

European Parliament resolution on Slovakia's application for membership of the European Union and the state of negotiations (5 September 2001)

Caption: On 5 September 2001, the European Parliament adopts a resolution on the Slovak Republic's application for accession to the European Union and on the state of negotiations.

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European Parliament resolution on Slovakia's application for membership of the European Union and the state of negotiations

(COM(2000) 711 - C5-0611/2000 - 1997/2173(COS))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Slovakia's application for membership of the European Union submitted on 27 June 1995, pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union,
 - having regard to the 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on Slovakia's progress towards accession (COM(2000) 711 - C5-0611/2000),
 - having regard to the Enlargement Strategy Paper on progress towards accession by each of the candidate countries presented by the Commission (COM(2000) 700),
 - having regard to the decisions taken by the European Council, notably at Copenhagen (21 and 22 June 1993), Helsinki (10 and 11 December 1999), Nice (7-9 December 2000) and Gothenburg (15 and 16 June 2001),
 - having regard to the Accession Partnership for Slovakia concluded in 1999,
 - having regard to its resolution of 4 October 2000 on Slovakia's membership application to the European Union and the state of negotiations⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 31 May 2001 on the Treaty of Nice and the future of the European Union (2001/2022(INI))⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy and the opinions of the other committees concerned (A5-0256/2001),
- A. whereas Slovakia has made significant progress in restructuring its industrial and financial sectors and thus in adapting its economy to meet the requirements of membership of the Single Market;
- B. whereas Slovakia has made some progress in reforming its public administration;

Political criteria

1. Notes that Slovakia continues to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria;
2. Encourages the Slovak government to progress in developing national approaches to the problem of minorities, however notes a gap between policy formulation and its practical implementation at the local level; calls particularly on all levels of government to implement policies aimed at improving the living conditions of the Roma, to stop various kinds of discrimination and to increase their representation in higher education;
3. Welcomes the Slovakian Government's intention to introduce university-level studies for members of the Hungarian minority in their mother tongue and thereby at least partly reduce the current need to go abroad to study; encourages the Slovak Government not to allow this intention to be undermined by reference to the autonomy of existing higher educational institutions but to implement its preferred policy in an appropriate form;
4. Regrets that it was not possible to reach a compromise over the rearrangement of administrative districts

which was also acceptable to the representatives of the Hungarian minority;

5. Recognises that the Roma issue is culturally, socially, politically and economically complex and involves a number of countries in the region; calls, to this end, for a stronger commitment by the European Union;
6. Points out that Slovakia is a country of origin and transit for widespread trafficking of women although the number of cases detected by the authorities is low; is also alarmed at the report of the UN special envoy which identifies Slovakia as a transit country for the trafficking of children for pornography, prostitution and sex tourism; urges the Slovak Government to take forceful measures to combat human trafficking and to ensure that victims and witnesses are guaranteed protection, healthcare, and legal and psychological assistance;
7. Recognises that the government coalition has reached agreement on key reforms, such as the amendment of the Constitution, the civil service law and, in particular, the public administration reform, which is a short-term priority under the Accession Partnership;
8. Notes that the constitutional reform is a major success for the governmental coalition in that it enables the country to push through further legislative and administrative reforms necessary in preparation for membership;
9. Encourages the government to continue the social dialogue with all social partners and civil society in order to gather support for the measures which necessarily entail significant transitional costs in terms of unemployment;
10. Supports the government in its efforts to increase the attractiveness of Slovakia for foreign direct investment in order to create jobs especially in disadvantaged regions;

Economic criteria

11. Congratulates the Slovak government on its determined action to improve macroeconomic stability by reducing budgetary and external deficits, to stabilise the economy and to improve the business environment;
12. Appreciates that wide-ranging structural reforms have been made including a new bankruptcy law and the debt-restructuring and privatisation of state-owned banks;
13. Welcomes the fact that Slovakia can now be regarded as a functioning market economy, as confirmed by Slovakia's accession to the OECD; confirms that Slovakia should be able to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union in the medium term, provided that the structural reform agenda is fully implemented;
14. Encourages the Slovak government therefore to continue to focus policy on macroeconomic stabilisation and structural reforms; calls on the coalition partners to continue implementing their ambitious programme of economic reform despite political differences and, in particular, supports them in the endeavour to keep the budgetary deficit for 2001 under control despite the temporary negative effects of the corporate income tax reduction;
15. Congratulates Slovakia on having abolished the import surcharge in line with its commitments;

Acquis criteria

16. Welcomes the progress made in the area of the Internal market, but notes that Slovakia still has certain weaknesses in important areas such as financial control, agriculture, environment and justice and home affairs; welcomes the fact that Slovakia has taken steps to address these weaknesses by significantly strengthening its staff in the ministries responsible;

