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24. Declares its intention to vigorously oppose any attempt that might be made to introduce any new requirement for candidate countries; considers that avoiding unnecessary delays in the negotiations and accessions is important for the Union's credibility;

25. Resolutely distances itself from any action whatsoever to block negotiations on a specific chapter, or to block the accession of any country, in order to insist on a demand which is of no relevance at all to the chapter in question, or which has nothing to do with the state of preparedness for accession of the country or countries affected by this action;

Other major issues and recommendations

26. Draws attention to the fact that unemployment is high and that considerable disparities in economic development also pose challenges to economic and social cohesion;

27. Welcomes the fact that the Estonian Sapard agency has finally been accredited; stresses the importance of integrated rural development for the enlargement process; notes with concern, however, the rural population's lack of information on, and growing dissatisfaction; calls on the Commission to help ensure that there is a considerable improvement in the information provided to the rural population on rural development plans and in its involvement in them;

28. Welcomes Estonia's forthcoming accession to the European Environmental Agency, its first full membership of an EU body; notes that its membership of the agency will open up new opportunities for Estonia to take part in exchanges and to receive support in adapting the EU's environmental rules, in a situation where the country continues to suffer the after-effects of half a century of Soviet communist occupation;

29. Supports Estonia's efforts to become fully integrated into Euro-Atlantic security structures and stresses Estonia's right to determine its security policy independently;

30. Looks forward to Estonia's full participation in the Common Foreign and Security policy; is convinced, not least in the light of Estonia's present and past active participation in the UN's peace-keeping activities, that Estonia can make an important contribution to the EU's efforts, in accordance with the Treaty, to strengthen the Union's security, preserve peace and enhance international security, promote international cooperation and develop and stabilise democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights;

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31. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the parliaments of the Member States and the government and parliament of Estonia.

9. State of accession negotiations with Latvia

A5-0252/2001

European Parliament resolution on Latvia's application for membership of the European Union and the state of negotiations (COM(2000) 706 – C5-0606/2000 – 1997/2176(COS))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Latvia's application for membership of the European Union, submitted on 27 October 1995, pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union,
- having regard to the 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on Latvia's progress towards accession (COM(2000) 706 – C5-0606/2000),
- having regard to the Enlargement Strategy Paper on progress towards accession by each of the candidate countries presented by the Commission (COM(2000) 700),

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- having regard to the decisions taken by the European Council, notably at Copenhagen (21/22 June 1993), Helsinki (10/11 December 1999), Nice (7-9 December 2000) and Gothenburg (15/16 June 2001),
 - having regard to the Accession Partnership for Latvia concluded in 1999,
 - having regard to its resolution of 4 October 2000 on Latvia's application for membership of the European Union and the state of negotiations (COM(1999) 506 — C5-0029/2000 — 1997/2176/COS) ⁽¹⁾,
 - 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 (A5-0252/2001),
- A. mindful of the absolute necessity to make a success of the EU enlargement process,
- B. convinced that this presupposes openness, frankness and respect for agreed rules and principles, on the part of the EU institutions and the Member States as well as on the part of the candidate countries,
- C. convinced, also, that in the most difficult final phase of the negotiations, all parties must refrain from making unreasonable demands; expecting that, instead, their actions will demonstrate their unstinting commitment to the project of healing the wounds inflicted upon our continent by tragic events in the past,
- D. whereas the principle of full differentiation within the negotiation process, according to which each country should be judged on its own merits, implies that a real chance to catch up must be given to those countries, including Latvia, with which negotiations were not opened until last year,
- E. whereas Latvia continues to make good progress in its preparations for EU membership,
- F. whereas this has allowed its negotiations to proceed at a steady pace, but a number of problems and weaknesses still call for stronger action,
1. Recognises that Latvia has made enormous efforts to close the gap with the previous first group of candidate countries; notes that Latvia has a real chance to catch up, provided it shows further progress in administrative and judicial reform, as well as in the fight against corruption;

Fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria*Political criteria*

2. Recognises that Latvia satisfies the political criteria for EU membership;
3. Is concerned about the remaining deficiencies in procedural law, the persistent lack of qualified judges, insufficient guarantees for the right to a fair trial, unacceptably long pre-trial detention periods and, in particular, the large number of minors in pre-trial detention, prison overcrowding and very poor sanitary conditions in prisons;
4. Notes that Latvia has acknowledged the need to improve the efficiency, accountability and transparency of its public administration system;
5. Encourages Latvia to press on with the fight against corruption; points to the fact that a high level of transparency, clear separation of political and business elites, a politically neutral civil service and high professional standards within the judiciary are characteristic features of countries with very low levels of corruption;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 178, 22.6.2001, p. 133.

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6. Recalls that the integration of the still considerable number of non-citizens depends to a large extent on the implementation of the Programme for the Integration of Society; recommends that the Latvian Government and Parliament provide adequate financial resources to the programme via the 'Social Integration Fund'; stresses the importance of free language training programmes for adults;

7. Expresses the hope that as part of the general integration of ethnic minority groups into Latvian society, these groups will be represented at political level in a more balanced way; believes that a precipitate approach should be avoided, but that at some point in the future, broadening the right to vote in local elections could be considered;

8. Welcomes the fact that Latvia has decided to introduce a new system of ID documents stating only citizenship, instead of ethnicity; hopes that, as a result, all the old ID documents can be replaced as soon as possible;

9. Notes that the new draft asylum law addresses many of the gaps in the current refugee law in relation to the EU *acquis*; stresses the need for further improvements so as to achieve compliance with the Council Resolution of 20 June 1995 on minimum guarantees for asylum procedures⁽¹⁾ and full respect of the principle of non-refoulement;

Economic criteria

10. Congratulates Latvia on its successful economic development; notes that the government deficit has now largely been brought under control and that continued strong growth should lead to higher tax revenues;

