Resolution on the 2012 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

2012/2866(RSP) - 23/05/2013 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 505 votes to 61 with 31 abstentions a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the 2012 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Parliament reiterates its **call to the Council to set a date for the start of accession negotiations without further delay**, and regrets that, for the fourth consecutive year, the Council decided not to follow the recommendation of the Commission during its last meeting on 11 December 2012 and has not yet opened accession negotiations. It considers that this **further postponement is adding to the growing frustration of the country's public opinion** about the stalemate of the EU integration process and risks exacerbating domestic problems and internal tension.

General considerations: Parliament calls on the Irish Presidency to conduct intense diplomacy to achieve a satisfactory outcome aimed at a Council decision to open the negotiations **before the end of June 2013**. It welcomes the country's overall constructive role as regards relations with other enlargement countries, and encourages the continuing diplomatic exchanges between Athens, Sofia and Skopje. It stresses the importance of all sides demonstrating proper commitment to 'good neighbourly relations'. Parliament reiterates its position that **bilateral issues should be addressed as early as possible in the accession process** and should not be resorted to in order to hinder the EU accession process.

It strongly believes that the **start of negotiations can itself be a 'game-changer'**, providing a positive impulse and an effective instrument to further reforms, improve the domestic situation, facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue and promote favourable relations with neighbours.

Parliament underlines the fact that **the national parliament is a key democratic institution** for the discussion and resolution of political differences and asks all the political forces in the country to act in this spirit, respecting its procedures and the democratic values on which it was founded.

It also expresses deep concern at the **tensions in inter-ethnic relations** which have arisen during the year, stating that appropriate measures must be taken for **historical reconciliation** in order to overcome the divide between and within different ethnic and national groups, including citizens of Bulgarian identity. Parliament offers recommendations to this effect, stressing the need for **educational materials free of ideological interpretations of history** and aimed at improving mutual understanding.

The name issue: Parliament continues to regret that the **inability to solve the name dispute has blocked the country's road to EU membership** and agrees with the European Council that the name issue needs to be brought to a definitive conclusion with no delay on either side. It notes with concern the **phenomenon of 'antiquisation'**. It strongly supports the efforts of the UN special envoy to reach a commonly acceptable solution.

Political criteria: Parliament shares the Commission's assessment that **the country continues to fulfil the political criteria**. It calls for **reinforcement of Parliament's oversight role** vis-à-vis the government and stresses also the need for **further efforts on**:

- the independence and impartiality of the **judiciary;**

- strengthening of the **anti-corruption legal framework**, being concerned that corruption remains widespread both inside the country and in the region as a whole;

- promoting **freedom of information and pluralism of the media**. Parliament expresses concern that the country has fallen significantly in the 'Reporters Without Borders' Freedom Index;

- strengthening **anti-discrimination policies**, especially those related to discrimination based on ethnicity as well as on national identity;

- strengthening **civil society organisations** (CSOs).

Economic issues: Parliament notes that public sector debt has increased, the quality of fiscal governance has deteriorated, the global economic downturn has had a negative effect on foreign direct investment to the country, and that unemployment continues to be very high, with youth unemployment one of the highest worldwide.

Regional and international cooperation: Members underline the importance of regional cooperation in line with the European agenda and European values and call for further progress in this regard. They reaffirm that it is important for the EU to pursue the accession of all countries in the region without exception.