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Regional integration in the western Balkans

European Parliament resolution on the state of regional integration in the western Balkans

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the European Commission's Annual Reports on the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) for South-East Europe,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on south-east European countries and the SAP, in particular that of 20 November 2003¹,
 - having regard to the historic visit of the Prime Minister of Croatia to Serbia and Montenegro on 15 November 2004, and to the signing of a Joint Declaration on that occasion stressing both countries' commitment to joining the European Union and their desire to settle outstanding issues, including protection of minorities, the return of Serb refugees to Croatia and the whereabouts of Croats who went missing in the war,
 - having regard to its resolution of 17 November 2004 on the European Agency for Reconstruction², and to the oral questions put to the Council (B6-0026/2004) and the Commission (B6-0025/2004),
 - having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas, in 1999, the EU initiated the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) for the countries of the western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) as its main contribution to the Stability Pact establishing strategic frameworks for these countries' relations with the EU and combining new contractual relationships (Stability and Association Agreements) and an assistance programme (CARDS),
- B. whereas bilateral relations complement a multilateral framework in which to develop regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations as pre-conditions for a concrete membership perspective,
- C. whereas the European Council in Thessaloniki in 2003 explicitly recognised the European vocation of the countries included in the SAP process and their potential as candidates for EU membership,
- D. whereas progress has been made by the countries in question, but whereas many challenges still lie ahead before they complete their transition to fully functioning democracies and market economies and before they are able to sustain a closer relationship with the EU; and whereas, ultimately, while their European vocation is

¹ OJ C 87 E, 07.04.2004, p. 521.

² P6_TA(2004)0056.

indisputable, further progress along these lines will depend on the ability of the individual countries themselves to make marked improvements,

- E. whereas the state union of Serbia and Montenegro, created at the initiative of the EU to promote the process of democratic and economic reforms and to speed up its integration into the EU, is currently not meeting expectations, and its parliament has effectively ceased to function as of 3 March 2005,
- F. whereas the establishment of a democratic Kosovo not only for the ethnic majority but for all ethnic groups living there must be the objective of EU action, and whereas present and future assistance must be based on such principles; whereas the results of this endeavour are not satisfactory; whereas the situation in Kosovo and the lack of security for the remaining members of the Serbian and other non-Albanian communities, particularly after the eruption of ethnic violence in March 2004, is also having a negative impact on the situation in Serbia,
- G. whereas the provisions of UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) on the return of Serb and other refugees to their homes in Kosovo are still not being complied with,
- H. whereas the large numbers of internally displaced persons in Serbia and Croatia represent an additional financial burden for both countries,
- I. whereas the presence of state-like entities and their persisting undefined status contribute to the instability of the region,
- J. whereas the present institutional framework stemming from the Dayton accords undermines the viability of Bosnia and Herzegovina and represents an obstacle to European integration,
- K. whereas the failure in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia of the referendum of 7 November 2004 has cleared the way for the full implementation of the Ohrid agreement and accelerated the pace of European integration,
- L. whereas the forthcoming opening of accession negotiations with Croatia once the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) commitments are fulfilled, should be regarded as a positive signal sent to all the countries in the region as regards their European prospects,
- M. whereas the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has also submitted its membership application and expects to receive an opinion from the Commission in due course,
 - 1. Stresses that, in line with the European Security Strategy adopted in December 2003, the western Balkans constitutes a region of the highest priority for the EU, and that the future of the region is certainly one of European integration, but that this future depends to a very large extent on the countries in the region themselves;
 - 2. Notes that political ownership and knowledge of the technical mechanisms for European integration are important elements, but that the relevant institutions, in particular elected bodies (in the countries of the region), need to be strengthened, and recognises that this will require considerable additional financial resources;

3. Expresses its serious concern at the economic and social situation in the region; stresses that the solution to this crucial question is one of the main keys to the stable development of those countries; calls on governments and the EU to make social and economic development one of the top priorities;
4. Recalls that, at a summit held in July 2002 between the Heads of State of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro, a joint declaration was agreed on implementing the Dayton agreement, maintaining the inalterability of borders, promoting the return of refugees, and cooperation on European integration;
5. Welcomes the bilateral Agreement on the Protection of Minorities concluded on 15 November 2004 between Croatia and the state union of Serbia and Montenegro indicating the Parties' willingness to recognise national minorities as an asset enriching society;

