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

2009/2768(RSP) - 10/02/2010 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 548 votes in favour to 45 against with 35 abstentions a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

It commends the latter on the progress achieved since the last progress report, noting with satisfaction that, on the basis of that progress, the Commission has recommended opening accession negotiations. Parliament calls on the Council to **confirm the Commission's recommendation without further delay at the summit in March 2010 and expects negotiations to begin in the near future**. It notes with concern the Council's postponement of the decision on further steps in the enlargement process in respect of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which is liable both to aggravate political inter-ethnic tensions in the country and to have an adverse effect on stability in the region. It welcomes the new Greek Government's initiative of suggesting a symbolic, motivating target date of 2014 for the accession of Western Balkan countries to the EU and invites, in this context, the governments of countries in this region to make a sincere contribution to achieving this noble goal. Parliament stresses that the clear and timely prospect of EU membership continues to be the main driving force for the reform process in countries in the region, and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in particular. Unhindered progress towards EU membership is of the utmost importance for ensuring political stability, which is the common goal broadly shared by the country's political actors and ethnic groups.

Political developments: Parliament welcomes the broad consensus between government and opposition parties on the country's European vocation. This consensus and improved political dialogue have accelerated the passing of laws on EU integration. Parliament stresses, however, the importance of implementing such laws effectively. It commends the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on recent developments, noting progress in the fight against corruption, (which nevertheless remains prevalent), in the conduct of the presidential and local elections, in the field of the judiciary, in reforming the functioning of public administration and the police.

Members emphasise the **utmost importance of improving inter-ethnic relations** by continuing to implement the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which is the cornerstone of inter-ethnic relations in the country. They draws particular attention to the ongoing process of decentralisation, which is an important step in terms of helping the country to function better and improving inter-ethnic relations. Parliament calls on all municipalities to sign the memorandum of cooperation for the implementation of Roma inclusion activities between 2005 and 2015, along with the Strategy for Roma,.

It stresses the importance of the following:

- the development of independent and diverse media free from political interference, and the need to strengthen media freedom on an ongoing basis by applying European standards and improving transparency;

- the development of an anti-discrimination strategy (guaranteeing the equality of all people regardless of their ethnic origin, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation or disability). Parliament regrets that the bill for a comprehensive anti-discrimination law proposed by the Government on 28 January 2010 does not recognise sexual orientation as a ground of discrimination;

- further efforts to increase the currently limited participation of women in political life;

- the role played by civil society organisations in the country's ongoing transformation, in relation not only to the reform process and the fight against corruption, but also to inter-ethnic relations and monitoring of the human rights situation.

Economic and social situation: Parliament commends the government on the macro-economic policies adopted to counteract the negative effects of the global financial and economic crisis. However, it is concerned that the impact of the crisis will exacerbate the persistently high unemployment level and hamper efforts to bring it down. The authorities should do their utmost to shield vulnerable groups within society as much as possible from the effects of the crisis. Members point out, however, that the procedures for registering businesses and protecting property rights have still not been improved sufficiently, and that the education system is not well enough resourced to produce the human resources needed to develop the economy. Parliament expresses some concerns about the implementation of environmental legislation is moderately advanced, and reiterates its call for effective monitoring of water quality and water levels.

Regional issues: Parliament welcomes the new, more positive climate between the governments of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece following the recent elections in Greece. It encourages the two countries to redouble their efforts at the highest level, in order to find a mutually satisfactory solution to the name issue, under the auspices of the UN, and stresses that the EU should be ready to assist in the negotiation process. Parliament notes with concern the use of historical arguments in the current debate, including the recent phenomenon of so-called "antiquisation", which is liable to increase tensions with neighbours and create new internal divisions. It underlines the importance of reconciliation in the region, which are part and parcel of European values and encourages the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and neighbouring countries to engage actively in developing confidence-building measures in the fields of education and cross-border cooperation and generating a common understanding of history. The authorities of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and neighbouring countries are called upon to avoid actions and statements which might adversely affect such efforts.