


Procedure file

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| | AFET Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security, Defense | V/ALE LAGENDIJK Joost | 13/10/1999 |
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South-Eastern Europe: stability pact, stabilisation and association agreements

PURPOSE : to establish a Stabilisation and Association process for the Western Balkans. CONTENT : the present Communication lies within the delicate political context which has characterized the region of South-Eastern Europe for the last decade and was recently jeopardised by the inter-ethnic conflict in Kosovo. Notwithstanding the important aid from the Union in favour of the countries concerned in order to stabilise the region (around 7 billion EURO for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia or FYROM and Albania), progress made has been fragile. That is why the Commission is proposing with this strategic document a global approach to the process of stabilisation for the Western Balkan region which constitutes the framework of relations to come with this region. On the geopolitical level, the region of South-Eastern Europe is very close to the Union and this proximity and the importance of it will continue to grow after the enlargement process. The approach advocated by the Commission is that of a regional process of stabilisation, even if there are some clear differences between countries that need to be taken into account. Two sub-sets have evolved : on the one hand, the countries who have not been involved in the conflicts and who have maintained bilateral relations with the Union (the FYROM and Albania) and the countries stemming from the former Yugoslavia. For the Commission, the respect for the Dayton agreement developed in 1996 constitutes an unquestionable prerequisite to the realisation of a stability process and of economic prosperity in the region. However, as the process set in motion in 1996 is no longer sufficient, a multilateral approach is preferred today. This approach would be based on certain strategic elements. Besides respect of the most demanding conditions on the political level (promoting and sustaining democracy, upholding of the rule of law and respect for minorities) and economic level (restoration and reconstruction of the economy and progress towards a market economy), it is planned to implement new initiatives which include: 1) the development of Stabilisation and Association Agreements with the 5 countries concerned, taking into account their respective situations: the main objectives of the agreements would be to draw the region closer in the perspective of full integration into the EU; to support the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law; economic development and reform; create a formalised framework for political dialogue both at regional and bilateral levels; promote economic and trade relations with the Union by nurturing a climate favourable to investment; to provide over time for the possibility to establish one or several free trade areas once sufficient progress has been made in economic terms; to provide a basis for cooperation in all fields. It is worth noting that strict conditions would have to be fulfilled prior to the launch of the negotiations (in particular, respecting political and economic demands), and in terms of the recent analysis of events, the countries nearest to satisfying the conditions would be the FYROM (see procedure 1999/2121/COS); 2) the development of economic and trade relations with and within the region; 3) the development/partial reorientation of existing economic and financial assistance; 4) increased assistance for democratization, civil society, education and institution-building : in this framework it would include free and fair elections, good parliamentary practice, promote independent media, rule of law through technical assistance for judicial, police and customs reform, anti-corruption programmes and reinforce civil society organisations and initiatives (especially after the war); 5) the use of new opportunities for cooperation in various fields, including justice and home affairs (in particular following the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty); 6) the development political dialogue, including at regional level. This dialogue should be developed at various levels and under different structures so as to permit the countries to meet to discuss issues of common and regional interest. The existing system of autonomous trade preferences for the countries which emerged from the former Yugoslavia will remain important until contractual relations are

established with the other countries concerned. Economic and political development should go hand in hand. In 1999, financial assistance from the Community budget to the countries of the Regional Approach will be almost 700 million EURO in order to cope with the reconstruction process. The Commission will propose a legal base for the implementation of assistance to the region as a whole, taking into account the links with the PHARE programme or other new instruments. In all instances, the granting of aid would be according to the capacity of countries to collaborate with one another (for example, by creating common programmes etc.). Finally, one of the essential elements of this strategy will be to closely link the European Regional approach with that of the other actors engaged in the Region (UN, Council of Europe, OSCE, WEU and NATO) and with the will of the populations concerned to advance towards the stabilisation of their countries.?

