2007 progress report on FYROM

2007/2268(INI) - 23/04/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 601 votes to 52 and 30 abstentions, a resolution on the 2007 Progress Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia The report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Erik MEIJER (GUE/NGL, NL) on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Overall, Parliament commends the considerable progress achieved by this country since the last Progress Report, published by the Commission. In particular, MEPs welcome:

-the adoption of the Law on the Public Prosecutors, the Law on the Council of Prosecutors and the Law on the Committee for Inter-Community Relations listing the laws to be adopted by the double-majority rule (Badinter principle);

-the establishment of the National Council for European Integration, which aims to achieve cross-party support for EU accession-related reforms;

-the sustained efforts of the Macedonian Government and Parliament in the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (on political aspects of inter-ethnic relations in the country) and the increased recognition of the multi-ethnic character of the state;

-the progress achieved in 2007 with regard to the fight against corruption, organised crime, human trafficking and narcotics;

-the progress made in the economic area (particularly, in tax policy, enhanced fiscal discipline, improved business climate and the reduction of legal and administrative barriers to business start-ups).

Parliament is concerned, however, by the level of unemployment, which remains high, and urges the government to address this issue. It notes particularly the situation in the villages bordering Kosovo, where tackling unemployment is vital in order to give the local population opportunities to earn legal income. Members commend the work that is being carried out in the public administration in preparation for the EU accession negotiation process, and call on the authorities to continue the reform of the public administration in order to ensure its de-politicisation, professionalism, expertise and efficiency, and to refrain from any action that may jeopardise the administrative capacity already built up. It is a shared challenge for all political forces and ethnic communities within the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to demonstrate that the country is now free of conflicts viewed negatively both domestically and abroad, and to demonstrate that the country is ready for the process of integration into the EU. In this context, MEPs support the initiative of the Thessaloniki-based Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe and the Soros Foundation to publish textbooks on Balkan history, in both the Albanian and the Macedonian languages, intended for history teachers and secondary school students. These textbooks incorporate different views on the common past, provide a balanced perspective and promote reconciliation.

Electoral law: Parliament notes the draft Law on Revision of the Electoral Code, which would provide for the parliament to be enlarged by 13 seats in the interests of both representation of small ethnic minorities and representation of nationals living abroad. It expresses its concern at the fact that the proposed Law would have the effect of bypassing the use of the Badinter majority rule as intended by the Ohrid Framework Agreement. It is desirable that a broad consensus should be reached, with the participation of the Albanian representatives on any revision of the Electoral Code. Parliament hopes that all provisions of the Electoral Law, including Article 27 on the appointment of the President of the Electoral Committee, will be fully respected and that the ruling coalition will ensure fair and democratic early elections. Parliament takes note of the dissolution of parliament on 11 April 2008 and the calling of early elections in June 2008, and expresses the hope that the authorities will do their utmost to minimise any possible delay in the necessary preparations that should lead to the opening of accession talks before the end of 2008.

Fight against discrimination: Parliament draws attention to the continuing discrimination against the Roma community, particularly in the areas of education, social protection, health care, housing and employment. It hopes that the National Strategy for Roma will be implemented in accordance with its stated objectives in the near future. It also urges the authorities to ensure public compliance with EU and Council of Europe standards on countering the resurgence of "hate speech", particularly in the media, against neighbouring States.

Regional cooperation: Members welcome the active participation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the South East Europe Cooperation Process and its contribution to the establishment of the Regional Cooperation Council. They also welcome its constructive position on the status of Kosovo, whilst expressing concern over the delay in the technical demarcation of the border with Kosovo. This issue should proceed as envisaged in the proposal put forward by Mr Martti Ahtisaari, former UN Special Envoy for the Kosovo status process. Parliament welcomes the active cooperation with Kosovo in trade, customs and police cooperation matters and the fact that, at the same time, good-neighbourly relations are being maintained with Serbia and recommends a similar policy in relations with Albania, Bulgaria and Greece.

Name: MEPs welcome the increased bilateral cooperation, as well as people-to-people contacts between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece. They note that bilateral talks have been held in the region, under the auspices of the United Nations and assisted by Special Envoy Matthew Nimitz, with a view to finding a mutually acceptable solution to the difference that has arisen over the name of the country. Parliament calls on both sides to seize the opportunity to resume negotiations immediately in the light of the significant progress made recently and to reach a compromise solution, so that the issue does not continue to represent an obstacle to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's membership of international organisations, as provided for in the Interim Accord of 1995, which is still in force.

MEPs note that, although the country has achieved significant progress since 2005, it is the only country of the three candidate countries with which no accession negotiations have taken place to date. Parliament calls on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to ensure that the necessary reforms are undertaken. It refers to the list of eight benchmarks that the Commission has drawn up, derived from the key priorities of the new Accession Partnership, and hopes that the attainment of these by the country will lead to opening of the accession negotiations before the end of 2008. The Council is asked to evaluate at the next summit the progress made so far, and, if possible, to decide on a date for

the start of the accession negotiations. Lastly, MEPs regret that the FYROM signed and ratified the Bilateral Immunity Agreement with the US authorities, granting citizens of that country exemption from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court in The Hague. They call on the Macedonian Government to bring its national legislation into line with EU principles.