

P5_TA(2004)0273

Application by Croatia for accession to the EU

European Parliament recommendation to the Council on the application by Croatia for accession to the European Union (2003/2254(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the proposal for a recommendation to the Council by Alexandros Baltas on behalf of the PSE Group on the application of Croatia for accession to the EU (B5-0476/2003),
- having regard to its position of 12 December 2001 on the proposal for a Council and Commission decision on the conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, on the one part, and the Republic of Croatia, on the other part¹,
- having regard to its position of 12 December 2001 on the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion and the provisional application of an Interim Agreement between the European Community, of the one part, and the Republic of Croatia, of the other part²,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, which set the criteria for countries seeking entry to the European Union,
- having regard to its position of 6 October 2000 on the proposal for a Council decision amending Decision 2000/24/EC so as to extend the Community guarantee granted to the European Investment Bank to cover loans for projects in Croatia³,
- having regard to its position of 15 November 2000 on the amended proposal for a Council regulation on assistance for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and amending Regulation (EEC) No 3906/89, Decision 97/256/EC and Regulation (EEC) No 1360/90⁴,
- having regard to United Nations Security Council resolution 827 of 25 May 1993, establishing the International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia,
- having regard to United Nations Security Council resolution 1503,
- having regard to its resolution of 20 November 2003 on the stabilisation and association process for south-east Europe – second annual report⁵,

¹ OJ C 177 E, 25.7.2002, p. 122.

² OJ C 177 E, 25.7.2002, p. 123.

³ OJ C 178, 22.6.2001, p. 297.

⁴ OJ C 223, 8.8.2001, p. 168.

⁵ P5_TA(2003)0523.

- having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement signed by Croatia and the European Community on 29 October 2001,
 - having regard to the Interim Agreement signed by Croatia and the European Community on 29 October 2001,
 - having regard to Croatia's application for accession to the European Union submitted on 21 February 2003,
 - having regard to the CARDS programme and the annual programme for Croatia adopted by the Commission in June 2003,
 - having regard to the Commission report on the stabilisation and association process for south-east Europe – second annual report (COM(2003) 139),
 - having regard to the declaration of the Ministerial Conference for the Sustainable Development of Fisheries in the Mediterranean held in Venice on 25-26 November 2003,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the European Councils in Thessaloniki (20-22 June 2003) and Brussels (12-13 December 2003) regarding Croatia,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers of 13 October 2003 and 9 December 2003 regarding Croatia,
 - having regard to Rule 49(3) and Rule 104 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy (A5-0206/2004),
- A. welcoming Croatia's application for accession to the European Union and stressing Croatia's European vocation and the symbolic nature of an application for accession from another country of the former Yugoslavia,
 - B. asserting that Croatia's desire to join the European Union could serve as a further example and incentive for the other countries of the Balkan region,
 - C. whereas Croatia's application for accession represents a logical continuation of the steps it has already taken in an effort to bring the country as close as possible to the European Union, such as the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the introduction and gradual implementation of the legal reforms needed to enable the *acquis communautaire* to be fully incorporated,
 - D. whereas anchoring Croatia within the European Union would breathe new life into the region and contribute to its development,
 - E. understanding that the process of bringing Croatia closer to the European Union and the impetus this is giving to the Balkan region reflect the key role that the Union can continue to play to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the region; whereas the Union is aware from its own historical and recent experience of the positive impact which a prospective accession can have on all countries aspiring to become candidates,

- F. considering that the legislative elections of 23 November 2003 were conducted in a proper manner and in accordance with the standards expected of any democratic country,
- G. welcoming the new constitutional law of 13 December 2002 on the rights of national minorities, which provides a necessary and useful framework for regulating their status,
- H. noting that the new government, like its predecessor, supports Croatia's accession to the European Union,
- I. whereas the economic reforms carried out by Croatia in recent years have improved the performance of the Croatian economy (growth in GDP rose from 4.1% in 2001 to 5.2% in 2002, while inflation fell from 7.4% in 2000 to 2.3% in 2002),
- J. whereas Croatia is already benefiting from the Interim Agreement, which is encouraging the opening-up of the European market and having a favourable impact on the Croatian economy, although it is to be regretted that the Stabilisation and Association Agreement has not yet come into force,
- K. aware in any case that the signing of this Agreement has prompted highly significant legislative reforms and directly contributed to strengthening cooperation on economic and social development and establishing frameworks for political dialogue and cooperation on justice and home affairs,
- L. welcoming Croatia's ratification of the statute setting up the International Criminal Court, it being the first south-eastern European country to do so, and Croatia's refusal to conclude a bilateral agreement with the United States concerning the International Criminal Court; noting that Croatia's cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has not always been satisfactory, tarnishing the country's image within the international community and adversely affecting the process for the ratification of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement by some Member States; welcoming, however, the government's promise to cooperate fully with the Tribunal,
- M. supporting the common position adopted by the Council on 16 April 2003 aimed at supporting the effective implementation of the mandate of the ICTY by placing a travel ban on persons involved in perverting the course of justice,
- N. taking the view that Croatia's active participation in the Stability Pact has encouraged regional cooperation, although further efforts are needed by all countries concerned to reinforce the climate of security and mutual trust,
- O. asserting that the prospect of accession could provide impetus for continuing the reforms needed for the modernisation of the country, particularly the strengthening of democratic institutions, the rule of law and respect for human and minority rights,
- P. welcoming the agreement concluded by the new government with the Serb minority; stressing the importance of measures to encourage the return of all refugees and, in this connection, recalling the undertakings given by Croatia under the Dayton, Paris and Erdut agreements,

