

Resolution on the 2009 progress report on Croatia

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The General Affairs Council adopted a series of conclusions on the enlargement strategy of the European Union. They may be summarised as follows:

- welcoming the Commission communication on [Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009-2010](#), the Council takes note of the conclusions and recommendations therein. The enlargement process gives strong encouragement to political and economic reform in the enlargement countries and reinforces peace, democracy and stability in Europe;
- the Council confirms that the EU will continue to help them to alleviate the impact of the crisis and prepare for sound recovery;
- it recalls that coherent implementation of the renewed consensus on enlargement which is based on consolidation of commitments, fair and rigorous conditionality, better communication and the EU's capacity to integrate new members, continues to form the basis for EU action at all stages of the enlargement process, with each country being assessed on its own merits. The rule of law, in particular the fight against corruption and organised crime, as well as strengthening administrative capacity, remains a major challenge which the enlargement countries need to address from an early stage of the process;
- it points out that the negotiating chapters for which technical preparations have been concluded will be opened or closed provisionally in line with the rules of an Inter-Governmental Conference, according to established procedures and in line with the Negotiating Framework;
- on the financial front, the Council welcomes the support provided to the enlargement process through financial assistance, in particular in the form of the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA), and emphasises the essential link between enlargement policy priorities and financial assistance.

As regards Croatia, the Council commends Croatia for the considerable efforts it has made over the past year and the good overall progress made, in particular in meeting the benchmarks set in the negotiations. It also refers to the conclusions on a financial package for the accession negotiations with Croatia. Nothing that negotiations are now entering their final phase, the Council attracts the attention of this country to the following issues:

Croatia still has to make significant improvements in the judiciary, the public administration and the fight against corruption, not least to create a solid basis for the full implementation of the *acquis*;

- it will also need to step up reform efforts in the fight against organised crime, to ensure rights of persons belonging to minorities, including refugee return, and war crimes trials to build up a convincing track record in these areas;
- enhanced efforts to establish the required instruments for management and control of Community financial instruments and to develop the infrastructure, equipment and resources to effectively manage the external border will be needed.

The Council underlines that addressing these reforms and meeting all benchmarks in a timely manner, thereby fulfilling all the requirements of membership, notably concerning the judiciary and fundamental rights, will be essential for Croatia if it is to meet its objective of concluding negotiations next year.

The Council notes the generally good cooperation of Croatia with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) on the majority of requests while reiterating that full cooperation remains essential in line with the Negotiating Framework. The Council welcomes the creation of a new inter-agency task-force, but notes with regret that the Prosecutor of the ICTY has not yet been able to report substantial progress regarding the request for certain key military documents. The Council calls on Croatia to take the necessary steps to complete a comprehensive and credible investigation into these issues without further delay.

Lastly, the Council welcomes the signing of the Arbitration Agreement on the border issue with Slovenia in Stockholm on 4 November 2009 and the ratification by the Croatian Sabor of the same agreement on 20 November 2009 and encourages Croatia to build on this progress in its efforts towards solving all outstanding bilateral issues, in particular border disputes, bearing in mind the importance of good neighbourly relations.