17. Encourages the Slovak government to maintain the momentum of reform in all legislative areas and to press ahead with the adoption of the draft legislation for Public Internal Financial Control as a matter of urgency in order to open accession negotiations on this chapter of the Community acquis;
18. Calls on Slovakia to speed up its alignment with the acquis in the area of agriculture in particular as regards implementation capacities in the veterinary and phytosanitary field;
19. Stresses that, since Parliament's last strategy paper on enlargement, no particular progress has been made on quality policy, and that Slovakia's preparations for setting up an integrated information network for farm accounts have not progressed;
20. Welcomes the substantial progress made in transposing veterinary and phytosanitary legislation, though also notes some shortcomings; highlights as a positive feature, however, the fact that Slovak legislation on organic farming is modelled on EU rules;
21. Recommends that Slovakia continue to endeavour to implement environmental protection measures in the area of rural development and forestry;
22. Acknowledges Slovak efforts in the agricultural sector to implement the SAPARD programme and welcomes the signing of the financing agreements; hopes also that the payment agencies can be established as soon as possible; recommends, in addition, that Slovakia improve overall administrative efficiency; stresses the importance of integrated rural development for the enlargement process; notes with concern, however, with regard to possible assistance measures, the rural population's lack of information and growing dissatisfaction; calls on the Commission to ensure under the SAPARD programme, and other pre-accession aid arrangements, that there is a considerable improvement in the information provided to the rural population on rural development plans and in its involvement in them;
23. Welcomes the conclusion of the agreements on the further liberalisation of agricultural trade and the double-zero approach contained therein, which provides for the mutual abolition of export refunds and the reduction of customs duties in connection with import tariff quotas; points out that, as a result, Slovakia has made perceptible progress on preparing for an internal market;
24. Notes that negotiations with Slovakia on the environment chapter have only just been opened, but that proper justification of the requests for transition periods is now necessary; calls for any transition periods for full compliance with the acquis to be kept to a minimum, and for establishment of intermediate targets; calls further for careful monitoring of progress in meeting these targets, for the establishment of a practical programme of implementing measures and for details of the financing arrangements that are envisaged;
25. Encourages Slovakia to speed up transposal of legislation in the area of environment, particularly in the fields water, waste, nature protection and industrial pollution and to develop financial strategies to ensure the full implementation of the acquis as soon as possible; reminds Slovakia that the European Parliament places a high premium on fulfilment of the acquis in this area, as confirmed in its resolution on enlargement of 4 October 2000;
26. Encourages the participation of Slovakia in the Community's new health action programme, launched in 2000;
27. Notes that Slovakia has made progress in combating crime and corruption by formulating targeted government policy, but increased efforts are needed in particular with regard to the lack of transparency on financing of political parties; welcomes increased international cooperation;
28. Calls on Slovakia to translate its intentions into specific actions speedily in order to improve Slovakia's otherwise insufficient record in this respect;
29. Welcomes Slovakia's swift response to allegations that a high-ranking official in the Prime Minister's

private office dealing with EU funds is involved in corruption;

30. Expects that all Slovak authorities will continue to give their full assistance to the EU's Organisation for the fight against fraud (OLAF) which has been quick in sending investigators to Bratislava;
31. Calls for the OLAF report concerning the suspicion of misappropriation of Community funds (PHARE and ISPA) to be forwarded to it as soon as possible, and calls on the Slovak authorities to cooperate as fully as possible with OLAF in the conduct of the investigation;
32. Expects to receive as soon as possible an assessment by the Commission and the Slovak government of any damage to the EU budget and measures taken to remedy the situation;
33. Calls urgently on Slovakia to facilitate on-the-spot European Union controls;
34. Notes that, despite the progress made by Slovakia through new legislation on internal financial control, weaknesses persist and efforts must be made to develop the role of internal audit in government payment centres;
35. Insists that Slovakia develop means of combating corruption in the public service by setting up an anti-fraud unit cooperating with European Union bodies;
36. Calls on Slovakia to accelerate the preparations for the closing down and decommissioning of reactors 1 and 2 at the Bohunice V1 nuclear power station and to actively pursue the upgrading plan for Bohunice V2 and the remaining upgrading safety measures scheduled for Mochovce units 1 and 2;
37. Welcomes the conclusion of the negotiations on reciprocal concessions for agricultural products; calls on the Member States to speed up the process of concluding a corresponding Additional Protocol to the Europe Agreement⁽³⁾;
38. Calls on Slovakia to put into place mechanisms necessary to link effectively to the Community's Rapid Alert System, both in terms of alerting the European Food Safety Authority of any serious perceived or identified risk and in terms of action to be taken by the RAS as a result of an EFSA warning;
39. Welcomes the fact that the Slovak Republic has started negotiations on a Protocol for European Conformity Assessment;
40. Stresses that, after the successful adoption of amendments to the Constitution, Slovakia now needs to quickly implement the public administration and civil service reform;
41. Asks Slovakia to ensure that when state aid is considered such measures comply with the relevant EC competition rules, as required under the Europe Agreement;
42. Asks the Slovak Government to intensify its efforts in the preparation for structural funds, to pay particular attention to the legal framework, coordination amongst ministries and decision making in the lead-ministry, to a clear separation of administrative and political functions and to the management capacity and partnership with regional and local partners, social partners, NGOs, SMEs and the business community;
43. Calls on the Slovak government to present to the Commission a draft law bringing legislation into line with the collective redundancies and European works council directives;
44. Welcomes the progress made on aligning legislation with the Community acquis in the field of equal treatment of men and women, in particular laws prohibiting night work for women and improving the rights of pregnant employees; stresses, however, that the acquis in this area has been transposed only partly and that, in particular, directives on equal treatment as regards social security still have to be transposed;

