



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009 - 2014

Session document

1.2.2010

B7-0065/2010

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Commission
pursuant to Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure
on the 2009 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Zoran Thaler

on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

B7-0065/2010

European Parliament resolution on the 2009 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions issued following the Thessaloniki European Council of 19 and 20 June 2003, at which a promise was made to all the Western Balkan states that they would join the European Union,
- having regard to the European Council decision of 16 December 2005 to grant the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the status of candidate country for EU membership and to the Presidency Conclusions issued following the European Councils of 15 and 16 June 2006 and 14 and 15 December 2006,
- having regard to the 1995 Interim Accord between the Hellenic Republic and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,
- having regard to the Commission's 2009 Progress Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Commission communication of 14 October 2009 entitled 'Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009-2010'¹,
- having regard to the conclusions of the sixth meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the EU of 27 July 2009,
- having regard to the recommendations of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee of 31 March 2009,
- having regard to the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia readmission agreement of 18 September 2007 and to Council Regulation 1244/2009 of 30 November 2009², adopted on 1 December 2009, amending Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 of 15 March 2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement,
- having regard to Council Decision 2008/212/EC of 18 February 2008³ on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,
- having regard to the conclusions of the General Affairs and Foreign Affairs Councils of 7 and 8 December 2009,
- having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

¹ COM(2009)0533.

² OJ L 336, 18.12.2009, p.1.

³ OJ L 80, 19.3.2008, p.32.

- A. whereas the enlargement process is beneficial for both the acceding countries and the European Union as a whole,
- B. whereas the prospect of EU integration is continuing to have a positive influence on reforms in the Western Balkan region and helping to make it more stable, peaceful and prosperous,
- C. whereas the fight against corruption in any country wishing to join the EU is an important priority on the EU's accession agenda,
- D. whereas the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is continuing the reform process and will join the European Union as soon as it fulfils all the Copenhagen criteria,
 - 1. Commends the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the progress achieved since the last progress report; notes with satisfaction that, on the basis of that progress, the Commission has recommended opening accession negotiations; calls on the Council to confirm the Commission's recommendation without further delay at the summit in March 2010, and expects negotiations to begin in the near future;
 - 2. Stresses that the clear, tangible and timely prospect of EU membership continues to be the main driving force for the reform process in countries in the region, and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in particular; recalls, moreover, that unhindered progress towards EU membership is of the utmost importance for ensuring political stability, which is the common goal broadly shared by the country's political actors and ethnic groups;

Political developments

- 3. Welcomes the broad consensus between the government and opposition parties on the country's European vocation; notes with satisfaction that this consensus and improved political dialogue have accelerated the passing of laws on EU integration; stresses, however, the importance of implementing such laws effectively; welcomes the fact that the vast majority of the population supports the process of EU accession and is therefore committed to the necessary reforms;
- 4. Welcomes the good progress the country has made in the fight against corruption, and in particular the passing of a law on political party financing; notes, however, that corruption – a common problem facing countries in the region – remains prevalent, and that further energetic efforts must be made in order to eradicate it;
- 5. Recalls that effective parliaments, which fulfil their role as legislators and oversee governments' activities, are a foundation of democracy; welcomes, in this respect, the passing of a law on the country's parliament, which considerably improves its functioning; notes that there is a need further to improve the functioning of parliament and enhance the role of the opposition by amending parliament's rules of procedure in line with European best practices; deplores the recent decision by one political party to withdraw from parliamentary activity and urges all political parties to pursue a generally accepted solution leading to the normalisation of parliamentary work;

