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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

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

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council of 19-20 June 2003, at which the promise was made to all 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 of the European Councils of 15-16 June 2006 and 14-15 December 2006,
 - having regard to the 1995 interim agreement 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 of 14 October 2008 (SEC(2009)1335),
 - having regard to the conclusions of the Sixth Meeting of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council of 27 July 2009,
 - having regard to the recommendations of the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee of 27-28 November 2008,
 - having regard to the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia visa facilitation and readmission agreements of 18 September 2007 and the Commission's proposal for visa liberalisation,
 - having regard to Council Decision 2008/212/EC of 18 February 2008 on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹,
 - having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the enlargement process is beneficial both for the acceding countries and for the European Union as a whole,
- B. whereas the prospect of EU integration continues to positively influence the reforms in the Western Balkan region and helps to make it more stable, peaceful and prosperous,
- C. whereas the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continues the reform process and will join the European Union as soon as that country 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 the opening of the accession negotiations; calls on the

¹ OJ L 80, 19.3.2008, p. 32.

Council to confirm the Commission's recommendation at the summit in December 2009 and expects the negotiations to begin in the near future;

Political developments

2. Welcomes the broad consensus between the government and opposition parties on the European vocation of the country; notes with satisfaction that this consensus and improved political dialogue have resulted in acceleration in the adoption of the laws on EU integration; stresses, however, the importance of their effective implementation;
3. Welcomes the good progress made by the country in the fight against corruption and in particular the adoption of the law on the financing of political parties; notes however that corruption, a common problem of the countries in the region, remains prevalent, and that further energetic efforts must be made in order to eradicate it;
4. Recalls that efficient parliaments, fulfilling their role as legislators and exercising oversight of governments' activities, are a foundation of democracy; in this respect, welcomes the adoption of the law on the country's parliament, which considerably improves its functioning; notes that there is a need to further improve the functioning of the Parliament and enhance the role of opposition, by amending the rules of procedure of parliament in line with European best practices; notes the recent boycott of the parliament by the Democratic Party of Albanians and calls on that party to pursue its political objectives through parliamentary work;
5. Commends the authorities on the conduct of the presidential and local elections, which constituted good progress as compared to the parliamentary elections held in 2008; notes with satisfaction that the elections fulfilled most international standards and calls on the government to swiftly implement the remaining OSCE/ODIHR recommendations; in this respect, underlines a number of reported cases of pressure on and intimidation of voters, in particular civil servants, 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;
6. Stresses the utmost importance of full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which is the cornerstone of inter-ethnic relations in the country; calls on all the communities 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; moreover, stresses the importance of education in the integration process and, in this respect, calls on the authorities to phase out the practice of ethnically separated shifts in schools;
7. Draws particular attention to the ongoing process of decentralisation, which is an important step contributing to better functioning of the country and to improving inter-ethnic relations; stresses that, in order to ensure the successful implementation of this process, the municipalities must be provided with sufficient funds to fulfil the new tasks;
8. Stresses that access to justice for the 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 commitment of the government to continue with the reforms, as manifested, *inter alia*, by increasing funding for the courts and the Public Prosecutor's Office; calls on the authorities to further strengthen the independence of judges and assure their impartiality; notes that the backlog of court cases has decreased and encourages the authorities to

further improve the efficiency of the system; moreover, calls for swift adoption of the law on legal aid;

9. Notes the progress achieved in reforming the functioning of the public administration in general and the adoption of the law on civil servants in particular; calls on the authorities to ensure compliance with the law by putting a stop to the practices of unlawful promotions and of hiring temporary staff outwith the scope of the law;
10. Calls on the authorities to further strengthen the independence and pluralism of the media by putting a stop to the political interference from any party and in particular from the government; underlines that media freedom is undermined by a lack of transparency and concentrated ownership in the media market;
11. Calls on the authorities to develop an anti-discrimination strategy; stresses the need for energetic efforts to improve the situation of women and children and to protect them from domestic violence; calls on the government to make further efforts to increase the currently limited participation of women in political life, manifested by the fact that none of the female mayoral candidates in the last elections has been elected; to this end, encourages the authorities to consider implementing a quota system, reserving a percentage of political positions and places on the election lists to women;

Economic and social situation

12. Is concerned that the impact of the financial crisis on the country will exacerbate the persistently high unemployment level and hamper the 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;
13. Congratulates the country on its improved ranking in the latest World Bank report 'Doing Business 2009'; however, points out that the procedures for registering businesses and protecting property rights have still not been sufficiently improved and that the education system is not sufficiently resourced to produce human resources needed for the development of the economy;
14. Notes the recent protest mounted by trade unions against proposed government changes to the Labour Law which could reduce workers' rights and freedoms; expresses serious concern over the status of workers, particularly female workers in the textile factories;
15. Considers that, although alignment of the legislation in the field of the environment is moderately advanced, implementation at the local level still needs to be considerably improved; reiterates its call for an effective monitoring of the quality and level of the water in the border lakes Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran;
16. 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; encourages the country to better integrate the transport system with all the neighbouring countries;

Regional issues

17. Congratulates the country on having fulfilled all the benchmarks for the visa liberalisation regime, which has resulted in the Commission's proposal to grant it a visa-free regime from 1 January 2010; commends the government for showing regional responsibility by offering the expertise of the key negotiator for visa negotiations to the

authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina;

18. Welcomes the country's participation in the EU civilian and military missions as well as its alignment with the majority of EU declarations and common positions; notes the recent agreement on the border demarcation with Kosovo;
19. Welcomes the new, more positive climate between the governments of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece following the recent elections in Greece; encourages the two countries to redouble their efforts at the highest level to find a mutually satisfactory solution to the name issue; notes with concern the use of historical arguments in the current debate, including the recent phenomenon of so-called "antiquisation", which risks increasing tensions with neighbours and creates new internal divisions;
20. Calls on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the neighbouring countries to contribute to a political culture based on mutual respect, understanding, trust and tolerance; in this regard, stresses the primary responsibility of the politicians and media;
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21. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the government and parliament of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.