

Procedure file

Basic information	
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2007/2126(INI)
Relations between the European Union and Serbia	
Subject 6.40.03 Relations with South-East Europe and the Balkans	
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Procedure completed	

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	AFET Foreign Affairs		04/06/2007
		ALDE KACIN Jelko	
Council of the European Union	Council configuration	Meeting	Date
	General Affairs	2809	18/06/2007
European Commission	Commission DG	Commissioner	
	External Relations	FERRERO-WALDNER Benita	

Key events			
16/05/2007	Non-legislative basic document published	B6-0202/2007	Summary
06/06/2007	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
18/06/2007	Resolution/conclusions adopted by Council		Summary
12/09/2007	Vote in committee		Summary
18/09/2007	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0325/2007	
24/10/2007	Debate in Parliament		
25/10/2007	Results of vote in Parliament		
25/10/2007	Decision by Parliament	T6-0482/2007	Summary
25/10/2007	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
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Committee dossier	AFET/6/49987

Documentation gateway

Non-legislative basic document	B6-0202/2007	16/05/2007	EP	Summary
Committee draft report	PE391.943	22/06/2007	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee	PE392.149	12/07/2007	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading	A6-0325/2007	18/09/2007	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading	T6-0482/2007	25/10/2007	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2007)6028	21/11/2007	EC	

Relations between the European Union and Serbia

In accordance with Rule 114(1) of its Rules of Procedure, Jelko KACIN (ALDE, Slovenia) has submitted, on behalf of the group ALDE, a proposal for a Recommendation to the Council on relations between the European Union and Serbia.

Recalling the huge importance of Serbia to stability and prosperity in the region, as well as its EU membership perspective, the proposal for a recommendation pointed to the urgent need for progress in Serbia's integration into the EU.

In this context, the proposal invites the Council to step up assistance to the Serbian authorities in meeting the requirements of the European Partnership priorities, particularly as regards the rule of law, through enhanced use of twinning and other technical assistance programmes. It also recommends that the Council firmly support the new Serbian Government in its endeavours to establish a modern, dynamic and prosperous Serbia.

At the same time, the proposal recalls that war crimes suspect Ratko Mladić remains at large and, according to the ICJ ruling of 26 February 2007, Serbia remains in violation of the Convention on Genocide by failing to secure his arrest. Accordingly, the proposal urges the Council to take a clear and unequivocal stance as to the definition of 'full cooperation with the ICTY' and to underline that conclusion of an SAA agreement will be conditional upon meeting this criterion.

Relations between the European Union and Serbia

The Council adopted the following conclusions on Serbia:

- it welcomed the fact that the new government in Belgrade had shown clear commitment and had undertaken concrete and effective action for full co-operation with the ICTY, and that this had enabled the Commission to resume negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with Serbia;
- it encouraged the Serbian authorities to build on this positive dynamic, to vigorously pursue the necessary reforms to bring Serbia closer to the European Union and to continue its efforts to ensure that all remaining fugitive ICTY indictees are brought to justice;
- it recalled that the pace and conclusion of the negotiations on the SAA would in particular depend on Serbia's progress in developing the necessary legislative framework and administrative capacity to implement its obligations under the Agreement, and on full co-operation with ICTY. The Council and the Commission will jointly review Serbia's performance in these areas before the decision to sign is taken by the Council;
- it reaffirmed that Serbia's future lies within the European Union and that the Union stands ready to work with Serbia towards this goal.

Relations between the European Union and Serbia

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Jelko KACIN (ALDE, SI) on relations between the European Union and Serbia. The report states that the future of Serbia lies in the European Union and that nearly 70% of Serbs voted in favour of EU membership. The committee believes that Serbia deserves special commendation for the peaceful resolution of a series of difficult challenges over the past year, including the dissolution of the State Union of Serbia Montenegro, fair and free parliamentary elections and the formation of a new government with a pro-European engagement. It welcomes the resumption of negotiations on an SAA between the Serbian Government and the EU after a 13-month break. It encourages both parties to move forward quickly with the negotiations and to make all the necessary arrangements in order to avoid technical delays in the interim period between the initialling and the signature of the Agreement, so that the signature can take place before the end of 2007. It regards the signature of the SAA as an important step in the road towards EU accession.

