

P7_TA(2010)0278

Iceland's application for membership of the European Union

European Parliament resolution of 7 July 2010 on Iceland's application for membership of the European Union

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Regulation (EU) No 540/2010 of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 June 2010 adding Iceland to the list of countries eligible for EU pre-accession aid to help applicant countries come into line with the body of European law,
 - having regard to the Commission Opinion on Iceland's application for membership of the European Union (SEC(2010)0153),
 - having regard to the decision of the European Council of 17 June 2010 to open accession negotiations with Iceland,
 - having regard to its resolution of 26 November 2009 on the Commission's 2009 enlargement strategy paper concerning the Western Balkan countries, Iceland and Turkey¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 11 February 2010 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1085/2006 of 17 July 2006 establishing an Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) (COM(2009)0588 – C7-0279/2009 – 2009/0163(COD))²,
 - having regard to statements by the Council and Commission on Iceland's application for membership of the European Union,
 - having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas, according to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, 'Any European State [...] may apply to become a member of the Union',
- B. whereas each country's progress towards membership of the EU is a merit-based one and depends on its efforts to comply with the accession criteria, while the Union's capacity for integration must also be respected,
- C. whereas on 17 July 2009 Iceland presented its application for membership of the European Union,
- D. whereas, on 24 February 2010, the Commission presented its opinion recommending that negotiations for accession should be opened with Iceland,
- E. whereas, since previous enlargements have undoubtedly been a success both for the EU and for the Member States which joined it, and have contributed to the stability, development and prosperity of Europe as a whole, it is essential to create the conditions needed to

¹ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2009)0097.

² Texts adopted, P7_TA(2010)0026.

complete the accession process with Iceland and ensure that its accession, too, will be a success, in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria,

- F. whereas relations between Iceland and the EU date back to 1973 when they signed a bilateral free-trade agreement,
- G. whereas Iceland is already cooperating closely with the EU as a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) and a signatory to the Schengen Agreements and the Dublin Regulation, and therefore has already adopted a significant part of the *acquis communautaire*,
- H. whereas Iceland has a well-established democratic tradition and a high degree of alignment with the *acquis*,
- I. whereas since 1994 Iceland has been making an important contribution to European cohesion and solidarity through the Financial Mechanism under the EEA,
- J. whereas Iceland, as a country with a non-military tradition, is contributing to EU peacekeeping missions with civilian capacity and aligns itself regularly with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy,
- K. whereas Iceland and its population have been severely hit by the global financial and economic crisis leading to the collapse of the Icelandic banking system in 2008,
- L. whereas the United Kingdom and Netherlands Governments signed two agreements with the Icelandic Government, in June and October 2009, on terms for the repayment of a loan of EUR 1.3 billion from the Netherlands and a loan of GBP 2.4 billion from the United Kingdom; whereas, following a referendum on 6 March 2010, the October agreement was rejected and the parties involved are expected to reach a new agreement in relation to payouts that were within the responsibility of the Icelandic deposit guarantee scheme,
- M. whereas the EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA) has stated, in its letter of formal notice of 26 May 2010, that Iceland is obliged to ensure payment of the minimum compensation to Icesave depositors in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands,
- N. whereas public opinion and political parties in Iceland are divided on the question of EU membership; whereas public opinion towards EU membership has, in the light of the political and economic crisis, clearly shifted in a negative direction since summer 2009,

Political criteria

1. Welcomes the decision of the European Council to open accession negotiations with Iceland;
2. Welcomes the prospect of having as a new EU Member State a country with a strong democratic culture; emphasises, in this context, that Iceland's accession can benefit both the country and the EU and will further enhance the Union's role as a worldwide promoter and defender of human rights and fundamental freedoms;
3. Highlights the excellent cooperation between the Members of the European Parliament and the members of the Althingi in the framework of the EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee and expects an equally fruitful collaboration in the new EP-Iceland Joint Parliamentary

Committee;

4. Particularly welcomes the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative, enabling both Iceland and the EU to position themselves strongly with regard to legal protection of the freedoms of expression and information;
5. Invites the Icelandic authorities to tackle the current distinction made between EU citizens concerning their right to vote and stand as candidates in local elections in Iceland;
6. Points out that, under the new EU enlargement strategy, the applicant country's judicial system is one of the areas to which the EU pays particular attention even at the early pre-accession stage; is of the opinion that the Government of Iceland should adopt the measures necessary to ensure the independence of the judiciary, in line with Venice Commission recommendations, adequately addressing the issue of the predominant role given to the Minister of Justice and Human Rights in the appointment of judges, prosecutors and supreme judicial authorities; trusts that the Icelandic authorities will adopt the necessary changes;
7. Encourages Iceland to ratify the UN Convention against Corruption and the Council of Europe Civil Law Convention on Corruption;
8. Commends Iceland for its good human rights record; invites the Icelandic authorities, however, to ratify the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
9. Encourages Iceland to follow the 2008 OSCE-ODIHR recommendations on hate crime;