Bosnia and Herzegovina

6. Notes that, ten years after the signing of the Dayton agreement, crucial political problems remain unresolved, the country is deeply divided and political stability is vulnerable; takes the view that new political initiatives based on a bottom-up participation of the three peoples living there and living in a sustainable peace as neighbours are urgently needed; underlines therefore the need for a revision of the Dayton accords;
7. Draws attention to the priorities which have not yet been met: full cooperation with the ICTY, security issues, institution-building, infrastructure, energy; welcomes the decision by the EU to take over peace-keeping operations from the SFOR led by NATO, whose mandate expired on 2 December 2004, and in this regard stresses the enormous importance of the EU's largest military mission so far, which will give the EU significant visibility in Bosnia; takes note that this will make the EU the main international player in Bosnia, with not only military instruments at its disposal but also civilian instruments, including aid, trade, and political dialogue; points out the contradiction inherent in some political forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which openly support European integration but obstruct the indispensable reforms needed for a functioning state;
8. Welcomes the fact that the EU is ready to assume more responsibilities with regard to the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina than in the past; notes that the EU's largest military mission, EUFOR, is a complementary element to the EU Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina; stresses, therefore, that the take-over of the NATO-led peace-keeping operation SFOR in December 2004 is a major opportunity for further progress ten years after Dayton; takes note of the inclusion of military as well as police components; calls on the Council to ensure maximum coordination between the multiplicity of actors and to ensure that the European Parliament is well informed and given specific information on EUFOR;
9. Welcomes the work of the newly instituted Directorate for European Integration in the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina; recognises the positive developments which have taken place; reiterates the importance for the authorities of further pursuing the reform process and turning their attention to priorities such as tackling corruption and organised crime, tracking down war criminals still at large and dealing with a severely depressed economy, the prohibitive costs of keeping the administration functioning and the general lack of administrative capacity;

10. Regrets the decision taken by the United States - which came into force in June 2003 - granting US citizens in Bosnia immunity from prosecution by the International Criminal Court in The Hague, following ratification by Bosnia and Herzegovina's Parliament;
11. Calls on the Bosnian authorities, in particular the government of the Republika Srpska, to cooperate fully with the ICTY in its pursuit of persons indicted for war crimes and, if this proves to be the case, supports a future invitation to Bosnia to participate in the Partnership for Peace programme; stresses that the most serious issue remains the continued impunity of indicted war criminals and the problem with their extradition, which represents an obstacle to reconciliation and the development of mutual trust between the peoples; calls on the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina at all levels of the administration, civil society, the Orthodox church, and all other responsible actors, to do their utmost to bring Karadzic and Mladic before the ICTY; welcomes, in this respect, the recent arrests by the Republika Srpska police of 8 persons on local war crimes warrants and the decision of the Council to freeze the assets of an increased number of indicted war criminals;
12. Is deeply alarmed at the discovery by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) scientists of depleted uranium contamination of water and ground samples taken from some parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina; expresses its concern at the lack of action in response to UNEP's recommendations that the polluted areas be decontaminated;
13. Welcomes the reconnection of electric generators in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro to western Europe's UCTE system, which was interrupted in 1991; believes that the reunification of the Bosnian market, formerly divided into the Federation and Republika Srpska entities, will boost Bosnia's economic recovery;
14. Recognises that the Office of the High Representative is still needed in Bosnia and Herzegovina; demands greater transparency and (European) parliamentary oversight regarding its activities and decisions, especially in the light of the planned gradual transfer of its activities to Bosnia and Herzegovina's own authorities; in this context, asks the High Representative to refrain from making too extensive use of the so-called 'Bonn Powers', given that these means of government are an obstacle to the establishment of the rule of law in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
15. Urges the Commission to support the country's political forces in finding a consensus to reform the political framework as set out in the Dayton agreement, in order to establish effectively functioning administrative structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina;

Serbia and Montenegro

16. Points out that the next two years will be critical for the state union in Serbia and Montenegro, as finding a mutually satisfactory solution will be a key factor for the stability of the region as a whole; reiterates that the EU should be ready to assist Serbia and Montenegro to work out a lasting arrangement, while adopting a neutral stance on which form that relationship should take;
17. Regrets that there is still a lack of cooperation from Serbia with the ICTY and calls on the authorities to make further progress with military and police reform, with a special focus

on the secret police; welcomes the recent surrender to the ICTY of indicted, high-ranking war criminals, and expects the Serb authorities to speed up their cooperation with the ICTY;

18. Reminds the government of Serbia and Montenegro that respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, including those of ethnic and national minorities, is one of the Copenhagen criteria, and a prerequisite for further involvement in the SAP that might eventually lead to EU membership;
19. Takes note of the findings of the European Parliament's ad hoc mission to Vojvodina and its report concerning ethnic and social tension in the province; reminds the Serb authorities of their responsibility to secure law and order throughout the country and for all inhabitants; recognises the potential of Vojvodina to become a model for the rest of Serbia in securing peaceful coexistence among all the different ethnic groups and to fully benefit from EU initiated/assisted regional and trans-border programmes;

