

European Parliament resolution on the Czech Republic'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 Czech Republic's application for accession to the European Union and on the state of negotiations.

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

(COM(2000) 703 - C5-0603/2000 - 1997/2180(COS))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Czech Republic's application for membership of the European Union submitted on 17 January 1996, pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union,
- having regard to the 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on the Czech Republic's progress towards accession (COM(2000) 703 - C5-0603/2000),
- 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 Göteborg (15 and 16 June 2001),
- having regard to the Accession Partnership for the Czech Republic concluded in 1999;
- having regard to its resolution of 4 October 2000 on the Czech Republic'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 (2001/222(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 (A5-0255/2001),

A. whereas the Nice European Council removed the institutional obstacles to the Czech Republic's accession,

B. whereas, following the strong signal put out by the Göteborg European Council, continuing major efforts are required on the part of the Czech Republic so that it can successfully complete its accession strategy by 2004, thereby enabling its citizens to take part in the next European Parliament elections in 2004,

C. whereas the survival of small owner-proprietor agrarian enterprises has been one of the vital bases of the preservation of biodiversity in many of the candidate countries,

D. having regard to its resolution on the Treaty of Nice and the future of the European Union in general, and in particular to paragraph 4 thereof, the number of Members representing the Czech Republic in the European Parliament should be changed to 22, which would not have a detrimental effect on the institutional balance achieved in Nice,

Political criteria

1. Welcomes the fact that constitutional stability is assured in the Czech Republic, that the rules of democracy are being followed and that the Czech Republic is thus continuing to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria;
2. Notes with satisfaction that the Czech Republic is continuing to take positive steps to improve the

situation of the Roma in society, employment, public services, healthcare and the educational system; calls for active participation of local authorities and the population concerned in assessing programmes and projects; acknowledges that the Roma question is socially, politically and economically complex and affects several candidate countries;

Economic criteria

3. Notes that the Czech Republic can be regarded as a functioning market economy and that it will be possible for it to cope with competitive pressure within the European Union in the medium term, provided that it carries out further structural reforms;
4. Welcomes the fact that the Czech Republic, having grasped this point, is speeding up reforms, has carried out several privatisations and is planning more privatisations within the next two years;
5. Reminds the Czech Republic, however, that successful overall economic reforms require measures to strengthen competition and the supervisory authorities for the banking sector as well as transparent controls of the use of state aids;
6. Insists that a sound and consistent legal environment for businesses is an essential prerequisite for the operation of the single market; draws attention, in particular, to the need for transparent and effective implementation of competition policy;
7. Is concerned about the rising budgetary deficit, which, after deducting privatisation receipts, could reach 7% of gross domestic product in 2001; calls therefore on the Czech government to carry out urgently needed reforms to the healthcare and pensions system;
8. Recalls that budgetary consolidation must not be carried through in such a way as to compromise the mid-term objective of social cohesion in accordance with the European Social Model, in particular the fight against poverty and social exclusion; stresses that future-oriented public investments are urgently needed for the improvement of social protection, public health and education, as well as for rendering the economy more ecologically sustainable;
9. Considers that special efforts are needed to fight unemployment amongst young people, given the fact that the average unemployment rate of persons under 25 reached a peak of 17% in 1999;
10. Urges that steps be taken to improve financial supervision and fight irregularities and fraud in banks and to solve the problem of bad loans, which not only is a heavy burden for the banking sector, but also leads to over-cautious practices on the part of the banks when providing new credits;
11. Notes that economic crime and asset-stripping is still a major problem in the Czech Republic, which worries citizens and investors alike; urges the government to step up efforts to put an end to such practices by increasing the staff of the respective unit in the ministry and improving their training;
12. Urges the Czech Republic to stick to its timetable for the closure of duty-free shops at land borders by 31 December 2001;
13. Notes that the environment chapter has been provisionally closed with the Czech Republic and that two transition periods have been negotiated, including one lasting up to 2010 for waste water treatment; calls for careful monitoring of progress with the involvement of all stakeholders, including environmental NGOs, on meeting the intermediate targets that have been agreed, and of the implementing measures and financing arrangements that are envisaged;