6. Commends the authorities on the conduct of the presidential and local elections, which represented good progress compared with the 2008 parliamentary elections; notes with satisfaction that the elections met most international standards, and calls on the government to continue its implementation of the remaining OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, in particular by updating the electoral roll, ensuring equal access to the media for parties and candidates and fully implementing the provisions on campaign financing; highlights a number of reported cases of voters, in particular civil servants, facing pressure and intimidation, which need to be addressed; welcomes the fact that some perpetrators of irregularities have been brought to justice, and expects the remaining irregularities to be investigated and their perpetrators prosecuted;
7. Stresses the utmost importance of improving inter-ethnic relations, including guaranteeing the rights of people from all ethnic backgrounds, by continuing to implement the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which is the cornerstone of inter-ethnic relations in the country; calls on all the communities and their leaders to respect the sensitivities of other groups and in particular to refrain from using inflammatory language and provocative symbolism undermining the role of other ethnic groups; stresses, moreover, the importance of education in the integration process and, in this connection, calls on the authorities to phase out the practice of ethnically separated shifts in schools;
8. Draws particular attention to the ongoing process of decentralisation, which is an important step in terms of helping the country to function better and improving inter-ethnic relations; stresses that, in order to ensure the successful implementation of this process, municipalities must be provided with sufficient funds to carry out their new tasks, and that their capacity to perform the competences transferred must be enhanced;
9. Stresses that access to justice for citizens is a vital element of the rule of law; welcomes, in this respect, the progress achieved in the field of the judiciary and the government's commitment to continuing with the reforms, as shown, inter alia, by increased funding for the courts and the public prosecutor's office; underlines the importance of implementing laws and calls on the authorities further to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and ensure judges' impartiality; notes that the backlog of court cases has decreased and encourages the authorities further to improve the system's efficiency, while continuing to enhance respect for human rights in the context of investigation and judicial procedures; calls, moreover, for the law on legal aid to be passed swiftly;
10. Notes the progress achieved in reforming the functioning of the public administration in general, and the passing of the law on civil servants in particular; calls on the authorities to ensure compliance with the law by putting a stop to unlawful promotion practices and the hiring of temporary staff outside the scope of the law;
11. Welcomes the progress achieved in reforming the police and introducing a new career advancement system, which contributes to the process of depoliticising the police; calls on the authorities to continue with the reforms in order to ensure effective, democratic mechanisms for supervising the police and prevent police misconduct and abuses of power;
12. Urges the authorities further to promote the development of independent and diverse media free from political interference; underlines the need to strengthen media freedom on

an ongoing basis by applying European standards and improving transparency;

13. Calls on the authorities to develop an anti-discrimination strategy (guaranteeing the equality of all people regardless of their ethnic origin, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation or disability) and to adopt all the necessary legislation to this end; stresses the need for energetic efforts to improve the situation of women and children and protect them from domestic violence;
14. Calls on the government to make further efforts to increase the currently limited participation of women in political life; welcomes the positive measures taken, which have increased the proportion of women in the national parliament; considers, however, that further efforts are needed, particularly with a view to increasing the participation of women in political life at local level;
15. Welcomes the new institutional framework of equal opportunities committees that has been put in place, and hopes that these committees will receive adequate resources and clear mandates;
16. Notes that, although a policy to combat domestic violence has been adopted, the Commission is of the view that such violence continues to be an area of concern; is pleased to note that the definition of statutory rape has been widened, which will mean greater protection for women;
17. Calls, in this context, on all municipalities to sign the memorandum of cooperation for the implementation of Roma inclusion activities between 2005 and 2015, along with the Strategy for Roma, with a view to addressing Roma issues at local level in cooperation with government institutions; urges the Macedonian authorities to increase the level of funding for the implementation of operational plans as part of the national action plan for Roma women;
18. Underlines the important role played by civil society organisations in the country's ongoing transformation, in relation not only to the reform process and the fight against corruption, but also – equally importantly – to inter-ethnic relations and monitoring of the human rights situation; stresses that such activities should be adequately supported by the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, in Skopje and the rest of the country;

Economic and social situation

19. Commends the government on the macro-economic policies adopted to counteract the negative effects of the global financial and economic crisis; is concerned that the impact of the financial crisis on the country will exacerbate the persistently high unemployment level and hamper efforts to bring it down; stresses that the authorities should do their utmost to shield vulnerable groups within society as much as possible from the effects of the crisis;
20. Congratulates the country on its improved ranking in the latest World Bank report, entitled 'Doing Business 2009'; points out, however, that the procedures for registering businesses and protecting property rights have still not been improved sufficiently, and that the education system is not well enough resourced to produce the human resources

needed to develop the economy;