South-Eastern Europe: stability pact, stabilisation and association agreements

The committee adopted the report by Jan Joost LAGENDIJK (Greens/EFA, NL) on the Stability Pact for South-East Europe. The report called on the Union to play the leading role in the Stability Pact and wanted the action of the EU, as the principal donor for the region, to be closely dovetailed with that of the special coordinator responsible for the implementation of the pact. The committee supported the strategic concept underlying the pact and stressed that, with the introduction of the stabilisation and association process, the EU was offering the peoples in the region the prospect of being incorporated in the structures of the EU in the long term. It believed that the principle of political conditionality should also apply to the pact and that extreme nationalists should be isolated. If any of the parties involved pursued policies aimed at altering borders unilaterally or undertook action on these lines in such a way as to damage the Stability Pact, it should be excluded from the financing procedures of the pact. The report contended that a strict armaments control policy was essential to the stabilisation and security of those countries and therefore urged Member States as well as all the signatories to the Stability Pact to set up a common programme to assist and train local police forces while keeping national armies as limited in size as possible. The fight against corruption and organised crime was seen as crucial for creating a civil society. The report also welcomed the democratic developments in Croatia and encouraged the new government to take the necessary steps to ensure that negotiations for a stabilisation and association agreement could begin. It also considered that there should be a distinction between sanctions against the Yugoslav establishment and those against the population of the country, so that the latter could be gradually lifted, thereby enabling democratic dialogue within Yugoslavia to make progress. The report called for Montenegro to be allowed to take part in the political dialogue under way with democratic forces in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and also wanted the Moldovan Republic to be offered the opportunity to take part directly in the Stability Pact. The committee stressed the importance of independent media for the development of civil society and therefore welcomed the draft "Charter for Media Freedom" drawn up in the context of the Stability Pact. It also highlighted the importance of non-governmental organisations. Lastly, it supported the efforts of the Commission to create an effective mechanism for civilian crisis management and said it was open to the idea of setting up a "Rapid Reaction Fund".

South-Eastern Europe: stability pact, stabilisation and association agreements

The European Parliament adopted its resolution on the Commission's communication on the stabilisation and association process for countries of South-Eastern Europe. Parliament's rapporteur was Mr. Jan Joost LAGENDIJK (Greens/EFA, NL). The EP considers the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe as the central challenge for the EU at present, and considers that it will be decisive for the future of peace and stability in South-Eastern Europe, as well as for the Union's political credibility. It therefore calls on the EU to take over the central leading role in the Stability Pact using all the instruments, programmes and funding potential at its disposal. It calls for dovetailing with the Special Coordinator responsible for the implementation of the Pact and for the strengthening of the European pillar within the structure of the Pact to be used to reduce the number of actors on the Balkan stage and to ensure greater transparency in the use of existing structures. The Parliament stresses the need to isolate extreme nationalist groups which resist all efforts to bring about a return to democratic dialogue and the economic development wanted by moderate groups in the region. The results of the financing conference for the Stability Pact of 29/30 March 2000 and considers its implementation as a decisive test of the Pact's ability to transform political concepts into practice. The EP calls on the Commission to cofinance practical projects from all three subject areas in the context of the new Association and Reconstruction Programme for the five countries of the Western Balkans (CARA Programme), under the Phare programme and exploiting INTERREG; not only should regional economic projects be promoted, but particular attention should also be devoted to projects in the first subject area - democratisation and promotion of civil society as well as the third - regional disarmament, mine-clearance, improving police work and anti-corruption measures. Parliament calls for particular emphasis to be laid on regional cooperation and programmes for several countries and cross-border projects to remain feasible in the context of the Stability Pact. It takes the view that the sphere of responsibility of the European Agency for Reconstruction should be extended beyond Kosovo to the whole region covered by the new association process and that the Agency must be responsible for implementing the horizontal EU programmes as well as for coordination with projects devised by other international donors. Parliament considers with respect to the FRY that the selective lifting of sanctions might be a way of strengthening the Serb opposition and weakening the Milosovic regime and that a distinction should be made between sanctions on the establishment in Yugoslavia and sanctions against the people of the country, so that the latter sanctions may be gradually lifted, thus allowing democratic dialogue in Yugoslavia to be promoted. It also supports the participation of Montenegro in the political dialogue launched with the democratic forces in the FRY. The EP requests, in the interests of the whole region, the earliest possible re-establishment of conditions for ensuring the navigability of the Danube. Parliament welcomes the democratic developments in Croatia and encourages the new government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the EU can extend its aid towards the country and the negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement to commence. It calls on the Council and the Commission to ensure their active participation in the Conference on the Security and Development of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas as a valid contribution to the work of the Stability Pact. It also asks for the Republic of Moldova to be given an opportunity to participate directly in the Stability Pact. Parliament considers the combating of corruption and organised crime to be a decisive precondition for creating a civil society based on the rule of law and democracy and, in this context, requests that appropriate attention be given to recruitment, training and adequate levels of pay for police forces. It calls on the Council, the Commission and the Pact coordinator to promote a specific initiative for drawing up common agreements on police and judicial cooperation between the European Union and the countries concerned and to offer active support for the projects needed for its achievement. The importance of the independent media for the development of civil society is stressed and the draft Charter for Media Freedom in the context of the Stability pact is welcomed; the EP considers that it should also receive tangible support in the form of precisely targeted projects. Parliament calls for the teaching of tolerance and cooperation, not least in schools, and calls for particular attention to be devoted to this when school books, curricula, etc. are being drawn up. The EP supports the formation of concrete plans aimed at contributing to the cultural and religious approach between the five countries and stresses the need for protection of the monuments and the cultural heritage treasures in the region with precise actions. The important role of international and local NGOs in economic and social reconstruction is stressed by the Parliament, as well as the need for the greater participation of as many local NGOs as possible in the reconstruction projects, retaining on the other hand strict and efficient control over their financial procedures in order to avoid