Transposing the Community Acquis

14. Welcomes the adoption of the act on environmental impact assessment and the act on waste

management in February this year; expects the work on transposing environmental protection policy to be stepped up, not least in the light of the government's most recent environmental report;

15. Regards it as unacceptable that the Czech Republic is not taking a sufficiently firm line against the production of, and trade in, pirated copies of electronic data media;

16. Expects the Czech government to table the act on the protection of air quality, the ozone layer and the climatic system in parliament as soon as possible, and encourages the Czech Republic, in the light of the European Parliament's resolution of 4 October 2000, to develop financial strategies with a view to precise planning for the full transposition of the environmental acquis; urges the Czech authorities to proceed with the ratification of the Aarhus Convention;

17. Welcomes the fact that substantial progress was made last year with regard to legislative alignment relating to agriculture, and that progress was also made with setting up the implementing structures for the CAP; points out, however, that the Czech Republic must further step up its efforts in this area, in particular with regard to administrative structures for the effective implementation of the veterinary and phytosanitary acquis;

18. Emphasises that EU animal welfare legislation must be properly supported by adequate controls at national and EU level if enlargement to include the Czech Republic is not to result in a deterioration in the EU's farm animal welfare record;

19. Is quite clear that, where the free movement of persons and workers is concerned, a rational compromise between the interests of the existing EU Member States and the Czech Republic must be found; considers that the Commission's proposals published early in 2001 constitute a sound basis for this;

20. Encourages the participation of the Czech Republic in the Community's new health action programme, launched in 2000;

21. Acknowledges the steps taken by the Czech Republic to build up its domestic legal and institutional framework in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms; notes in this respect its ratification of the European Social Charter in November 1999 and its adoption of a law which entered into force in February 2000 establishing the post of Ombudsman as the public official entrusted with defending citizens' rights; acknowledges the existence of specific legislation outlawing trafficking in, and violence against, women, whilst noting nonetheless that compliance with that legislation remains inadequate; calls on the Czech government to employ every means at its disposal to combat trafficking in, and violence against, women;

22. Calls on the Czech government to take action to tackle the serious problem concerning the trafficking in women which occurs in the Czech Republic;

23. Notes the improvements with regard to regional policy and territorial organisation, and also the strengthening of the administrative capacity of the Ministry of Regional Development (MRD); welcomes the boost that the establishment of Czech regions has provided for the development of a stronger transnational orientation on the part of the Czech Republic, and in particular the intention of the regional governors to pursue their interests independently of the central government and in interaction with other partner regions in Europe;

24. Regards this as a clear sign that the modern concept of a Europe of the regions has also established itself in the Czech Republic;

25. Welcomes developments in the debate on the act of the Czech National Bank, which in its present form does not appear to threaten the central bank's independence;

26. Calls on the Czech government to ensure that any changes in legislation do not have a negative effect on the Czech Republic's capacity to transpose the acquis relating to economic and monetary union, since this

might delay accession;

27. Notes that in 1998 the Czech Republic set up a programme to combat corruption, which however, has only produced limited results, calls, therefore, on the Czech Republic to step up implementation of the programme;

28. Points out to the Czech Republic that it must take more far-reaching steps as soon as possible to improve its border control capacity, by undertaking structural changes in its border management, since the Czech Republic is increasingly a transit country and destination for illegal immigration;

29. Reminds the Czech Republic, in this context, that the new act on the residence of aliens only partly transposes the Schengen acquis;

30. Expects the Czech Republic to be aware of the need to make more effective use of its administrative implementing and monitoring capacity relating to agriculture, the environment and regional and structural development;

