Resolution on the European integration process of Montenegro

2010/2997(RSP) - 14/12/2010

The Council adopted a series of conclusions on the **enlargement strategy**. These may be summarised as follows:

Welcoming the communication from the Commission of 9 November 2010 on the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2010-2011, as well as the Opinions on **Montenegro** and Albania, and the progress reports on Turkey, Croatia, Iceland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. The Council states that it broadly shares the Commission's assessments.

The Council reaffirms the strong support of the EU for taking the enlargement process forward but states that **key challenges remain to be negotiated in most enlargement countries**. Sound macro-economic and fiscal policies and EU-related reforms can help to overcome the economic crisis and to achieve sustainable growth. Strengthening the rule of law, including through judiciary reform and stepping up the fight against corruption and organised crime, remains crucial and requires sustained efforts. Public administration reform is also important for EU policies to function properly. Social and economic inclusion of vulnerable groups, including the Roma, should be improved. Problems affecting freedom of expression and the media remain a particular concern. Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations are essential parts of the enlargement process. They contribute to reconciliation and a climate conducive to addressing open bilateral issues. The Council encourages all parties concerned to address bilateral issues, falling outside areas of EU competence and/or contractual obligations towards the EU, in a constructive spirit and taking into account overall EU interests.

As the countries concerned meet the standards which have been set, including notably those linked to democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights and freedoms, the EU is committed to working with them to advance to the next steps in the process. The Council welcomes the strengthened link between priorities identified for the (potential) candidate countries and the programming of financial assistance, in particular through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

As regards Montenegro: the Council welcomes the Commission's Opinion on the Montenegro application for EU membership. Montenegro has made progress towards meeting the political criteria set by the Copenhagen European Council and the Stabilisation and Association Process requirements.

- **economic criteria**: Montenegro has achieved a certain degree of macroeconomic stability. Montenegro's track record in implementing its obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement is positive overall. Montenegro would be in a position to take on the obligations of membership in the medium term in most of the acquis fields;
- **political criteria**: further efforts are needed, in particular on the implementation of the seven key priorities set out in the Commission's Opinion on Montenegro which need to be addressed. These key priorities focus on the rule of law, judicial reform, electoral reform, the role of parliament, public administration reform, media freedom and cooperation with civil society, addressing discrimination and the situation of displaced persons, and especially the fight against organised crime and corruption.

The Council notes that the opening of accession negotiations will be considered by the European Council, in line with established practice, once the Commission has assessed that Montenegro has achieved the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria and has met in particular the key priorities

set out in the Commission's Opinion on the country. The Council invites the Commission to focus its 2011 progress report on Montenegro in particular on the implementation of these key priorities which need to be addressed and will return to this issue when the Commission has assessed that these conditions have been met.

In the light of the progress made by Montenegro, the Council welcomes the positive assessment of the Commission and notes that its recommendation of **granting candidate status** will be considered by the European Council.