

ORAL QUESTION O-0060/00/rev.1

pursuant to Rule 42 of the Rules of Procedure

by Enrique Barón Crespo, Johannes Swoboda, Pierre Schori and Jannis Sakellariou, on behalf of the PSE Group
to the Commission

Subject: Support for the process of democratisation and stabilisation in Croatia

In January 2000 there were parliamentary elections in Croatia, and in February presidential elections which have resulted in a radical shift in policy. The coalition government of SDP/HSLs and a four-party grouping affords the country a unique opportunity of developing a democratic state based on the rule of law without any nationalistic or xenophobic excesses. The government programme for 2000-2004 contains all the measures needed for this. And the first decisions taken by the government with the support of parliament clearly point towards a speedy democratisation of the country, which could set an example for the region. The prime minister, Ivica Račan, has stressed that Croatia wants to become a full member of the European community of values in the Balkans and that it feels co-responsible for the further development of the region as a whole. The noticeable improvement in relations with Bosnia/Herzegovina, the cooperation with the UN tribunal in The Hague, active support for minority rights and equal rights for returning refugees are the first tangible evidence of the change. Croatia will not be able to follow this difficult path on its own since it is deeply in debt and the combination of structural crisis and severe economic losses as a result of the Kosovo crisis in 1999 have removed what economic basis the country had. The 2000 budget, which has now been adopted by the Croatian parliament, is an extreme belt-tightening measure to revitalise the budgetary situation of the country as rapidly as possible. The EU has been asked to provide aid rapidly, effectively and without any bureaucracy.

1. In the Commission's opinion, what are the prospects for a speedy commencement and conclusion of negotiations on a stability and association agreement with Croatia? What is the position of the European Council on this issue? What scope is there for speeding up the negotiations?
2. How can the EU ensure that meaningful proposals by Croatia for the stability pact can be taken into account at the June conference?
3. What financial and manpower proposals does the Commission have for the 2001 financial year for further, and increased, aid to Croatia?
4. In the Commission's opinion, what is the effective additional absorption capacity for projects eligible to EU support in the current financial year, as a means of providing short-term financial assistance for the positive political development?

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Deadline for reply: 15.05.2000