The report welcomes the Serbian Government's desire to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which opens the way to further cooperation with the EU. It congratulates Serbia on its recent progress in cooperating with the ICTY, which has

made it possible for the SAA negotiations to be resumed and for the ICTY's Chief Prosecutor, Carla del Ponte, to give a positive assessment regarding Serbia's cooperation with the Tribunal. It welcomes the arrest and transfer to The Hague of Zdravko Tolimir and Vlastimir Đorđević, the assurance of Prime Minister Koštunica to Carla del Ponte that "more arrests are likely" (including ex-Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladić), and the creation of new structures aimed at centralising all activities to apprehend fugitives, including improved transparency of the National Security Council. The committee stresses that full cooperation with the ICTY is not only an international obligation but also a key step towards achieving lasting reconciliation in the region. To this end, MEPs call on the Serbian parliament to fulfil its commitments arising from the ICJ ruling and to adopt a declaration denouncing the genocide in Srebrenica. They believe that, given the timetable for closure of the ICTY, which currently envisages the conclusion of trials by 2008, it would be necessary to consider extending the mandate of the ICTY were indicted war criminals to be arrested after that date.

As regards Kosovo, the committee takes the view that a resolution to the status of Kosovo will both consolidate stability in the Western Balkans and facilitate the integration of the region into the European Union.

On an economic level, the committee is pleased to note that Serbia has made significant economic progress since 2000, with an average annual growth rate of 5%. However, according to the IMF's assessment, this has not translated into a reduction in poverty or in the high unemployment rate (which is over 20%). It believes that tackling these problems represents a core challenge for the new government. It therefore calls on the Serbian government to make a firmer commitment to employment creation and poverty alleviation and to adopt concrete measures aimed at a more balanced economic development in all districts of the country.

Further efforts are necessary as regards the development of administrative structures and procedures as these can increase trust in the rule of law, strengthen the market economy and encourage economic growth in Serbia. MEPs call on the Serbian authorities to improve the economic climate for foreign investment and transparency in trade relationships.

The committee is pleased to record that Serbia has a new constitution which includes positive provisions regarding human rights. It notes, however, that the legal framework for the protection of minorities needs to be improved further.

Concerning the territorial issue, the committee calls on the Serbian Government to maintain the territorial, administrative and political entity of Vojvodina, the Sandžak district and any other areas or regions with ethnic and national minorities when forming the new NUTS 2 level regions, and not to use the administrative steps vis-à-vis the European Union as a pretext to divide the historic regions. The Commission, the Council and the Parliament are called upon to bear the risk of this in mind and to follow with critical attention the organising of NUTS 2 level regions in Serbia.

MEPs strongly believe that a key human rights issue is to find durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs), especially since Serbia is still hosting a very high number of refugees, mostly from Croatia and partly from Bosnia-Herzegovina, and IDPs from Kosovo. It deeply regrets that the end-of-2006 deadline for resolving all outstanding issues foreseen by the Sarajevo Declaration on the return of refugees and property reparations has not been met. The Serbian Government is called upon to adopt a clear legal framework covering, inter alia, the right to return to the place of origin and the right to property compensation. The EU is urged to remain committed to upholding the rights of refugees, and to provide continuing support to the countries in question, including by earmarking sufficient financial resources to that end. They emphasise that the integration or resettlement of IDPs and refugees should not significantly alter the original ethnic balance of an area or region. In this respect, the report draws attention to the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Protection of Minorities (1995).

Recognising the progress made in the fight against organised crime and corruption, the report points out that corruption is a major obstacle to attracting greater foreign investment, and calls on the Serbian government to implement a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy. It considers it necessary to pursue the fight against organised crime. The Council and the Commission are urged to further encourage the Serbian government to carry out substantial reform of the police, the security services and the army, including measures to provide for greater civilian oversight of the military. It considers that the reform of the police should take into account the need for minority-language-speaking police forces in regions inhabited by large minority populations. The report welcomes the judicial reform measures taken to date but stresses the need for this process to be pursued, particularly in relation to the speed of trials, witness protection, the prevention of corruption and the independence of judges. It regrets that the Constitutional Court is not functioning, something that is not conducive to the development of democracy and democratic legislation in Serbia. MEPs welcome the work of the Serbian War Crimes Prosecutor but regrets that domestic war crimes trials are undermined by a lack of transparency and political will to trace back the chain of command responsibility beyond the immediate perpetrators to those who issued the orders. It believes that the sentences imposed by the Serbian war crimes court on four members of the paramilitary group, the Scorpions, for the execution of six Muslims from Srebrenica did not reflect the heinous nature of the crime.

As regards the recent history of Serbia, MEPs believe that the citizens of Serbia are entitled to be told the truth about the recent policies of war and genocide committed in their name, and to have knowledge of the perpetrators of war crimes. They believe that Serbia must honestly confront its recent past in order to progress and that coming to terms with the past is an integral part of the road to reconciliation with Serbia's neighbours. They call on the government to re-open the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in 2001, not least in order to secure an end to the climate of fear that persists in some parts of the country. The committee welcomes the Serbian President's apology to Croatian citizens for war crimes committed by Serbs during the 1992-1995 war in Croatia. Reconciliation and justice are indispensable for the stability and development of all the countries in the region as well as for their integration into the European Union. It urges Serbia's neighbouring countries to follow this model and to condemn any manifestation of ethnic intolerance and racism which takes place in their territories.