11. Recalls in this respect that budgetary stabilisation policies should be in line with other objectives of sustainable development, such as the need to improve the provision of social services and social protection, and to reduce growing income disparities; considers it necessary to look into the possibility of raising the very low legal minimum wage;

12. Notes that Latvia is well aware of the massive investments required to reduce pollution and comply with EU environmental standards; points to the need to enhance the cooperation between public administration at central and local level in implementation of environment legislation, including cost-effective and timely investments;

13. Notes that privatisation has almost been completed; calls on the Commission to support Latvia in its efforts to liberalise the telecommunication sector in view of EU accession; recalls that in the context of the forthcoming liberalisation of the energy sector, incentives should be offered for the use of the extensive potential of renewable energies, especially in rural areas;

'Acquis' criteria

14. Hopes that the process to merge local communities into bigger units, with greater capacity for implementing important parts of the *acquis*; will be accelerated; encourages Latvia to proceed with the establishment of viable regional structures, in order to draw maximum benefit from EU structural funds after accession;

15. Notes that in the area of social policy and employment, alignment with the *acquis* is not yet complete; points out that proper enforcement should also be ensured; draws attention to the prominent role of the social partners in Community legislation and the importance of functioning bipartite social dialogue;

16. Urges Latvia to adopt the necessary provisions for ensuring mutual recognition of qualifications and free movement of workers;

17. Urges that an urgently needed socially sustainable integration process is secured; invites the Commission to continue working together with the Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the European Parliament to produce a reference document;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 274, 19.9.1996, p. 13.

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18. Draws attention to the importance of developing regional and local authorities' ability to implement environmental legislation, which depends also on the effective participation of independent non-governmental organisations in decision-making processes; suggests that the pre-accession instrument 'twinning' should be opened also for local and regional authorities, so as to familiarise them with EU practice in this field;

The Pre-Accession Strategy

19. Regrets the delay in the launch of the Sapard programme for aid to agriculture and rural development; asks the Commission to speed up the process; agrees with the Commission that the deadline for spending the Sapard funds allocated in the 2000 budget should be extended to the end of 2003;

20. Underlines that Sapard should be implemented in a way that enables all members of the rural population to benefit from it and to exploit the big opportunities for integrated rural development and environmentally friendly production; points to the importance of supporting and cooperating with farmers' organisations, not least with a view to reaching farmers with small resources and low access to information;

21. Welcomes Latvia's wish to manage future structural aid in a decentralised way; advises the Commission to speed up the process of decentralisation of pre-accession funds, including the application of the partnership principles, in order to support Latvia's preparations in this regard;

22. Is concerned about reports that EU-based companies operating in Latvia are adopting hostile attitudes towards trade unions and are reticent in cooperating with Latvian employers' associations; asks the Commission to thoroughly investigate the situation;

Latvian – Russian Relations

23. Welcomes Latvia's efforts to re-activate the intergovernmental committee; regrets that several initiatives by the Latvian side for the enhancement of cross-border cooperation have not yet received support from Russia; reiterates its call on Russia launched in its resolution of 13 December 2000 on the implementation of the Common Strategy of the EU on Russia (2000/2007(INI))⁽¹⁾ to sign and ratify the border agreement with Latvia, which has been initialled;

The negotiations and crucial issues in view of Parliament's assent to Latvia's accession

24. Stresses the crucial importance to the Union's cohesion of the principle that Member States have equal rights and equal obligations; insists on the defence of this principle against insufficiently founded demands for transitional periods or special arrangements in connection with accessions, regardless of whether these demands are made by candidate countries or Member States;

25. Considers it regrettable following clear policy set by DG Environment that candidate countries do not ask for transition periods for the transposition, implementation and enforcement of nature protection legislation, that some candidate countries are still trying to negotiate transition periods in this area, and urges the Commission to stand firm in the negotiations;

26. Calls on Latvia 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;

27. Believes it to be of central importance that the implementation of the new proposals in the Commission's White Paper on Food Safety (COM(1999) 719) is carefully monitored by Latvia, and taken full account of before the negotiations are finally completed;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 232, 17.8.2001, p. 176.

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

29. Encourages the participation of Latvia in the Community's new health action programme launched in 2000;

30. Calls on the Commission to address the EU information strategy on Enlargement also towards the specific needs and concerns of non-citizens in Latvia;

31. Deplores the Member States' and the Commission's rejection of Parliament's request for better insight into the negotiations; considers this rejection illogical and damaging to the spirit of cooperation between the institutions;

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

10. State of accession negotiations with Lithuania

A5-0253/2001

European Parliament resolution on Lithuania's application for membership of the European Union and the state of negotiations (COM(2000) 707 – C5-0607/2000 – 1997/2178(COS))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Lithuania's application for membership of the European Union, submitted on 8 December 1995, pursuant to Article 49 of the EU Treaty,
 - having regard to the 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on Lithuania's progress towards accession (COM(2000) 707 – C5-0607/2000),
 - having regard to the 2000 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 (21/22 June 1993), Helsinki (10/11 December 1999), Nice (7-9 December 2000) and Gothenburg (15/16 June 2001),
 - having regard to the Accession Partnership for Lithuania concluded in 1999,
 - having regard to its resolution of 4 October 2000 on Lithuania's membership application to the European Union and the state of negotiations (COM(1999) 507 – C5-0030/2000 – 1997/2178(COS))⁽¹⁾,
 - 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 (A5-0253/2001),
- A. mindful of the absolute necessity to make a success of the EU enlargement process,
- B. convinced that this presupposes openness, frankness and respect for agreed rules and principles, on the part of the EU institutions and the Member States as well as on the part of the candidate countries,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 178, 22.6.2001, p. 135.