Resolution on the 2009 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

2009/2768(RSP) - 07/12/2009

The “General Affairs” Council adopted a series of conclusions on the enlargement strategy of the European Union. They may be summarised as follows:

- welcoming the Commission communication on Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009-2010, the Council takes note of the conclusions and recommendations therein. The enlargement process gives strong encouragement to political and economic reform in the enlargement countries and reinforces peace, democracy and stability in Europe;

- the Council confirms that the EU will continue to help them to alleviate the impact of the crisis and prepare for sound recovery;

- it recalls that coherent implementation of the renewed consensus on enlargement which is based on consolidation of commitments, fair and rigorous conditionality, better communication and the EU’s capacity to integrate new members, continues to form the basis for EU action at all stages of the enlargement process, with each country being assessed on its own merits. The rule of law, in particular the fight against corruption and organised crime, as well as strengthening administrative capacity, remains a major challenge which the enlargement countries need to address from an early stage of the process;

- it points out that the negotiating chapters for which technical preparations have been concluded will be opened or closed provisionally in line with the rules of an Inter-Governmental Conference, according to established procedures and in line with the Negotiating Framework;

- on the financial front, the Council welcomes the support provided to the enlargement process through financial assistance, in particular in the form of the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA), and emphasises the essential link between enlargement policy priorities and financial assistance.

As regards the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Council welcomes the progress made in a number of important areas and that the country has substantially addressed the key priorities of the accession partnership. The smooth implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement should facilitate further steps. The presidential and local elections of 2009 met most international standards.

The Council also underlines the need to:

- continue the reform agenda;

- continue efforts to fight corruption and to ensure the independence and impartiality of the judiciary;

- maintain good neighbourly relations, including a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution on the name issue, under the auspices of the UN, remains essential. The Council is encouraged by recent positive developments concerning the relations between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The Council notes that the Commission recommends the opening of accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and will return to the matter during the next Presidency.

Lastly, the Council is very pleased to have decided on the amendments to Council Regulation 539/2001, as it applies to Member States, so as to establish a visa free regime for the citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia starting from 19 December 2009.