Pre-accession strategy

31. Supports the Commission in its work using the three pre-accession instruments to drive the reforms in the Czech Republic forward on a continuous basis, and at the same time expects the Commission to reach an agreement internally at an early date on the long-awaited special programme to promote the EU regions bordering the accession countries so that the funds can be released and the programme implemented;

32. Encourages the Czech Republic to propose high-quality projects, especially for 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;

33. Encourages the Czech Republic to join the LIFE programme;

34. Encourages the Czech government to give high priority to the development of agri-environment programmes when allocating national and EU funds to rural development and the re-structuring of the agricultural sector;

35. Notes that agricultural production in line with European food safety, veterinary, phytosanitary and quality standards is not possible, in every instance, when accession takes place; notes that pre-accession aid must also be targeted in particular on improving that situation; realises that, for a period following accession, internal trade may be restricted by these European demands;

Negotiations and key issues

36. Welcomes the quickening tempo of the negotiating process and, in particular, the possibility of a more flexible approach to dealing with difficult chapters, both of which were created by the decisions of the Nice European Council;

37. Welcomes the fact that the European Union and the Czech Republic have completed the negotiations on far-reaching reciprocal concessions on trade in agricultural products; calls on the Member States to speed up the procedure for ratifying a protocol to the Europe Agreement⁽³⁾ to that effect; welcomes also the fact that the European Union and the Czech Republic have also reached agreement on liberalising trade in processed agricultural products, and have started negotiations on liberalising trade in fish and fishery products;

38. Calls on the Czech Republic 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, further, the completion of the negotiations on an additional protocol to the Europe Agreement establishing an Association between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Czech Republic, of the other part, on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (PECA)⁽⁴⁾, which brings far-reaching provisions of the EU internal market into force in the Czech Republic prior to accession, thus further simplifying trade between the two sides;

40. Welcomes the implementation of the second stage of the Europe Agreement, with effect from 1 February 2001, as a sign of the Czech Republic's progress with regard to liberalisation of the free movement of capital and of the right of establishment;

41. Welcomes the Czech government's willingness to scrutinise the laws and decrees of the Beneš government, dating from 1945 and 1946 and which still on the statute books, to ascertain whether they run counter to EU law in force and the Copenhagen criteria;

42. Welcomes the fact that the Commission succeeded in acting as intermediary between Austria and the Czech Republic with regard to the Temelin nuclear power station, and that both sides were able to reach agreement on a plan for a fresh investigation of the risks posed by Temelin, in the form of an environmental impact assessment;

43. Recalls that the zero-option must be considered, especially as problems continue to come to light over faults in the past construction in both the nuclear and non-nuclear section of the Temelin nuclear power plan;

44. Calls on the Commission to investigate whether parts of Temelin can be written off as a 'stranded investment' in the event of relinquishing Temelin (e.g. making possible a network supplement for a limited period and hence facilitating, economically, relinquishment of Temelin), and to convoke an international conference to consider the prospects for, and costs of, relinquishing Temelin and the possibility of an international offer to the Czech Republic to relinquish it;

45. Notes with satisfaction that, with regard to its foreign policy, the Czech Republic is increasingly aligning itself with the European Union's joint declarations and positions in the context of the CFSP;

46. Endorses the Czech Republic's aim of joining the European Union as soon as possible; hopes that the Slovak Republic will also be ready for accession at the same time, on the grounds of internal logic and their unique historical relations; expects the Commission, in the unfortunate event of this not being the case, to put forward practical proposals to the Member States and the Czech Republic as to how to deal with transit matters, so that no pointless frontiers are erected for a short transitional period, contrary to the spirit of EU integration and at a high administrative and political cost;

47. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the parliaments of the Member States and the government and parliament of the Czech Republic.

(1) OJ C 178, 22.6.2001, p.140.

(2) Texts Adopted, Item 4.

(3) OJ L 360, 31.12.1994, p. 2

(4) OJ L 135, 17.5.2001, p. 1.