21. Notes the recent protest mounted by trade unions against proposed government changes to the Labour Law that might reduce workers' rights and freedoms; expresses serious concern over the status of workers, particularly female workers in textile factories; points out that equal treatment for women and equal employment opportunities are a core feature of a prosperous and competitive economy;
22. Considers that, although the alignment of environmental legislation is moderately advanced, its implementation at local level still requires considerable improvement; reiterates its call for effective monitoring of water quality and water levels in the Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran border lakes and the river Vardar; calls for closer cross-border cooperation on environmental issues, on the basis of EU standards, and welcomes in this regard initiatives at regional level, such as the recent meeting between the premiers of Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania;
23. Calls, in recognition of the importance of these ecosystems, for effective steps – based on sustainable development – to be taken to curb the negative impact of human and economic activities on such ecosystems, having particular regard to endangered species and the overall health of fragile habitats; stresses, in this context, that delays in the construction of waste-water management projects in all major cities, towns and industrial plants are a matter of concern;
24. Urges the authorities to start investing in the maintenance and upgrading of the railway network, which is, both ecologically and economically, a viable alternative to the road system as well as being crucial for the resumption of sound regional cooperation; encourages the country to ensure better integration of its transport system with those of all its neighbouring countries, particularly as regards the public sector, and calls on the Commission to provide the necessary technical and financial assistance within the framework of the IPA;
25. Congratulates the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on its progress in preparing to take over the management of funds under the IPA; notes with satisfaction the accreditation of national authorities for the IPA components on regional development, human resources development and rural development; calls on the country's government and the Commission to speed up the necessary work with a view to transferring management of the IPA components on transition assistance and institution-building and on cross-border cooperation; stresses the importance of the IPA as an important tool designed to assist the country in preparing for future EU membership;

Regional issues

26. Congratulates the country on having fulfilled all the benchmarks for the visa liberalisation regime, as a result of which Council Regulation 1244/2009 grants it visa-free status from 19 December 2009; commends the government for showing regional responsibility by offering the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina the expertise of the key negotiator for visa negotiations;
27. Welcomes the country's participation in EU civilian and military missions and its

alignment with the majority of EU declarations and common positions; notes the recent establishment of diplomatic relations with Kosovo, and the conclusion of an agreement on the physical demarcation of the border, as a vital contribution to regional stability;

28. Recalls that, in accordance with the relevant European Council conclusions of 19 and 20 June 2008 and those of the General Affairs and Foreign Affairs Councils of 7 and 8 December 2008 and 8 December 2009, maintaining good neighbourly relations, including a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution on the name issue, continues to be essential;
29. Welcomes, to this end, the new, more positive climate between the governments of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece following the recent elections in Greece and, in particular, the recent meetings between the two prime ministers; encourages the two countries to redouble their efforts at the highest level with a view to finding a mutually satisfactory solution to the name issue, under the auspices of the UN, and stresses that the European Union should be ready to assist in the negotiation process; notes with concern the use of historical arguments in the current debate, including the recent phenomenon of so-called 'antiquisation', which is liable to increase tensions with neighbours and create new internal divisions;
30. Welcomes the new Greek Government's initiative of suggesting a symbolic, motivating target date of 2014 for the accession of Western Balkan countries to the EU; invites, in this context, the governments of countries in the region to make a sincere contribution to achieving this noble goal;
31. Underlines the importance of reconciliation and understanding in the region, which are part and parcel of European values and principles, and encourages the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and neighbouring countries to engage actively in developing and implementing confidence-building measures in the fields of education and cross-border cooperation and generating a common understanding of history; calls on the authorities of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and neighbouring countries to avoid actions and statements which might adversely affect such efforts; notes that joint celebrations of common historic events with neighbouring EU Member States contribute to a better understanding of history and the maintenance of good neighbourly relations;
32. Calls on the authorities in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to take the necessary measures to discourage 'hate speech' relating to neighbouring EU Member States in the media and similar statements in school textbooks;
33. Calls on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and neighbouring countries to contribute to a political culture based on mutual respect, understanding, trust and tolerance; stresses, in this regard, the primary responsibility of politicians and the media;
34. Stresses the key responsibility of governments in the region for peace, security and stability, as well as the important role played in this respect by the EU institutions, and urges them to give careful consideration to the consequences of their decisions and actions; notes with concern, in this connection, the Council's postponement of the decision on further steps in the enlargement process in respect of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which is liable both to aggravate political inter-ethnic tensions in the country and to have an adverse effect on stability in the region;

35. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the government and parliament of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.