 1 January 2007.

Poettering launched an appeal to also make clear in the Member States of the European Union that the implementation of the rule of law and democracy in countries that have been subject to communist rule for so many years was an impressive success story.

The Constitutional Treaty, which is supported by a large majority of the European Parliaments, provides with its common rules and the definition of common values an important base for the future of Europe. Poettering criticized the absence of the Council of Ministers during this important debate with the European Commission. He thus called not only on the Council Presidency but also on the Secretariat of the Council to make sure the presence of the Council during future important debates taking place in the European Parliament.