- Q. whereas the decision by the Croatian Government on the creation of an ecological zone for fisheries protection in the Adriatic despite the prospects of concluding a multilateral agreement involving all the countries in the Adriatic Basin has provoked political tension in its relations with Slovenia and Italy,
- R. noting the declaration of the Ministerial Conference for the Sustainable Development of Fisheries in the Mediterranean, which stipulated inter alia that the establishment of fisheries zones makes it possible to improve fisheries conservation and control and helps achieve better resources management and a joint commitment to combat illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing; whereas, without prejudice to the sovereign rights of states and in accordance with relevant international law, a more detailed examination should be made of how fisheries protection zones are created, taking into account the precedents that exist, with a view to employing a concerted regional approach based on dialogue and coordination,
- S. reaffirming that enlargement is an evolutionary process open to any European country which complies with the criteria laid down in Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union and fulfils the Copenhagen criteria,
- T. recognising that Croatia's application for accession to the European Union is a challenge which Croatia is ready to take up, and stressing that a favourable response would have a significant impact on the other countries of south-east Europe,
1. Addresses the following recommendations to the Council:
- (a) to stress the need for Croatia to meet the undertakings deriving from the Dayton and Paris agreements, particularly as regards the return of refugees;
 - (b) to call on Croatia to pursue the dialogue with its neighbours in order to reach agreement on the borders between Slovenia and Croatia and on outstanding issues with Italy;
 - (c) to encourage Croatia to persist in its participation in the Alpe Adria Organisation in order to improve cross-border cooperation with Italy, Slovenia and Hungary and to enhance new cross-border cooperation programmes with Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro;
 - (d) to call on Croatia to help further strengthen the Stability Pact for the countries of south-east Europe with a view to improving security and mutual trust among all countries of the region;
 - (e) to point to the need to comply with international law and to the importance of maintaining regional cooperation and good-neighbourly relations by adopting an approach based on compromise and dialogue with a view to multilateral management of fish stocks and natural resources in the Adriatic;
 - (f) to call on Croatia to improve its cooperation with the ICTY further, recalling the importance attached to it by the European Union;

- (g) to urge Croatia to adopt the measures necessary to prevent entry into or transit through its territory by persons sought by the ICTY, in line with the aforementioned Council common position;
- (h) to welcome the holding of domestic trials against war crime suspects, to emphasise that legal proceedings should be instituted against suspects irrespective of their ethnic origin and that there must be one standard of criminal liability applied to all who face war crime charges before Croatian courts;
- (i) to call on the Croatian authorities to continue their policy of encouraging the return of refugees by:
 - implementing the legal framework effectively (particularly as regards the restoration of property), at local level especially,
 - taking economic measures to encourage refugees, such as access to housing, job opportunities and financial support for reconstruction work,
 - creating a socio-psychological climate that will inspire confidence and be welcoming for refugees and displaced persons;
- (j) to stress the need for an independent judiciary and to urge the Croatian authorities to pursue the reform strategy launched in 2002; to emphasise that Croatia should, in particular in connection with domestic war crime trials, enforce the newly enacted legislation providing for adequate witness protection measures;
- (k) to make every effort to assist the Croatian authorities to introduce efficient administrative structures to ensure that reforms are implemented;
- (l) to insist on the freedom and independence of the media and to urge the Croatian authorities to hone the legal provisions governing Croatian Radio-Television (HRT) so as to remove the possibility of political interference and bring it fully into line with European standards;
- (m) to encourage the active participation of all citizens and non-governmental organisations in consolidating democracy, taking care to guarantee the rights of ethnic minorities and the Roma;
- (n) to welcome the appointment of the Serb minority representatives to the Croatian Government and the election of eight ethnic minority representatives to the Croatian Parliament, which was made possible by the new, amended, electoral law that has thus increased their numbers by comparison with the previous parliament;
- (o) to encourage Croatia to pursue the economic and structural reforms needed to develop and safeguard a viable market economy, while drawing attention to the need to ensure transparency and speed up the privatisation process;
- (p) to call on the new Member States to play an active role in Croatia's move towards accession, using their knowledge of the region and allowing Croatia to benefit from their experience during this period of reform;

- (q) to urge Member States which have not yet done so to ratify the Stabilisation and Association Agreement;
- (r) to call on Croatia to continue its efforts to combat corruption, which must be supported through the effective implementation of the relevant legislation;
- (s) to call on the Council to consider providing greater Union assistance in support of the CARDS, SAPARD and ISPA programmes and instruments such as Twinning and TAIEX by mobilising additional financial resources from the EIB, the EBRD and international financial institutions, as well as from private investment sources, so as to support the reform process as effectively as possible and ensure the funding of networks and infrastructures in key sectors of the country's economy;
- (t) to promote information about the European Union and its values, as well as the benefits and obligations entailed by accession;
- (u) to salute Croatia's determination to tie its future to that of the European Union, its democratic standards and duties, and its values, which are shared by all the peoples of Europe;

2. Instructs its President to forward this recommendation to the Council and, for information, to the Commission and the Government and Parliament of Croatia.