Resolution on the 2013 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

2013/2883(RSP) - 06/02/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 486 votes to 55 with 29 abstentions a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and reiterated its call to the Council to **set a date for the start of accession negotiations without further delay.** It welcomed the progress made in the EU integration process by the other countries in the region, but was concerned that further delay in the opening of accession talks could create an unreasonable disparity in the region, which could pose further risks to good interethnic relations and create a feeling among all Macedonian citizens of being left behind.

Parliament **invited Greece to use its Presidency to inject momentum into the European integration process of the country**, thereby reaffirming its commitment made in the 2003 Thessaloniki Agenda and creating a positive environment for settling bilateral differences, using its leadership to develop new initiatives to overcome the current stalemate in the negotiations and work towards a solution. Members considered that bilateral issues should not represent an obstacle to the official opening of accession negotiations, although they should be solved before the end of the accession process. They asked for more concrete results in terms of cooperation in order to establish good neighbourly relations between the three sides (Athens, Sofia and Skopje).

They stressed the need for a **negotiated and mutually acceptable solution to the name issue under UN auspices.** Bearing in mind the Albanian minority within the country and also the sensitive bilateral issues with other neighbouring countries, particularly Greece and Bulgaria, Parliament reiterated its position, sharing the view of the Commission in this regard, that bilateral issues should be addressed as early as possible in the accession process, in a constructive and neighbourly spirit and through an intensive and open dialogue in the spirit of the common European future. Gestures, controversial actions and statements which could negatively impact on good neighbourly relations should be avoided.

The resolution went on to discuss issues of concern relating to **reform of the judiciary, and public administration, and improving the situation of people belonging to minorities**. It also discussed **the independence and competence of courts and electoral reform.** On the latter issue, it endorsed the Government's commitment to comply with the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and emphasised the need for further efforts to increase transparent financing and accountability of political parties, urging action to avoid the blurring of state and party activities during election campaigns and secure cross-party agreement for an audit of the voters' register.

Parliament regretted the **deterioration of the country's reputation in relation to media freedom,** sharing the Commission's concern that the safeguarding of freedom of expression with diverse and pluralistic media free from political interference remained a vital challenge for the country. It pointed out that the lack of media pluralism was partly a result of government advertising and stressed the need to ensure the independence of the public service broadcaster, encouraging the authorities to adopt safeguards in media law in this respect. The current media law should be the object of further consultation and dialogue, so that such important reforms are agreed only if there is broad support across the country's journalistic community. Parliament supported the initiative of the country's Media Institute, with EU support, to publish a 'White Book' on enhancing civil society-media relations.

On economic issues, Members **recommended that the Commission should award the country 'functioning market economy status'.** They commended the government for preserving macroeconomic

stability, and welcomed the return to growth, noting the increase in GDP of 2.9 % in real terms in the first quarter of 2013 as compared with the same quarter in 2012. They also noted, however, that income convergence had been slow and shared the concern existing as to whether the public deficit target of 2,6 % by 2016 would be met and how public finances would be consolidated. Members went on to welcome the trend of positive changes in the labour market, with the annual unemployment rate falling by 4.2 %, and the ranking of the country in the World Bank's 'Doing Business' report as being among the top ten in the world showing the greatest progress in the business and regulatory environment.

Lastly, Parliament endorsed the Commission's call for the review of the Ohrid Framework Agreement to be completed and for implementation of its recommendations to commence.