

EU - CROATIA JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

**11th Meeting
29-30 March 2010
Zagreb, Croatia**

DECLARATION and RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopted on 30 March 2010

The Joint Parliamentary Committee EU-Croatia held its 11th meeting on 29-30 March 2010 in Zagreb, under the co-chairmanship of Mr Gunnar HÖKMARK for the European Parliament Delegation and Ms Marija Pejčinović BURIĆ for the Croatian Parliament Delegation.

It exchanged views with:

Mr. Gordan Jandroković, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration
Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Minister of Justice,
Mr. Vladimir Drobňak, Chief Negotiator,
Mr. Davor Božinović, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration,
Ms. Nataša Vujec, State Secretary, Ministry of Economy, Labour and Entrepreneurship.

- on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Croatia;

Ms. Alexandra Cas-Granje, Director, DG Enlargement (Croatia, Macedonia, Turkey, Island)

- on behalf of the European Commission

Mr. José Pedro Torrubia Asenjo, Deputy Head of Mission, Chargé d'Affaires. a.i.,

- on behalf of the Spanish Presidency in Office of the Council of the European Union

The members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee addressed the following subjects:

- State of play of the accession negotiations and EU-Croatia relations,
- Judicial reform including the fight against corruption and organised crime,
- Croatia's relations with its neighbours and its role with regard to promoting regional stability,
- Economic policy in light of the economic crisis and energy reform,

- The Common Foreign & Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security Defence Policy (CSDP) after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, and
- Communicating Europe in EU member states and in Croatia.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee, in accordance with Rule 3 of its Rules of Procedure and Article 116 of the EU-Croatia Stabilisation and Association Agreement, addressed the following Declaration and Recommendations to the Stabilisation and Association Council, and to the institutions of Croatia and of the European Union:

On EU-Croatia accession negotiations to the EU and EU-Croatia relations

1. welcomed Croatia's continued progress in meeting the benchmarks set out in the negotiating chapters; expects that the country will do its utmost to pursue its efforts in particular in the areas of judicial and public administration reform as well as in the fight against corruption and organised crime including full ICTY cooperation; furthermore, stressed the importance of a sustainable policy ensuring refugee return and their re-integration; emphasised that this is not primarily a matter of complying with external requirements but rather a necessity for the country's further development and prosperity and encouraged Croatia to pursue strengthening the administrative capacity not only to implement adopted reforms but also to secure that Croatia can benefit fully from increased financial assistance in the coming years;

2. welcomed the continuation of the EU-Croatia accession negotiations since the last Joint Parliamentary Committee of 25-26 November 2009 with the opening of two new chapters and the provisional closure of five chapters, thereby bringing the number of opened chapter to thirty and the number of provisionally closed chapters to seventeen; considered that the negotiations have to proceed smoothly and effectively in order to complete them in 2010, provided that Croatia meets all the opening and closing benchmarks;

3. welcomed the Council Decision to invite Croatia to present its negotiating positions on Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights), which Croatia did on 23 February 2010; took the view that in so doing the Council acknowledged the country's progress in the fulfilment of the benchmarks; was pleased that Croatia also made advances in meeting the benchmarks for the other remaining negotiation chapters; expressed hope that Chapter 8 (Competition Policy) and Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) would be opened at the Intergovernmental Conference in April 2010 and Chapter 31 (Foreign Security and Defence Policy) as soon as possible;

4. welcomed the ratification of the Arbitration agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Government of the Republic of Slovenia by the Croatian Parliament on 20 November 2009, which constitutes an important political milestone towards a definitive and mutually acceptable solution to the border dispute between the two countries; was pleased about the overwhelming support of Deputies of the Croatian Parliament, who voted in favour of this Arbitration Agreement; expressed their hope that the Parliament of Slovenia would also ratify this Arbitration Agreement as soon as possible;

5. welcomed the current preparations to amend the Croatian Constitution, which is currently being discussed by the Croatian Parliament, aimed at providing a legal basis for the future referendum on Croatia's EU accession and aligning it with the obligations arising from future EU membership;

6. welcomed Croatia's continued progress in the pursuit of war crime trials and to continue in the same spirit; expects Croatia to pursue the path of fully cooperating with the ICTY and expressed the hope that efforts of the Inter-Agency Task Force in searching for missing documents required by the ICTY Prosecutor will bear fruit; reiterated that full cooperation remains essential in line with the Negotiating Framework;

On the judicial reform including the fight against corruption and organised crime

7. welcomed the Croatian Parliament's adoption of a package of judicial laws in December 2009 in order to provide for the establishment of the State School for Judicial Officials, which will improve the selection, appointment and training of judicial officials based on uniform, objective and transparent criteria; and welcomes the establishment of formalized criteria for the young judges entering the profession and for the promotion within the profession thus improving the impartiality, independence and professionalism of the judiciary expressed their hope that this school would be functional by the end of 2010; hopes that the forthcoming negotiations on Chapter 23, in parallel with the on-going reforms in the judiciary, will improve the confidence the Croatian citizens have in the justice system;

