Report on Croatia's 2006 progress report

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Hannes SWOBODA (PES, AT) on Croatia's 2006 progress report. It congratulated the Croatian authorities on the rapid progress made so far in accession negotiations and stressed that key pieces of legislation in crucial areas such as public administration, the administration of courts and anti-corruption policy had already been adopted. However, the committee exhorted Croatia to make further efforts on several fronts. It should first strengthen its capacity to implement Community legislation, especially in the area of the environment. The Croatian government should therefore "fully respect and implement" international documents such as the Aarhus Convention (on public access to environmental information) and ratify the Kyoto Protocol in accordance with the most recent EC environmental strategies.

MEPs in the committee also pointed out that having "an open, competitive market economy is a fundamental requirement for EU membership". Croatia must thus comply with the agreed targets for the sale of "minority and majority state-owned interests in companies" and for the reduction of state subsidies in the shipbuilding and steel industries in particular. The committee appeals to Croatia to authorise the acquisition of real estate by EU nationals, with the exception of the exempted areas.

The committee also called on Croatia to continue to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and expressed concern about the Government's offer to support the defence costs of Croatian army generals. Croatia's institutions and political parties should counteract the public's perception of the ICTY as a hostile institution and publicise the role which it was playing in prosecuting crimes committed against Croat civilians. MEPs also criticised the "persisting bias amongst some judicial staff against non-Croatian nationals" and the insufficient protection of witnesses against intimidation. They pointed out that procedures for appointing and assessing judicial staff should provide "sufficient guarantees for a professional and independent judiciary", and that a recent amendment of the Courts Act introduces an obligation for judges to declare their assets and provides for the possibility of transferring judges to overburdened courts.

Other points raised by the committee included the integration of minorities into everyday life and the idea of including in pension calculations the years worked by people who lived in the Republika Srpska Krajina during the conflict.MEPs also urged Croatia to resolve the issue of its frontier with Slovenia in line with the conclusions of the European Council of June 2004.

Lastly, the committee voiced concern at the flagging public support for EU accession in Croatia and welcomed the fact that the Government and the opposition were joining forces in explaining to the public the economic, political, social and cultural benefits resulting from the accession process.