Report on Croatia's 2006 progress report

2006/2288(INI) - 25/04/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report by Hannes **SWOBODA** (PES, AT) on Croatia's 2006 progress report, and stated that it felt, in line with the Commission's communication on Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006-2007, that Croatia continued to meet the political criteria for accession. Croatia could be regarded as a functioning market economy that should be able to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union in the medium term, provided that it vigorously implemented its reform programme so as to remove the significant remaining weaknesses. Parliament congratulated the Croatian authorities on the rapid progress made so far in accession negotiations, particularly in the adoption of key pieces of legislation in crucial areas such as public administration, the administration of courts and anti-corruption policy.

Parliament asked the Croatian government to strengthen its capacity to implement laws transposed from the acquis communautaire into national legislation in all fields, especially in the area of the environment. In this regard, the Croatian authorities should take into due consideration the concerns raised by local communities and public opinion with regard to controversial industrial projects which might pose a threat to the environment or public health. The Croatian government must fully respect and implement international documents such as the Aarhus Convention and eventually ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

Whilst concerned by flagging public support for EU accession in Croatia, Parliament welcomed the fact that Government and opposition were joining forces in explaining to the public the economic, political, social and cultural benefits resulting from the accession process.

Parliament expressed concern about certain matters, such as the delay regarding the entry into force of certain provisions of the Civil Service Act. It commended Croatia for fully cooperating with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), but was concerned that the effective prosecution of war crimes might be undermined by hostility at local level, persisting bias amongst some of the judicial staff against non-Croatian nationals and insufficient protection of witnesses against intimidation. It urged the Croatian Government to continue actively to encourage the prosecution of war crimes, regardless of the nationality of the perpetrators. Parliament was also concerned about certain initiatives taken by the Government, notably its offer to support the defence costs for army generals and its request to act as amicus curiae in cases pending before the ICTY. All Croatian institutions and parties should counteract the public's perception of the ICTY as a hostile institution and publicise the role which the ICTY plays in prosecuting crimes committed against Croat civilians.

Parliament went on to call for the development of a concrete action plan for achieving proportional representation of minorities, pursuant to the provisions of the Constitutional Law and with adequate provisions for monitoring. It invited the Croatian authorities to reopen the deadline for the recognition of working years in respect of people who worked in the so-called "Republika Srpska Krajina" during the conflict and to allow these non-residents too to apply for such recognition.

The Croatian authorities were reminded that an open, competitive market economy was a fundamental requirement for EU membership, and were urged to implement more seriously the agreed targets for the sale of minority and majority state-owned interests in companies and the reduction of state subsidies, particularly in the shipbuilding and steel sectors. More should be done to open the Croatian market to foreign investors and service providers and to place them on the same footing as national operators. Parliament wanted Croatia to authorise, the acquisition of real estate by EU nationals, with the exception of the exempted areas, and recalled that this was already envisaged in the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Croatia.

Both the Croatian and the Slovenian governments were asked to reach an agreement on all their pending border issues, taking into account the agreements reached so far and the conclusions of the European Council of 17-18 June 2004, and invited them to abstain from any unilateral action which might undermine such an agreement.

Parliament then called on the Commission further to support a broad-based truth and reconciliation process, in Croatia and throughout the Western Balkans, and to include other neighbouring countries when necessary. This process should involve civil society, political actors and cultural figures, and it should lay the ground for lasting peace and stability in the region. This reconciliation process must, in particular, target young people and it should include a thorough review of school books and curricula for history studies.

Lastly, Parliament called on the new Member States to play an active role in Croatia's move towards accession, allowing Croatia to benefit from their experience of reforms.