Resolution on the state of regional integration in the western Balkans

2004/2599(RSP) - 14/04/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the state of regional integration in the western Balkans.

It stresses that the western Balkans constitutes a region of the highest priority for the EU, and its future is certainly one of European integration, but that this future depends to a very large extent on the countries in the region themselves. Parliament notes that elected bodies in the countries of the region need to be strengthened and recognises that this will require considerable additional financial resources. It expresses serious concern at the economic and social situation. The countries of the region can do much to help themselves to achieve further progress on the road to EU integration by fulfilling the following conditions: cooperation with the ICTY; implementation of an effective policy in favour of the return of refugees and displaced persons; respect for human and minority rights; implementation of active policies against corruption, organised crime and trafficking in human beings, arms and drugs; and effective economic cooperation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: ten years after the signing of the Dayton agreement, crucial political problems remain unresolved. The country is deeply divided and political stability is vulnerable. Parliament takes the view that new political initiatives based on a bottom-up participation of the three peoples living there in a sustainable peace as neighbours are urgently needed. It underlines therefore the need for the Commission to support the country’s political forces in finding a consensus to reform the political framework as set out in the Dayton agreement. Members draw attention to the priorities which have not yet been met: full cooperation with the ICTY, security issues, institution-building, infrastructure, energy. They also points out the contradiction inherent in some political forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which openly support European integration but obstruct the indispensable reforms needed for a functioning state.

Serbia and Montenegro: Parliament reiterates that the EU should be ready to assist Serbia and Montenegro to work out a lasting arrangement, while adopting a neutral stance on which form that relationship should take. It regrets that there is still a lack of cooperation from Serbia with the ICTY and calls on the authorities to make further progress with military and police reform, with a special focus on the secret police.

Kosovo: Parliament expresses its desire for the EU to start negotiations as soon as possible on the conclusion of a stabilisation and association agreement. It calls on the Council and the Commission to take the leading role in preparing the negotiations on final status and to exclude in advance the following options: return to a constitutional relationship with Serbia and Montenegro; unification with Albania or any other state or territory in the region; partition of Kosovo. It insists, however, on the need for the authorities in Kosovo to take decisive steps to increase security for all citizens of Kosovo.

Albania: Parliament is concerned that the political climate in Albania is problematic, with tensions within the ruling party having led to a split within the party. It condemns the Albanian government's inability to act effectively. Members call on the Albanian government to respect the rights of the ethnic Greek minority, and point out that progress in the negotiation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and Albania's European future are closely linked to respect for human and minority rights.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Parliament is of the view that the full participation of the latter in the European integration process will be beneficial not only for the country itself but also for the

entire region. Members regret that the March 2005 local elections were marred by irregularities. They take the view that the various EU bodies acting in the country should improve their coordination. In this regard, that the Commission should play a pivotal role in the implementation of EU policies in the country.

Croatia: Parliament welcomes the decision to grant Croatia candidate status. It takes note of the Council's decision to postpone the opening of accession talks with Croatia due to the absence of a common agreement about this country's full cooperation with the ICTY, calling on the Croatian government to do its utmost to prove it is fully cooperating with the ICTY. This is a basic test for all the countries in the region. It also calls on Croatia to settle the remaining border disputes through dialogue with Slovenia and to avoid unilateral acts which intend to prejudice the determination of the Slovenian-Croatian border and affect the demarcation of the border without consent.

The resolution stresses that the need for a clear allocation of responsibilities/competences between the European Agency for Reconstruction and the delegations of the European Commission in the region.

Parliament calls on the Commission and Council and the EU, as appropriate, to do the following:

- lay down a clear roadmap and accession strategy for the western Balkan countries over the next few years and, especially in view of the opening of negotiations with Croatia, Parliament asks that the EU send out an unambiguous message to the other south-east European states;
- support all governments in the region to prepare EU-compatible provisional National Development Plans similar to the one Turkey has prepared in order to build institutional absorption capacity for future EU assistance, especially in the areas of rural, infrastructure and human resources development;
- take urgent action to strengthen cooperation on border controls as part of a wider justice and home affairs strategy for the region, which should include a study by the Commission on the effects of a progressive easing of visa requirements for the countries of the region;
- make further efforts to assist the countries of the region in having their multi-ethnic heritage fully reflected in their education systems, and to ensure that they can take part in EU educational exchange programmes;
- promote the setting-up of twinning programmes at municipal level.

Lastly, Parliament notes that budgetary allocations for relations with the western Balkans have been significantly reduced every year since 2002. It states its determination to provide adequate funding in the next financial perspective taking into account the crucial challenges of the region, the gradual shift from physical reconstruction to institution-building and pre-accession assistance, as well as the region's strategic importance to the EU.