

Resolution on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2008 progress report

2008/2693(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 478 votes to 92, with 42 abstentions, a resolution on the 2008 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

On the whole, the Parliament welcomes the fact that the parties in government and the opposition in FYROM are united in their desire to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership and for the earliest possible accession to the EU. MEPs reaffirm their full support for the European perspective of FYROM and of all the Western Balkan countries, which is essential for the stability, reconciliation and peaceful future of the region.

In relation to the application of the **Copenhagen criteria** by FYROM, MEPs make the following observations:

Political criteria: MEPs welcome the fact that, seven years after the Ohrid Agreement, the country's Parliament adopted the law on the use of languages in administration and education. They also welcome the progress made by the country in the dialogue on visa liberalisation, as well as in terms of the integrated border management scheme. Moreover, the Parliament commends the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings, illegal migration and corruption, and calls on the government to continue the efforts in this field in cooperation with Frontex, Europol and Eurojust. The Parliament takes note of the difficulties faced by the citizens of FYROM due to the non-recognition of its passports by one EU Member State; It therefore calls on the Commission to recommend to the Council the abolition of visa requirements for all citizens of FYROM.

At the same time, the Parliament notes that, after a series of attempts to disrupt the parliamentary elections on 1 June 2008 (particularly in the north-west of the country), the government took effective measures, by means of a partial repeat of elections and effective monitoring of procedures, to arrive at correct election results. Moreover, the Parliament commends the adoption of amendments to the Electoral Code broadly in accordance with the recommendations of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Economic criteria: the Parliament commends the efforts made by FYROM in the economic field, which have resulted in significant progress in fulfilling the economic criteria, thus bringing the country closer to a functional market economy, (in particular: the facilitation of the tax payment procedures, reform of one-stop-shop registration, foreign trade facilitation and the cutting of red tape).

Regional cooperation and neighbourly relations: the Parliament welcomes the progress achieved in the establishment of necessary structures for decentralised management of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). It notes that, following a widely supported decision by its Parliament, FYROM recognised the independence of Kosovo, despite the difficulties which this might cause with Serbia. It stresses that the increased interest in Serbia (which in 2009 could result in the status of candidate for membership of the EU being conferred on it) **must not result in any slackening of interest in FYROM** within the EU or in a further slowing of the progress of the accession process.

Accession negotiations: MEPs regret that, three years after it was granted the status of candidate for membership of the EU, accession negotiations have not yet started with FYROM, which is an

unsustainable situation having demotivating effects for the country, and risks destabilising the region. According to MEPs, it is desirable that this exceptional situation should end. The Parliament calls on the Council to decide on a date for the beginning of accession negotiations, during the current year, pending full implementation of the key priorities of the Accession Partnership.

Problem surrounding the country's name: MEPs support the efforts of mediator Matthew Nimetz within the UN, aimed at resolving the differences that have arisen over the constitutional name of the state in order to reach final agreement between FYROM and Greece as soon as possible, on the basis of his proposal of 6 October 2008 as to how the distinction between the various areas which belong to different states but have in common the fact that they are called Macedonia can be clarified internationally. MEPs realise that this proposal is viewed with hesitation by both parties but call on them to remain committed to the talks under the auspices of the UN and to **reach a compromise solution**, so that the issue does not continue to represent an obstacle to FYROM's membership of international organisations. MEPs warn that unless agreement is reached quickly between the two states, this could result in a long delay in FYROM joining the EU.

Other sectoral issues: MEPs welcome the efforts of the authorities of FYROM to work together with neighbouring EU Member States with a view to reviewing possible discrepancies and misinterpretations of history that may cause disagreements. They urge promotion of the joint celebration of the common cultural and historic heritage shared between the country and its neighbours. MEPs also deplore the fact that the new law (2007) on the legal status of a church, a religious community and a religious group, has not yet resulted in adherents of different faiths feeling that they have the same opportunities to confess and propagate their faith. They recall, in this respect, that the authorities have a duty to protect tolerance towards those whose convictions are different and the right to religious diversity. MEPs also regret the increasing pressure placed on the media by the government forces, in particular during the election campaign. Moreover, they call for greater freedom of the press.

MEPs also call for:

- greater freedom for trade unions;
- measures to update the integrated waste cycle, including differentiated waste collection;
- improvements to the quality of water (including in the border lakes Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran);
- greater account to be taken of the negative effects on human beings and the environment of the OKTA oil refinery (in the town of Ilinden near Skopje);
- improvements to the railway network;
- the acceleration of planning and production from renewable sources.

MEPs are also concerned about the rise in the large number of reports of victims of domestic violence. Moreover, they call for better protection of minorities (including the Roma). Lastly, the Parliament calls on the Commission to be vigilant and, if necessary, to adopt adequate measures in order to guarantee the smooth continuation of the Stabilisation and Association Process concerning FYROM, in the context of the current economic crisis.