South-Eastern Europe: stability pact, stabilisation and association agreements

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The committee adopted the report by Jan Joost LAGENDIJK (Greens/EFA, NL) on the Stability Pact for South-East Europe. The report called on the Union to play the leading role in the Stability Pact and wanted the action of the EU, as the principal donor for the region, to be closely dovetailed with that of the special coordinator responsible for the implementation of the pact. The committee supported the strategic concept underlying the pact and stressed that, with the introduction of the stabilisation and association process, the EU was offering the peoples in the region the prospect of being incorporated in the structures of the EU in the long term. It believed that the principle of political conditionality should also apply to the pact and that extreme nationalists should be isolated. If any of the parties involved pursued policies aimed at altering borders unilaterally or undertook action on these lines in such a way as to damage the Stability Pact, it should be excluded from the financing procedures of the pact. The report contended that a strict armaments control policy was essential to the stabilisation and security of those countries and therefore urged Member States as well as all the signatories to the Stability Pact to set up a common programme to assist and train local police forces while keeping national armies as limited in size as possible. The fight against corruption and organised crime was seen as crucial for creating a civil society. The report also welcomed the democratic developments in Croatia and encouraged the new government to take the necessary steps to ensure that negotiations for a stabilisation and association agreement could begin. It also considered that there should be a distinction between sanctions against the Yugoslav establishment and those against the population of the country, so that the latter could be gradually lifted, thereby enabling democratic dialogue within Yugoslavia to make progress. The report called for Montenegro to be allowed to take part in the political dialogue under way with democratic forces in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and also wanted the Moldovan Republic to be offered the opportunity to take part directly in the Stability Pact. The committee stressed the importance of independent media for the development of civil society and therefore welcomed the draft "Charter for Media Freedom" drawn up in the context of the Stability Pact. It also highlighted the importance of non-governmental organisations. Lastly, it supported the efforts of the Commission to create an effective mechanism for civilian crisis management and said it was open to the idea of setting up a "Rapid Reaction Fund".