

# Resolution on the Croatia 2008 progress report

2008/2692(RSP) - 12/03/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 11 March 2009, the European Parliament adopted by 548 votes to 40, with 34 abstentions, a resolution on the Croatia 2008 progress report.

Parliament commends Croatia for the good results it has achieved during 2008 in adopting the legislation and carrying out the reforms required to qualify for EU membership. It is confident that the goal of concluding negotiations in 2009 can be achieved provided the Government of Croatia steps up its efforts to address particularly the more sensitive issues linked to the accession process, including fighting organised crime and corruption.

Parliament also welcomes the Commission's recommendation that the Council should set up the ad hoc technical working party in charge of drafting the Accession Treaty.

## **Copenhagen criteria:**

**Political criteria:** MEPs are satisfied with the progress achieved as regards the adoption of key documents and key legislation in certain areas, notably anti-discrimination, women's rights, minority rights and return of refugees. However, they point out that swift and effective implementation is now crucial. They consider that there is a need to pursue the reform of public administration with the introduction of a new salary system and a comprehensive overhaul of administrative procedures in order to increase transparency, accountability and de-politicisation of the Croatian civil service. They call for specific attention to be paid to the regional and local administrations since their ability to take on new responsibilities is crucial to the success of the decentralisation process. Other issues are highlighted by the Parliament such as the importance of providing legal certainty and equality before the law to foreign investors and increased efforts to be made in the judicial sector.

Parliament takes note of the statement made by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia before the United Nations Security Council on 12 December 2008, in which he indicates that Croatia has responded to most requests for assistance made by the Office of the Prosecutor, whilst pointing out that certain key military documents relating to the Gotovina case remain unaccounted for. It urges the Government to step up its efforts to make these key documents available immediately to the Tribunal.

As regards the fight against corruption, MEPs emphasise that the increased investigative and prosecutorial activities of the Office for the Fight against Corruption and Organised Crime (USKOK) must be matched by equal police and judicial efforts if these activities are to produce results. They are of the opinion that **zero tolerance** must be shown at all levels and that verdicts must be reached and enforced, including the seizure of assets. Although MEPs are satisfied with the freedom of the press in Croatia, they draw attention to recent cases of intimidation and even killings of journalists investigating cases of corruption and organised crime.

Parliament considers that there is a need to concentrate on the economic and social rights of **minorities**, in particular their access to employment. It welcomes the continuing progress as regards the education of minorities even if the current structures maintain segregation rather than aiming at integration of different ethnic groups (notably the Roma).

On the issue of refugees; Parliament takes note that, whilst tangible results have been achieved in providing the conditions for refugee returns, much remains to be done in order to make these returns

sustainable in terms of housing, particularly for former holders of tenancy rights in urban areas, of integration, and of access to the labour market. It calls on the authorities, at national and local level, to show zero tolerance towards episodes of racial hatred and any other form of hatred and ensure that such episodes are duly prosecuted.

**Economic criteria:** MEPs are encouraged by the increase in employment and the sustained economic growth recorded by Croatia. Nevertheless, they point to persisting high unemployment rates amongst young people and minorities. They consider that it will be necessary to accelerate the pace of structural reforms. Parliament calls on the Croatian authorities to comply with the goals laid down in the EU climate package and give adequate priority to energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy, particularly in coastal areas.

**Ability to assume the obligations of membership:** Parliament is generally pleased with the overall pace of legislative alignment. However, greater attention should be paid to the quality of legislation. It encourages the Croatian authorities to pursue their efforts to develop the administrative capacity required to implement the *acquis*. Parliament calls on the Croatian Government, with the support of the Commission, to adopt specific measures to offset the social costs of the restructuring. It also invites the Commission and the Council to take into account the current economic and financial crisis when reviewing progress by Croatia in implementing the necessary reforms. In addition, Parliament notes that progress in the agricultural sector has been uneven and calls for new measures in this area. Parliament wishes to see a better absorption of EU pre-accession funds.

**Regional Cooperation:** lastly, Parliament regrets that accession negotiations have been effectively blocked for a considerable time because of bilateral issues. MEPs underline that these issues should not be an obstacle to progress in accession negotiations. They urge the Croatian Government and the governments of the neighbouring countries to solve expeditiously all their outstanding issues. MEPs stress that good neighbourly relations remain a key element of the European integration process. In this context, they welcome the readiness of Croatia and Slovenia to accept the mediation offer made by the Commission.