South East Europe: stabilisation and association process. 2nd annual report 2003

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The committee adopted the report drawn up by Joost LAGENDIJK (Greens/EFA, NL) in response to the Commission's second annual report on the stabilisation and association process for South East Europe. In its general remarks, it stressed that "a European perspective" for the countries in South Eastern Europe depended on their respect for human rights. Financial and other help by the EU should therefore be linked to certain conditions. These countries should fully cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. They should also implement an effective policy for the return of refugees and actively combat corruption, organised crime and trafficking in human beings, arms and drugs. MEPs observed that countries which in practice make citizens' rights dependent on their ethnicity cannot expect to join the EU. Furthermore, it would be undesirable to allow countries which have signed bilateral agreements with the USA which undermine the International Criminal Court (ICC) to become members of the EU. The EU should gradually ease the conditions for granting visas to citizens of the South East European countries, as they undertake necessary reforms. The five countries concerned should also be able to make use of EU programmes such as Socrates for the exchange of teachers and students. As regards Albania specifically, MEPs were unhappy with the way the local elections on 12 October had been held. Albania should, moreover, strengthen the protection of its minorities. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the return of refugees to certain parts of the country was welcomed by MEPs, who nevertheless urged the authorities in the Republika Srpska to enable refugees to return to the Posavina region and to Banja Luka. The Bosnian authorities were urged to cooperate fully with the ICTY in The Hague and to do their utmost to bring Karadzic and Mladic to trial. Croatia was praised for not concluding a bilateral agreement with the USA on the ICC and for introducing a new law on the rights of national minorities. It should implement this law fully so as to guarantee the unobstructed return of all refugees. Croatia also needed to make significant improvements in its cooperation with the ICTY, combating corruption, freedom of the media and reform of the judicial system. The committee deplored the unilateral declaration by the Croatian authorities of an ecological and fishing zone in the Adriatic in spite of opposition by the Commission and the EU presidency, and called for an agreement on borders to be reached by diplomatic means. As regards Macedonia, MEPs called for the full dismantling of the Albanian National Liberation Army; full cooperation with the EU in putting an end to arms trafficking; the speeding-up of the implementation of the Ohrid agreement, especially in the reform of the police and army and the amnesty law for former NLA fighters; and a more active policy against corruption and organised crime. The committee said it expected the EU military presence to be maintained as long as necessary. The EU should no longer insist on keeping Serbia and Montenegro together at all costs, but leave it up to them what form their relationship should take, while helping them to work out a lasting and peaceful arrangement. The Serbian government was encouraged to press on with the current reform of the army and to take more action in the fight against corruption and organised crime. MEPs asked the OSCE and the Council of Europe to examine allegations of violations of human rights, a lack of independence of the judiciary and growing state influence over the media. Lastlyt, the report said that the EU should play an active role in achieving a conclusion on the final status of Kosovo within two years which would safeguard the principles of a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multireligious society.