On the issue of regional cooperation, the report emphasises that it is in Serbia's best interests to develop and maintain good relations with its regional partners, to enhance effective trans-border cooperation, fully utilising the potential of the national minorities in the border areas, and to participate actively in bilateral, regional and European infrastructural projects. It encourages the Serbian Government to promote good neighbourly relations with both entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska), since such relations will help to foster a better climate of cooperation in the region.

The report also calls on the Council and the Commission to allocate to the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP) sufficient financial resources to enable that organisation to complete its work of identifying all missing persons in the territory of the former Yugoslavia by 2010. MEPs welcome the adoption of a comprehensive national strategy to combat human trafficking, but urges the Serbian Government to be more stringent in prosecuting cases and ensuring that traffickers receive and serve prison sentences consistent with the nature of the offence. They believe that the transformation of Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) into a public service represents a step forward. They draw attention

also to the need to draw up fully democratic rules governing the allocation of radio and television broadcasting concessions and providing in particular for the possibility of appealing against decisions of the concessionary authority. They deeply regret that there has been no progress in the resolution of cases involving murders of journalists.

As regards the civil society, MEPs note the existence of a well-developed NGO sector, however, the Serbian parliament is urged to adopt legislation to improve the legal situation for civil society organisations. They condemn the public denigration of civic society actors who criticise the government or draw attention to sensitive issues such as war crimes.

The report welcomes the initialling of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements and urges the Council to ensure that they enter into force by the end of 2007. The Council, with the support of the Commission, is urged to establish a concrete roadmap for visa-free movement and to adopt support measures designed to increase travel opportunities for a greater proportion of citizens, particularly young people. MEPs also request Serbia to reform the education system and to continue approximating EU environmental legislation and standards and to implement and enforce adopted legislation.

Lastly, the report calls on the Council, the Commission and all Member States to make concerted efforts to increase EU visibility in Serbia.

Relations between the European Union and Serbia

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Jelko KACIN (ALDE, SI) on relations between the European Union and Serbia. It believes that Serbia deserves special commendation for the peaceful resolution of a series of difficult challenges over the past year, including the dissolution of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, fair and free parliamentary elections and the formation of a new government with a pro-European engagement. Parliament welcomes the completion of technical negotiations on an SAA between the Serbian Government and the EU after a 13-month break. It encourages both parties to make all the necessary arrangements in order to avoid technical delays prior to signature of the SAA, so that the signature can take place before the end of 2007. Members regard the signature of the SAA as an important step in the road towards EU accession.

Parliament congratulates Serbia on its recent progress in cooperating with the ICTY, which has made it possible for the SAA negotiations to be resumed and for the ICTY's Chief Prosecutor, Carla del Ponte, to give a positive assessment regarding Serbia's cooperation with the Tribunal. It welcomes the arrest of Zdravko Tolimir and Vlastimir ĆorĆeviĉ, the assurance of Prime Minister Koĉunica to Carla del Ponte that more arrests are likely (including ex-Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladiĉ), and the creation of new structures aimed at centralising all activities to apprehend fugitives, including improved transparency of the National Security Council. It reminds Serbia that signature of the SAA is conditional upon full cooperation with the ICTY, and that this should lead to the arrest and transfer of all remaining indictees, whilst noting that the recent arrests prove that the Serbian authorities are able to apprehend indicted war criminals. Full cooperation with the ICTY is not only an international obligation but also a key step towards achieving lasting reconciliation in the region. To this end, Parliament calls on the Serbian parliament to fulfil its commitments arising from the ICJ judgment and to adopt a declaration denouncing the genocide in Srebrenica. Given the timetable for closure of the ICTY, which currently envisages the conclusion of trials by 2008, it would be necessary to consider extending the mandate of the ICTY were indicted war criminals to be arrested after that date.

Parliament feels that resolving the issue of the status of Kosovo will both consolidate stability in the Western Balkans and facilitate the integration of the region into the European Union.

It is pleased to note that Serbia has made significant economic progress since 2000, with an average annual growth rate of 5%, but also notes that this has not translated into a reduction in poverty or in the high unemployment rate (which is over 20%). Parliament calls on the Serbian government to make a firmer commitment to employment creation and poverty alleviation and to adopt concrete measures aimed at a more balanced economic development in all districts of the country, with particular attention being paid to underdeveloped south-eastern and eastern parts of the country. The further development of administrative structures and procedures can increase trust in the rule of law, strengthen the market economy and encourage economic growth in Serbia.

