Application of Croatia to become a member of the European Union

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Hannes SWOBODA (S&D, AT) on the application of Croatia to become a Member of the European Union. Members consider that Croatian membership will make the EU stronger, enrich its European culture and heritage and make an important contribution to maintaining the credibility of the enlargement process. They also feel that Croatias successful accession will have wider European and regional implications and will give positive impetus to the process of European integration in both the EU and the Western Balkan region. The prospect of EU membership is a powerful incentive for countries in the region, on the path to European integration. Accordingly, Members welcome the conclusion of the accession negotiations with Croatia, bringing to an end almost six years of negotiation and several years of preparation. Stressing the need to keep up the reform momentum, they consider that the positive results of this process will strengthen support for EU membership among Croatias citizens, and their trust in it. They encourage people to participate in the EU referendum and support the Accession Treaty. Members support the signing of the Accession Treaty. Croatian Members: the report emphasises the temporary provisions of the Accession Treaty introduce a derogation from the maximum number of seats in the European Parliament, until the end of the 2009-2014 parliamentary term. Members are resolved to present their proposal for the decision determining the new composition of the European Parliament in good time before the 2014 elections, in accordance with Article 14(2) TEU and ensure that all relevant institutional aspects of the accession must be taken into consideration in their entirety. Monitoring the reform process: Members expect the Commission to monitor further preparations for accession with objectivity and to help the Croatian authorities fulfil their commitments and obligations entered into in the negotiations. They underline the need to focus in particular on commitments given on the judiciary, home affairs and fundamental rights including protection of the freedom of the media, as one of the crucial instruments of democracy, as well as the continued implementation of judicial reform and efficiency, the impartial handling of war-crime cases, the fight against corruption, the protection of minorities, border management, police cooperation, the fight against organised crime and judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters as well as commitments on competition policy with a view to the adequate and efficient restructuring of the shipbuilding and steel industries. The committee stresses that it will follow the monitoring process, and call on the Commission to keep it regularly informed of the extent to which the Croatian authorities honour the commitments given in the Accession Treaty so as to assume their membership obligations fully upon accession on 1 July 2013. It reserves the right to address recommendations to the Commission and the Croatian authorities throughout the monitoring process. Reforms: while acknowledging the good progress made on judicial reform, Members encourage Croatia to continue to implement reform of the judiciary, creating an efficient, independent and impartial judicial system. They stress the need for implementing the provisions on the independence, impartiality and accountability of the judiciary. Amongst the priorities for reform, Members stress the following: · the fight against high-level corruption in the judiciary, law-enforcement agencies, the public administration and state-owned companies; · reform in public procurement; · the need further to strengthen transparency and integrity in public administration and in the police; · to continue reforming law-enforcement agencies with the goal of making them efficient, effective, depoliticised and respectful of civil rights and freedoms; The fight against impunity: Members encourage Croatia to step up its efforts on the prosecution of war crimes, to implement the new strategy on impunity, which is a key to ensuring justice and achieving lasting reconciliation in the region. They invite the Croatian Government to allocate adequate financial resources and provide full support to the Croatian judiciary in order to speed up the investigation of war crimes. Furthermore, they encourage the Croatian authorities to continue active cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Croatia and Serbia are asked to cooperate fully in the field of justice, particularly as regards the prosecution of war crimes. The following

measures are also recommended: · assistance for the return of refugees and displaced persons; · launching social and economic recovery projects for vulnerable groups, especially the refugees; · further progress on womens rights and gender equality; · pursue further efforts to combat all kinds of discrimination directed against ethnic and LGBT minorities and fight homophobia; · fight against human trafficking. Strengthen economic reform and stimulate employment: Members encourage Croatia to further strengthen labour and trade unions rights, to strengthen social dialogue and to promote capacity-building for the social partners. Generally, the committee calls on Croatia, in light of the existing economic problems, to continue its structural reforms of the economy, to stimulate employment by reviving the labour market and to pursue fiscal consolidation in order to boost competitiveness, enabling it to catch up with EU Member States. It considers it important that economic recovery is accompanied by environmental modernisation, including through improved energy efficiency, the reinforcement of policy on renewable energy sources, and the harmonisation of spatial development and energy policies. The Government is encouraged to pay particular attention to small and medium-sized enterprises and to pursue further efforts to reform Croatias social system and to respect in full the public interest and environmental standards. Member States tare asked to apply decisions on transitional provisions concerning Croatian workers access to their labour markets and to keep the Commission informed of measures taken. Financial consequences: Members point out that the financial consequences of the enlargement have to be fully addressed in the upcoming negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020 and in decisions concerning the Unions own resources system. They call on all parties involved to associate Croatia, to the greatest extent possible, in its capacity as an acceding country, in all exchanges of views and negotiations on the MFF 2014-2020. Taking note of the EUs position on the financial and budgetary provisions based on an accession date of 1 July 2013, Members note that the required financial envelopes for Croatias accession, by heading and sub-heading of the budget, for the last semester of the last financial year of the current MFF would substantially increase expenditure in the EU budget. They note Corepers position whereby the overall level of expenditure should not be changed for the financial year 2013. They recall nevertheless that the current MFF adopted in 2006, did not take into account the potential accession of Croatia during the lifetime of this MFF, and urge the Commission to propose a revision of the MFF for the financial year 2013 in order to avoid financing Croatias accession by redeployments. Neighbourhood issues: welcoming the adoption by the Croatian Government in July 2011 of the declaration on promoting European values in South East Europe, Members encourage Croatia to continue to enhance good-neighbourly relations, to remain an important and proactive promoter of regional cooperation on all levels and to maintain its commitment to translating reconciliation efforts into practical steps of economic, social and human benefit to all citizens of the region. They call for increased use of the financial instruments that support SMEs, infrastructure development and the business environment as part of the multi-beneficiary programmes throughout the Western Balkans. Members also call for progress on resolving outstanding bilateral issues with neighbouring countries, in particular with Serbia, mainly regarding border demarcation, missing persons, property restitution and refugees. They strongly believe that while open issues of a bilateral nature must not halt the EU accession process of candidate and potential candidate countries in the Western Balkans. Support of citizens: considering that the success of accession depends to a large extent on the support and commitment of citizens, the committee encourages the Croatian authorities and civil society to conduct, with the help of the Commission, a wide-ranging and objective information campaign on the obligations, consequences and advantages arising from EU accession so that the Croatian people will be fully aware of their choice in the referendum and that they see the European project as belonging to them too.