corruption. Parliament reiterated its demand for active regional aid from the EU in the context of the Stability Pact, to promote regional infrastructure projects, such as the extension of European corridors 8 and 10, cross-border energy, environment and water projects and the joint improvement of border management and customs. The Commission is called upon to ensure that there are no barriers to trade between the countries in the region, in particular between the applicant countries and the other countries. Lastly, the EP supports the efforts of the Commission to create an effective mechanism for civilian crisis management.?

South-Eastern Europe: stability pact, stabilisation and association agreements

The Council presented a report examining the stabilisation and association process. This revealed in particular that: - the stabilisation and association process represented the European Union's commitment to contribute to peace, democracy and prosperity in South-Eastern Europe; - the regional approach to the stabilisation and association process was based on certain elements including, according to the Council, the credible prospect of potential EU membership once the relevant conditions had been met and the need to re-establish normal mutual relations between border regions and adopt a flexible approach enabling each country to move ahead at its own pace. This flexibility would be balanced by a common set of political and economic conditions so as to maintain the integrity of the EU's overall policy towards the region; - the stabilisation and association process represented an overall framework in which preferential trade concessions, an assistance programme and a new contractual relationship should assist each country to progress, at its own pace, towards the prospect of EU accession. This process was based on one essential condition which was respect for democracy, reconciliation and regional cooperation. Hence, conditionality, as a policy addressing the region as a whole, was the cement of the stabilisation and association process.

South-Eastern Europe: stability pact, stabilisation and association agreements

This is the third Annual Report on the Stabilisation and Association process for South East Europe (Sap) prepared by the European Commission. It provides an assessment of the economic and political progress made in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro and Kosovo. An Opinion on Croatia's application for EU membership is being presented separately. The Report is structured into three parts. The first summarises the progress made by the individual countries over the previous year. Included in this part is an evaluation of the EU's trade measures vis-à-vis the region. The second part comprises of an analysis of each country, including assessments on the political and economic situation, implementation of reforms etc. The third part contains the Commission's proposal for the first European Partnership programmes for the countries here assessed. This part of the study identifies short and medium term priorities which each country needs to address if they are to succeed in gaining EU membership. The European Partnership for Croatia will be presented separately alongside the Commission's Opinion on its membership application. Significantly, this Report is a key indicator in assessing the readiness of the countries concerned to move towards their stated ambition of joining the European Union. The third Annual Report makes the following findings: - The Commission will work hard to help those countries analysed in this report prepare for eventual membership of the EU. - A first step in this direction are the European Partnership agreements, which are being presented alongside this Report. These Partnerships identify priority measures for the short and medium term. The countries are strongly encouraged to develop plans for the implementation of the priorities within a set timeframe. - The Commission will continue to support the efforts of the western Balkans to obtain increased financial assistance. - The Commission welcomes sector specific reforms which are currently underway in the western Balkans. Negotiations for an SAp with Albania are underway. An SAp for Bosnia Herzegovina was not deemed feasible and so a 16 point priority list was identified in 2003, which Bosnia Herzegovina is working towards achieving. The SAA with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is about to come into force and Serbia Montenegro has made progress towards a closer relationship with the EU through the adoption of a Constitutional Charter and an internal market and trade action plan. - The Commission is encouraged by the increase in regional co-operation, particularly as far as infrastructure, trade, transport and energy, are concerned. - The Report does, however, identify a number of challenges hindering the countries transition to fully functioning democracies. Some of the problems identified include organised crime and a weakness in the enforcement of law and order. - Greater efforts need to be made in the field of reconciliation. - Several countries continue to refuse to co-operate with the ICTY. - Although unemployment remains high across the region, the Commission reports that the economies continued to grow at a higher rate than the rest of the world and that inflation remain low. The Commission urges the countries to improve the business climate and the competitiveness of their industries. - Recent events in Kosovo were a serious setback to the process of stabilisation and is a reminder that the Kosovo question remains critical for the stability of the region as a whole. - Lastly, the EU will continue to work toward greater co-operation among the different international actors involved in the region in order to make the best use of the resources available.?