

Resolution on the 2010 progress report on Croatia

2010/2995(RSP) - 16/02/2011 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 548 votes to 43 and 52 abstentions, a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the 2010 progress report on Croatia.

Parliament **commends Croatia for the substantial progress achieved** in attaining the benchmarks necessary for the conclusion of the accession negotiations. It asks Croatia to pursue resolutely the necessary reforms in order to be able to attain the final benchmarks and to conclude the negotiations, welcoming the intention of the Hungarian Presidency to **complete the negotiations in the first half of 2011 if all the criteria and benchmarks are complied with.**

However, Members continue to be concerned that, as revealed by the latest Eurobarometer survey, the majority of Croatian citizens think that Croatia's EU membership would not benefit the country. They encourage the Croatian authorities and civil society, with the help of the Commission, to work to ensure that the Croatians see the European project as being theirs as well.

Political criteria: Parliament welcomes the fact that in June 2010 the Croatian Parliament adopted substantial amendments to the Constitution required by EU accession. It believes that the constitutional changes adopted will pave the way for passing the remaining legislation.

Corruption: whilst welcoming the efforts of the Croatian Government to take a strong stance against all forms of corruption, Parliament notes that corruption seems to have been widespread in Croatia and remains a serious overall problem. It also notes that few corruption cases have come to court and most remain at the prosecution/investigation stage. Parliament calls on the Croatian authorities to further strengthen the administrative capacities of anti-corruption bodies, in particular that of the Office for the Fight against Corruption and Organised Crime (USKOK), and further foster a culture of political accountability.

Judicial system: Members are pleased with the substantial efforts to further reform the judiciary, in particular with the adoption of the revised judicial reform action plan. They stress, however, that the rule of law and citizens' confidence in the judiciary are still suffering from the heavy backlog of cases and excessive length of court procedures. Furthermore, the enforcement of court decisions remains a problem, and the the Commission has not yet observed sufficient progress with regard to the infrastructure and equipment of courts. The Croatian authorities are encouraged to continue improving the independence, efficiency and resources of the judiciary.

ICTY: Members welcome the generally responsive attitude of Croatia's authorities to the Prosecutor's requests for assistance and the fact that requests are answered adequately and access to witnesses and evidence is provided. They call on the Croatian Government, however, to intensify its administrative investigation concerning the military documents requested and clarify inconsistencies in its reports to the Prosecutor's Office that were mentioned in the Prosecutor's latest statement to the UNSC and have not been resolved yet. They also note that further improvements are necessary in the conduct of war crimes trials, in order to ensure fully unbiased, impartial trials as well as to tackle impunity and improve witness protection.

Refugees: Parliament welcomes the overall progress in the field of refugee return and is pleased to note that public hostility towards returning Serbs has diminished in most of the country. It notes, however, that problems still remain for refugees and returnees. It calls on the Croatian authorities to facilitate the reintegration of returnees by further removing obstacles to obtaining permanent residence status, by

adequately financing and accelerating the programme of house reconstruction and by launching social and economic recovery projects.

Freedom of expression: the resolution notes that freedom of expression, including freedom and pluralism of the media, is provided for in Croatian law and generally respected in the country. It calls on the Croatian authorities, however, to take further steps to ensure the independence of media outlets and create conditions for their professionalism. It also welcomes the relative progress made in the area of women's rights and gender equality. Parliament welcomes the fact that Croatia was among the first countries to agree to be bound by the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as welcoming progress with regard to the prison system, and improvements regarding prosecutions for hate crimes. It also notes good progress with regard to respect for and protection of minorities, whilst stressing the need to take the appropriate measures to protect the Roma minority.

Economic criteria: the resolution calls on the Croatian Government (i) to address the structural weaknesses of the economy and reduce its redistributive role through structural reform to boost competitiveness; (ii) to reform Croatia's health sector, social systems and state aid policies; (iii) to address the very low employment rates and pursue further efforts to increase employment by addressing inflexible labour market regulations and the disincentives for workers' participation in the labour market.

Members note that Croatia has continued to improve its ability to take on the **obligations of EU membership**, with a good degree of alignment with the *acquis communautaire* in most sectors. They encourage the Croatian authorities, however, to devote particular attention to administrative capacities ensuring proper implementation.

Taking note of the tendering procedure for the **shipyards in difficulty** in May 2010, Parliament calls on the Croatian Government to conclude as soon as possible the process of restructuring in this regard in order to attain an important benchmark of the accession negotiations necessary for the provisional closure of the competition chapter. They also urge the Croatian Government to improve the coordination of central government institutions responsible for environmental management, in particular those for spatial planning, waste and water management and air.

Lastly, Parliament encourages Croatia to continue its efforts to **maintain and further develop good-neighbourly relations** and to remain an important and proactive promoter of regional cooperation on all levels. It commends the Croatian President for paying deep respect to Bosnian victims of war crimes on his official visit to Sarajevo in April 2010. It sees this initiative and gesture as a commitment on the part of Croatia to solve historical issues with its neighbours in a fair, sincere and dignified manner.