45. Calls for the promotion of cross-border contact and cooperation between social partners in border regions so as to help disseminate EU social partnership models;
46. Calls for the promotion of job creation schemes for workers who lose their jobs as a result of the opening-up of borders;
47. Would like to see the Slovak government support and spur on the development of the housing market in industrial conurbations so that housing is provided in areas where there are labour shortages;
48. Calls on Slovakia, in view of experience with national employment plans in EU Member States in the context of the Luxembourg Process, to focus on similar initiatives; considers that a monitoring system therefore needs to be introduced, as a flanking measure, to improve information on the course and impact of industrial restructuring processes and thus counteract adverse effects on the labour market;
49. Notes that, with the adoption of the law on Radio and Television broadcasting, Slovakia has made significant progress in the audiovisual sector, and that legislation is largely in line with the "Television without frontiers" directive;
50. Earnestly hopes that the Council will soon approve proposals for decisions on the participation of Slovakia in the Culture 2000 and Media + programmes; recalls that the establishment of a "European Cultural Area" centred on respect for and encouragement of cultural and linguistic diversity and a common shared heritage will contribute to the process of integration;
51. Calls on the Commission to fully promote Slovakia's participation in Community programmes which can strengthen gender equality, especially in the programme relating to the Community framework strategy on gender equality (2001-2005), as well as in the STOP and DAPHNE programmes to combat violence against women;
52. Welcomes the fact that the chapter on social policy and the labour market has recently been opened in the membership negotiations with Slovakia and commends Slovakia for its willingness fully to incorporate the Community acquis into national legislation; stresses the importance of using 'gender mainstreaming' and equality impact analysis in reviewing legislation and in public administration reform; calls on the Council and the Commission to treat equality as a major issue in negotiations with the candidate countries; takes a positive view of Slovakia's ratification of the optional protocol to CEDAW on 17 November 2000, which only a few EU Member States and candidate countries have done;

Pre-accession strategy

53. Welcomes the fact that the EU-Slovak Joint Consultative Committee with the Economic and Social Committee has been set-up and that the social partners and civil society can contribute through their discussions to EU enlargement;
54. Supports the Commission's work in providing ongoing support to Slovakia through the three instruments PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD; insists, however, on better distribution on a regional basis so that all parts of the population can benefit equally from EU financial assistance; notes that the SAPARD agency has not yet been accredited, mainly due to administrative problems in the Commission, and that thus so far no support in this area has been provided;
55. Encourages Slovakia to propose high quality projects in the fields covered by the ISPA programme, on the basis of cost-benefit analysis and strategic environmental impact assessments, as well as to ensure effective participation of all interested stakeholders, i.e. local and regional government, social partners and NGOs in all phases of programme management, so that substantial improvements can be made in the areas of the environment and transport;
56. Welcomes the Slovak government's decision to join LIFE III and calls for the full utilisation of this

programme in helping to preserve the outstanding biodiversity of Slovakia;

57. Emphasises the importance of enabling Slovakia to catch -up with the countries of the Luxembourg group as reconfirmed by the Helsinki European Council;

58. Reconfirms its expectation that Slovakia will be able to accede to the EU in the first wave of the new EU enlargement;

Negotiations and crucial issues

59. Stresses that 2001 and 2002 are two crucial years for Slovakia during which the most difficult chapters will be opened, and calls on Slovakia for sustained and even reinforced efforts to strengthen its negotiation and reform capacities;

Other major issues

60. Notes with satisfaction that Slovakia has developed a habit of aligning its foreign policy positions with common declarations and common positions of the Union in the areas of CFSP;

61. Welcomes Slovakia's decision to play an active part in the post-Nice debate and to set-up a 'National Convention on the European Future of Slovakia' which will be responsible for defining Slovakia's position vis-a-vis how the EU should develop in the future;

62. Calls on the Commission to reach a common position as soon as possible on the long-standing demand for a special programme of aid for the EU regions bordering on the candidate countries so that the money can be released and the programme implemented;

63. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the parliaments of the Member States and the Government and Parliament of Slovakia.

(1) OJ C 178, 22.6.2001, p.143.

(2) Texts Adopted, Item 4.

(3) OJ L 359, 31.12.1994, p.2.