Kosovo

20. Calls on the Commission to expedite and complete work on its feasibility study with a view to starting negotiations as soon as possible on the conclusion of a stabilisation and association agreement with the European Union;
21. Recognises that future decisions taken on the status of Kosovo will have political implications for Serbia, and therefore invites Belgrade and Pristina to engage in a cooperative dialogue and find a constructive solution for the future of Kosovo;
22. Welcomes the decision of former Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj to resign and surrender himself to the ICTY; hopes that his voluntary surrender will act as an example for other indicted war criminals in the region and increase respect for, and the standing of, the ICTY;
23. Notes the outcome of the recent (23 October 2004) elections, but regrets the low turnout and in particular the mass boycott by Kosovo's minority Serbs and the fact that this highlights the deep divisions still plaguing the territory;
24. Is aware that a review on the implementation of the standards will take place in mid-2005 with a view to deciding on the possibility of opening discussions on the future status of Kosovo;
25. Expects the Council, in particular the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and the Commission to play their full part, together with the UN, the US, NATO and all other relevant actors, in preparing the ground for the forthcoming talks on the future of Kosovo; stresses, in this respect, that all parties must be fully aware of the shared European future of the whole region;
26. Calls on the Council and the Commission to take the leading role in preparing the negotiations on final status and to exclude in advance, in order to speed up the process, the following options:

- return to a constitutional relationship with Serbia and Montenegro;
- unification with Albania or any other state or territory in the region;
- partition of Kosovo;

27. Insists, however, on the need for the authorities in Kosovo to take decisive steps to increase security for all citizens of Kosovo;
28. Recognises the importance of the SAP Tracking Mechanism (STM) as a way of supporting Kosovo in its EU-compatible structural reforms and preparing for Kosovo's future inside the European Union;
29. Points out that, more than five years after the conflict, the fate of almost 3 500 Kosovars has not been resolved; calls on the Serbian government to cooperate actively in providing all information concerning the missing persons; likewise calls on the Kosovo authorities to provide all information concerning the 500 Kosovo Serbs still missing;
30. Calls on the authorities of Kosovo to respect the rights of the Serb community, to facilitate the return of Serb and other non-Albanian refugees, to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) and to tackle organised crime and drug trafficking more vigorously;

Albania

31. Is concerned that the political climate in Albania is problematic, with tensions within the ruling party having led to a split within the party; condemns the Albanian government's inability to act effectively; expects all political parties to take practical steps to improve the political climate;
32. Stresses the necessity of improving Albania's administrative capacity and the fight against arbitrary actions by the authorities; recommends that enhanced actions be taken to provide the means needed in the fight against corruption, organised crime, trafficking in human beings, arms and drugs; and calls for improvements aimed at achieving an independent and efficient judicial system, especially the development of a functioning jurisdiction for the administrative sector;
33. Recognises that, with the role it has to play in the fight against organised crime, Albania is a key player in the stabilisation of the region;
34. Is aware that much still has to be done to develop the economic sector (e.g. a quarter of the population is living below the poverty line), tackle corruption and increase transparency; draws attention to the difficult situation in the education sector with regard, in particular, to the urgency of guaranteeing equal education opportunities for children all over the country;
35. Calls on the Albanian government and authorities to respect the rights of the ethnic Greek minority, and points out that progress in the negotiation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and Albania's European future are closely linked to respect for human and minority rights;

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

36. Is of the view that the full participation of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the European integration process will be beneficial not only for the country itself but also for the entire region;
37. Welcomes the answers of the government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the Commission questionnaire on the political and economic issues and the EU acquis; expects the Commission to deliver its opinion on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's application for EU membership as soon as possible; stresses that obtaining candidate status at the December 2005 European Council will encourage the country to achieve further results in the reform process, and will strengthen stability in the region;
38. Welcomes the efforts made by the government in the implementation of the decentralisation reforms as part of the Framework Agreement signed in Ohrid in 2001; welcomes the outcome of the referendum of November 2004, which demonstrated the support for the European course of the country and creates conditions for further reforms; points out that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's efforts to decentralise should be adequately backed up by EU support programmes, which should be further 'deconcentrated' to bring in the expertise of national and local authorities;
39. Regrets that the March 2005 local elections were, according to OSCE monitors, marred by irregularities, and calls on the authorities of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia immediately to take the necessary measures so as to bring the electoral standards into line with the requirements of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights;
40. Is of the opinion that the failure of the referendum regarding the feasibility of the territorial division ensures a continuing reconciliation between the two main ethnic groups along the lines of the Ohrid agreement, with a view to making the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia a model of peaceful coexistence and contributing to the stabilisation of the whole region;
41. Takes the view that the various EU bodies acting in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia should improve their coordination; is of the opinion, in this regard, that the Commission should play a pivotal role in the implementation of EU policies in the country;
42. Takes the view that full support for the ICC is a basic element of cooperation between the EU and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; points out, in this respect, that in view of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's application for membership the so-called 'exemption treaty' between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the USA, signed in 2003, should be annulled;
43. Regrets that, according to the OCSE reports on the local elections, irregularities were observed in a number of municipalities; calls, therefore, for further efforts to be directed towards strengthening the election procedures in the future, particularly at local level;

