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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Commission

pursuant to Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure

by Hannes Swoboda

on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

on Croatia's 2008 progress report

European Parliament resolution on Croatia's 2008 progress report

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the decision adopted by the Council on 3 October 2005 to open accession negotiations with Croatia,
 - having regard to its resolution of 28 February 2008 on Croatia's 2007 progress report¹,
 - having regard to the Croatia 2008 Progress Report, published by the Commission on 5 November 2008 (SEC(2008)2694),
 - having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas Croatia has made substantial progress across the board in all three areas covered by the Copenhagen criteria,
- B. whereas these considerable achievements need to be consolidated and matched by sustained efforts to adopt and implement the reforms addressed in the Commission's report and in the present resolution,
- C. whereas the conclusion by 2009 of technical negotiations with Croatia must remain the common objectives of all the parties involved,
- D. whereas recent killings and attacks have highlighted the need to tackle seriously and expeditiously corruption and organised crime in Croatia,
- E. whereas a new Minister of the Interior, a new Minister of Justice and a new acting Head of the Police have been recently appointed and entrusted with the task of addressing these issues,

General remarks

1. Commends Croatia for the good results it has achieved during 2008 in adopting the legislation and carrying out the reforms required to qualify for EU membership;
2. Is particularly pleased to note that legislative and regulatory work has finally been matched by efforts to strengthen and improve the administrative capacity required to implement such reforms;
3. Is confident that the goal of concluding negotiations in 2009 can be achieved, provided the Government of Croatia steps up its efforts to address some of the more sensitive issues linked with the accession process and finally meets the benchmarks in these areas too;

¹ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0120.

Political criteria

4. Is satisfied with the progress achieved as regards the adoption of key documents and key legislation in certain areas, notably anti-discrimination, women's rights, minority rights, return of refugees; points out that swift and effective implementation is now crucial;
5. Points, however, at the need to pursue the reform of public administration with the introduction of a new salary system and a comprehensive overhaul of administrative procedures in order to increase transparency, accountability and de-politicisation of the Croatian civil service; calls for specific attention to be paid to the regional and local administrations since their ability to take on new responsibilities is crucial for the success of the decentralisation process;
6. Believes that more earnest efforts need to be made in the judicial sector in order to address the root causes of the case backlog and of the excessively long judicial procedures, to kick-start a serious and comprehensive court rationalisation, covering all types of courts, to introduce an objective and transparent selection procedure for judges, to ensure that war crimes are treated in accordance with common standards, irrespective of ethnicity, and, finally, to find ways of addressing the problem of in absentia verdicts and trials, notably by means of strengthened regional cooperation;
7. Welcomes the fact that the Croatian Government has finally taken measures in order to tackle corruption and organised crime; emphasises that USKOK's (The Office for the Fight against Corruption and Organised Crime) increased investigative and prosecutorial activities must be matched by equal police and judicial efforts if these activities are to produce results; is of the opinion that zero tolerance must be shown at all levels and that verdicts must be reached and enforced, including the seizure of assets;
8. Is satisfied with the freedom of press in Croatia but draws attention to recent cases of intimidation and even killings of journalists investigating cases of corruption and organised crime; calls on the police and the judiciary to take resolute action to investigate and prosecute these cases so as to re-establish a positive climate in the country and to promote a good image of the country abroad;
9. Is pleased by progress achieved in the area of minority rights with the adoption of an Action Plan and with the increase in funding; emphasises, however, the need to concentrate on the economic and social rights of minorities, in particular their access to employment, and to devise a long term strategy for minorities' employment in public administration and judiciary; calls furthermore for the Councils on National Minorities to enjoy budgetary autonomy from the local authorities they are expected to advise, so that they can exercise their mandate in full independence;
10. Takes note that, whilst tangible results have been achieved in providing the conditions for refugee returns, much remains to be done in order to make these returns sustainable in terms of housing, particularly for former tenancy holders in urban areas, of integration, and of access to the labour market;
11. Welcomes furthermore the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and attaches great importance to the effective implementation of its provisions; calls on the

authorities, at national and local level, to show zero tolerance towards episodes of racial hatred and any other form of hatred and ensure that such episodes are duly prosecuted;

Economic criteria

12. Is encouraged by the increase in employment and the sustained economic growth recorded by Croatia; points nevertheless at persisting high unemployment rates amongst young people and minorities and at the impact which higher food prices and, more generally, inflation have on the livelihood of ordinary citizens;
13. Points to the need to tackle the growing trade and current account deficits, as well as external debt, that make the Croatian economy more vulnerable and exposed to risks; emphasises that, in order to maintain the current economic growth level and enable Croatia to catch up with EU Member States, it will be necessary to accelerate the pace of structural reforms;

Ability to assume the obligations of membership

14. Is generally pleased with the overall pace of legislative alignment; believes, however, that greater attention should be paid to the quality of legislation; encourages Croatian authorities to pursue their efforts to develop the administrative capacity required in order to implement the acquis;
15. Welcomes the decision by the Croatian authorities to proceed with tenders for the privatisation of the Croatian shipyards which should be completed in 2009, and emphasises that the sale of shipyards must take place in full transparency and in compliance with EU competition standards; calls on the Croatian Government, with the support of the European Commission, to adopt specific measures to offset the social costs of the restructuring;
16. Notes that progress in the agricultural sector has been very uneven and that the capacity to absorb rural development funds must be considerably improved; stresses that increased administrative capacity and reform of the agricultural support systems are essential to achieve a smooth transition to the EU Common Agricultural Policy regime and to minimise the social impact of such transition;
17. Invites the Croatian authorities to show good absorption of EU pre-accession funds and to prepare at all levels – central, regional and local – the structures and know-how required for the EU Structural and Cohesion Funds;

Regional Cooperation

18. Underlines that bilateral issues should not be an obstacle to accession; urges, nevertheless, the Croatian Government and the governments of the neighbouring countries to solve expeditiously all their outstanding issues;

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19. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Government and Parliament of Croatia.