Parliament strongly believes that a key human rights issue is to find durable solutions for refugees and IDPs, especially since Serbia is still hosting a very high number of refugees, mostly from Croatia and partly from Bosnia-Herzegovina, and IDPs from Kosovo. It deeply regrets that the end-of-2006 deadline for resolving all outstanding issues foreseen by the Sarajevo Declaration on the return of refugees and property reparations, signed on 31 January 2005 by Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia-Montenegro, has not been met and that little progress has been made since.

It recognises the progress made in the fight against organised crime and corruption, whilst noting that corruption, particularly in the police and the judiciary, remains a serious problem and that official investigations into corruption often appear to be politically motivated. Corruption is a major obstacle to attracting greater foreign investment, and Parliament calls on the Serbian government to implement a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy. The fight against organised crime must be pursued. Promotion of the rule of law must form one of the government's top priorities.

Members believe that the citizens of Serbia are entitled to be told the truth about the recent policies of war and genocide committed in their name, and to have knowledge of the perpetrators of war crimes. Serbia must honestly confront its recent past in order to progress. Coming to terms with the past is an integral part of the road to reconciliation with Serbia's neighbours. Parliament calls on the government to re-open the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in 2001, not least in order to promote a positive climate in those parts of the country which have been most affected by inter-ethnic conflict. It urges the Commission to promote initiatives facilitating people-to-people contacts in the region and to allocate a greater proportion of funds to this end.

Parliament moves on to call on the Council and the Commission to allocate to the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP) sufficient financial resources to enable that organisation to complete its work of identifying all missing persons in the territory of the former Yugoslavia by 2010. The work of the ICMP contributes significantly to the process of truth, justice and reconciliation in the region.

The report calls on Serbia to continue to play a responsible role in the region, and encourages the Serbian Government to promote good neighbourly relations with Bosnia-Herzegovina and to continue the dialogue with its south-east European neighbours on border issues, given that territorial demarcations between Serbia and Croatia and between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina have yet to be established. It commends Serbia on improved inter-ethnic relations, in particular in Vojvodina where there has been a reduction in, although not a total cessation of, inter-ethnic incidents. The Serbian authorities must take additional measures to promote the development of national minorities in multi-ethnic Vojvodina, to promote peaceful coexistence amongst them and to ensure that the police, the judiciary and other state bodies act

on an ethnically neutral basis. Parliament welcomes the earmarking of funds in the 2007 budget for projects directly linked to the Decade of Roma Inclusion, but was concerned by the overall lack of a systemic policy approach towards improving the lives and living conditions of the Roma, including IDPs and returnees, and by persisting discrimination against the Roma community.

It welcomes the adoption of a comprehensive national strategy to combat human trafficking, but urges the Serbian Government to be more stringent in prosecuting cases and ensuring that traffickers receive and serve prison sentences consistent with the nature of the offence.

Parliament believes that the transformation of Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) into a public service represents a step forward, but draws attention to the lack of public debate surrounding modifications to the Law on Broadcasting and shortcomings in the procedure for appointing RTS board members. It deeply regrets that there has been no progress in the resolution of cases involving murders of journalists and deplores the recent attempted assassination of a prominent investigative reporter of war crimes and organised crime.

As regards civil society, Parliament notes the existence of a well-developed NGO sector and welcomes efforts by the authorities to consult with the civil sector. It condemns, however, the public denigration of civic society actors who criticise the government or draw attention to sensitive issues such as war crimes. It deplores a recent spate of politically motivated assaults and warns of the increasing prevalence of hate speech in the media and politics targeted at human rights activists, journalists and politicians.

The report welcomes the signing of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements on 18 September 2007 and urges the Council to ensure that they enter into force by the end of 2007. It calls on the Council, with the support of the Commission, to establish a concrete roadmap for visa-free movement and to adopt support measures designed to increase travel opportunities for a greater proportion of citizens, particularly young people. Parliament emphasises the importance of mobility for the political and economic development of Serbia, since mobility grants people the opportunity to gain first-hand experience of the EU and facilitates Serbia's European integration process. It calls for greater participation in life-long learning and cultural exchange projects.

Parliament calls on the Serbian authorities to adopt, as a matter of urgency, restitution laws in line with those of other countries, which provide for real-cost compensation when appropriate, instead of government bonds. Lastly, the new Member States are asked to play an active role in Serbia's move towards the EU, allowing Serbia to benefit from their experience of reforms.