8. welcomed the Croatian authorities overall commitment to improve the efficiency and transparency of the judiciary and the continued reduction of the backlog of court cases; noted with satisfaction the authorities' focus on cases older than three years; stressed, however the need to maintain these efforts and encouraged the Croatian authorities to continue work towards rationalising the court network, reducing the excessive length of court proceedings and increasing efficiency with regard to enforcement of judgements, thus also in order to improve the perception of judiciary among Croatian citizens and public opinion; stresses the need for the Croatian Supreme Court to be allocated sufficient technical and human resources to operate in an efficient way; and pointed out the need of meeting the benchmarks of impartiality, independence and professionalism of the judiciary;

9. expressed the view that sustained efforts to resolutely investigate and prosecute cases of intimidation of journalists working on cases of corruption, organised crime and war crimes should be pursued; stressed that a positive outcome in those efforts will prove instrumental in consolidating freedom of speech and the overall freedom of expression as well as strongly enhance the civil society's role in the fight against corruption and organised crime; stresses that independence and editorial objectivity of public media is part of this consolidation process;

10. welcomed the signing of the Amendments to the Agreement on the mutual enforcement of judicial rulings in criminal matters between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, thereby closing an important impunity gap for convicted war criminals as well as persons convicted for other crimes;

11. welcomed the adoption of the Anti-Discrimination Law and expects the full implementation of this law and of the Gender Equality Law;

12. noted that Croatia respects the EHCR rulings which points to the necessity for integrated schools for Roma and non-Roma children;

On Croatia's relations with its neighbours and its role with regard to promoting regional stability

13. welcomed the recent statements made by the new President and by the Prime Minister of Croatia with a view to giving priority to enhancing good neighbourly relations and cooperation with Slovenia and all Western Balkan countries, in particular with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and encouraged the country to remain an important and pro-active promoter of regional stability and cooperation on all levels; reiterated that bilateral issues should not jeopardize the EU accession process; underlined the importance of designing the future policy on dual citizenship of Croatian citizens with permanent residence in Bosnia and Herzegovina in a fair and sustainable manner in the light of ongoing reforms ;

14. welcomed specifically the joint initiative of Croatia and Slovenia to organise the high-level regional conference "*Together for Europe: Western Balkan's Contribution to the European Future*" on 20 March 2010 in Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia, which brought together leaders of South-East Europe and the EU and welcomes recent meetings between Presidents and Prime Ministers of Croatia and Serbia;

15. Welcomed the recent hand-over by the Croatian government of the translated acquis to the neighboring countries and salutes this gesture as an exemplary act of a good neighbour;

On economic policy in light of the economic crisis and energy sector reform

16. Commended the efforts made by the Croatian Government, through the recent adoption of anti-recession measures, aimed at promoting economic recovery; encouraged the Government to ensure that these measures will be implemented in a transparent and efficient manner;

17. noted with satisfaction the recently announced tender procedure for the privatisation of the shipyard industry, which was launched in agreement with the Commission on 15 February 2010, while offering retraining and creating job opportunities for workers of the sectors impacted by this restructuring; encouraged the Croatian authorities to complete the programme of small-scale privatisation, to proceed with restructuring in sensitive sectors such as agriculture, and to promote through concessions, project financing and public-private partnerships, the completion of infrastructures in an atmosphere of transparency and fight against corruption;

18. encouraged Croatia to promote further investment in energy infrastructure with the aim to improve security of energy supply and energy efficiency and by a necessary diversification of energy sources, thereby promoting sustainable economic growth in new jobs;

19. Encouraged Croatia to fully align itself with the policies and objectives in the EU's 2020 strategy and to adopt policies and responses to the current economic crisis in line with the 2020 targets and objectives;

On the Common Foreign & Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security Defence Policy (CSDP) after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty

20. welcomed Croatia's engagement in a significant number of peacekeeping mission and operations including the Kosovo EULEX and the Afghanistan EUPOL civilian missions, and the EU NAVFOR Atlanta military operation and encouraged the country to continue aligning itself with the EU;

On communicating Europe in EU member states and in Croatia

21. noted with satisfaction the broad support for EU accession among all political parties in Croatia; was concerned, however, about the fact that the majority of Croatian citizens remained sceptical about the EU; encouraged the Croatian authorities together with civil society representatives to address this scepticism in a pro-active manner; and

22. welcomed the European Parliament's readiness to support the Croatian authorities in their endeavours to hold public discussions and to explain the consequences of accession to the European Union; invited the Commission also to play an active role in this; recalls that in order to secure public support for and understanding of the negotiation process, positions and negotiation results should be widely debated at all levels; recalls the pivotal role of the National Committee in this respect.