Economic criteria

10. Notes that Iceland has a generally satisfactory track record in implementing its EEA obligations and in its ability to withstand competitive pressure and market forces within the EU; notes, however, that further efforts are needed in relation to alignment with general principles and ensuring full compliance with the *acquis* in the fields of conformity assessment, accreditation and market surveillance; takes note of the ESA letter of formal notice dated 26 May 2010 to the Government of Iceland – the first step in an infringement procedure against it for failure to comply with its obligations under the EEA agreement to implement the EU Deposit Guarantee Directive (94/19/EC) – and welcomes the Icelandic Government's reaction of readiness to conclude the Icesave negotiations as soon as possible;
11. Welcomes policies to further diversify Iceland's economy as a necessary step for the country's long-term economic well-being;
12. Points out that the environment is a priority for the EU and welcomes Iceland's strong involvement in environmental policies;
13. Notes that, while fiscal consolidation remains a key challenge, Iceland shows encouraging signs of economic stabilisation; regards monetary measures taken so far as steps in the right direction for improved financial and economic stability;

14. Welcomes the report of the Special Investigation Commission, which may contribute to rebuilding national confidence; encourages follow-up measures to the work of this Commission in order to address the pressing political, economic and institutional shortcomings described in the report;
15. Welcomes the fact that the Icelandic Pension Funds Association (IPFA) has agreed to organise an independent investigation into the working methods and investment policies of pension schemes in the period before the economic collapse;
16. Calls for a bilateral agreement to be concluded on arrangements for the repayment of loans totalling EUR 3.9 billion to the Governments of the UK and the Netherlands; stresses that reaching an agreement acceptable to all parties will restore confidence in Iceland's ability to honour its commitments, including compliance with all obligations under the EEA agreement, and will strengthen the public support, both in Iceland and in the EU, for the Icelandic accession process;
17. Takes note of Iceland's desire to become part of the euro zone, an ambition that can be achieved after it becomes a member of the EU and once all the necessary conditions have been met;
18. Welcomes the approval of the second review of the IMF stand-by agreement aimed at currency stabilisation, bank restructuring and fiscal consolidation;
19. Is concerned about Iceland's high levels of unemployment and inflation, while noting recent signs of improvement;
20. Commends Iceland for its high rates of investment in education, research and development;

Capacity to assume the obligations of membership

21. Notes that, as an EEA member, Iceland is at an advanced stage of compliance with the requirements of 10 of the negotiating chapters and partly fulfils the requirements of 11 chapters, leaving only 12 chapters not covered by the EEA that need to be negotiated in full; stresses that the Commission has underlined the need for Iceland to pursue serious efforts to align its legislation with the *acquis* in a number of areas and to implement and enforce it effectively in the medium term in order to meet the accession criteria; emphasises that the fulfilment of Iceland's obligations under the EEA, as well as the agreement associating Iceland with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen *acquis*, are important requirements in the accession negotiations;
22. Invites the Icelandic authorities to address the key institutional weaknesses of the country's economy, notably the organisation and functioning of the financial supervisory system and the deposit guarantee system;
23. Encourages Iceland to adopt an agricultural and rural development policy in line with EU policies, and to put in place the administrative structures needed to implement these policies; stresses, in this regard, that EU policies must take into account the specific nature of Iceland's environment, flora and fauna, as well as its geographical distance from the European continental mainland;
24. Calls on the Commission to involve the Icelandic authorities in the current debates on

reform of the Common Agricultural Policy;

25. Recognises the responsible and sustainable manner in which Iceland has managed its marine resources and expects both the EU and the Icelandic authorities to adopt a constructive attitude in negotiations on the requirement for Iceland to adopt the European Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), so that the outcome may be a mutually satisfactory solution based on best practices and protecting the interest of both fishermen and consumers in the EU, as well as in Iceland;
26. Encourages Iceland to adopt fisheries-policy measures that will allow it to make the transition towards introduction of the CFP;
27. Insists that Iceland cease all whaling and drop all the reservations it has lodged with the International Whaling Commission;
28. Notes that Iceland can make a valuable contribution to EU environment and energy policies through its experience in the field of renewable energies, particularly geothermic energy, the protection of the environment and the fight against climate change;

Regional cooperation

29. Considers Iceland's accession to the EU – inasmuch as it will further anchor the European presence in the Arctic Council – as a strategic opportunity for the EU to play a more active and constructive role, and also to contribute to multilateral governance, in the Arctic Region; points out that this will help in tackling environmental issues of common concern and could heighten EU interest in the Arctic and its protection at regional and international level;
30. Welcomes the fact that Iceland's accession to the EU would reinforce the North Atlantic dimension of the Union's external policies;

Public opinion and support for enlargement

31. Encourages the Icelandic authorities to initiate a broad public debate about EU accession, involving civil society in the process from the outset, addressing Icelandic citizens' concerns about EU membership and taking into account the need for a firm commitment in order to have successful negotiations; calls on the Commission to provide material and technical support, if requested to do so by the Icelandic authorities, in order to help them improve transparency and accountability in relation to the accession process and to organise a thorough and extensive country-wide campaign of information on the implications of EU membership, so that Icelandic citizens can make an informed choice in the future referendum on accession;
32. Is of the view that it is crucial to give EU citizens clear and comprehensive information on the implications of Iceland's accession; calls on the Commission and the Member States to make efforts to that end, and considers it to be equally important to listen to and address citizens' concerns and questions and to respond to their views and interests;

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33. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the President of the Althingi and the Government of Iceland.