Croatia

44. Welcomes the decision taken on 18 June 2004¹ to grant Croatia candidate status;
45. Takes note of the Council's decision to postpone the opening of accession talks with Croatia due to the absence of a common agreement about this country's full cooperation with the ICTY;
46. Welcomes, in this respect, the decision of the Council to adopt the negotiating framework with Croatia and calls on the Croatian government to do its utmost to prove it is fully cooperating with the ICTY; takes the view that this is a basic test for all the countries in the region and expresses its full support for the difficult work carried out by the ICTY;
47. Calls on Croatia to settle the remaining border disputes through dialogue with Slovenia and to avoid unilateral acts which intend to prejudice the determination of the Slovenian-Croatian border and affect the demarcation of the border without consent;
48. Takes note of the November 2004 visit by Croatian Prime Minister Sanader to Belgrade, the first such official visit since the collapse of the former Yugoslavia; notes the fact that Prime Minister Sanader and Serbia and Montenegro President Marovic signed agreements regarding national minorities and on technical and scientific cooperation, and that they concurred that the future of both Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro must include European Union membership;
49. Calls on the authorities to take significant steps to facilitate the return of refugees and to guarantee fair and effective domestic trials for war crimes;
50. Urges the Council and the Commission to send the Monitoring Task Force to Croatia as soon as possible in order to provide the next Council meeting with reliable results on which to base decisions;

General points

51. Calls for the international action in the region to be better coordinated; notes that, with numerous actors playing a role in the region, there is a need for a definition/allocation of competences among them; draws particular attention to the need for a clear allocation of responsibilities/competences between the European Agency for Reconstruction and the 'deconcentrated' delegations of the European Commission in the region;
52. Calls on the Council and the Commission to lay down a clear roadmap and accession strategy for the western Balkan countries over the next few years and, especially in view of the opening of negotiations with Croatia, asks that the EU send out an unambiguous message to the other south-east European states;
53. Points out that the SAP in the western Balkans constitutes an essential framework for the countries' journey towards the EU;
54. Points out that the roles of the SAP and the Stabilisation and Association Agreements should be strengthened and that the EU should provide a clear, step-by-step integration agenda;

¹ See Council Conclusions, 17-18 June 2004 (10679/2/04 REV 2).

55. Calls on the EU to encourage and support all governments in the region to prepare EU-compatible provisional National Development Plans similar to the one Turkey has prepared in order to build institutional absorption capacity for future EU assistance, especially in the areas of rural, infrastructure and human resources development;
56. Points out that free trade between south-east European countries and the EU market is hampered by the issue of rules of origin because, in most cases, these countries have not signed the pan-European agreement on rules of origin; calls on the Commission to give top priority to helping these countries conduct any negotiations and necessary procedures;
57. Notes that budgetary allocations for relations with the western Balkans have been constantly and significantly reduced every year since 2002; and is determined to provide adequate funding for the region in the next financial perspective taking into account the crucial challenges of the region, the gradual shift from physical reconstruction to institution-building and pre-accession assistance, as well as the region's strategic importance to the European Union;
58. Calls on the Council and the Commission, in the light of the need to embrace the whole of society, in particular opinion-formers, within the process of advancing the region's journey towards the EU, to take urgent action to strengthen cooperation on border controls as part of a wider justice and home affairs strategy for the region, which should include a study by the Commission on the effects of a progressive easing of visa requirements for the countries of the region, its conclusions to be presented by the end of 2005; considers that the study should focus in particular on how to facilitate the movement of students, NGO representatives, economic actors and representatives of political institutions and business people;
59. Calls on the authorities in the countries of the region to strengthen their efforts to bring before domestic courts all those responsible for war crimes, regardless of the ethnicity of the victims and the perpetrators, and to do this in accordance with internationally recognised fair trial standards, and in cooperation with the ICTY;
60. Stresses that the countries of the region can do much to help themselves to achieve further progress on the road to EU integration by fulfilling the following conditions:
 - cooperation with the ICTY;
 - implementation of an effective policy in favour of the return of refugees and displaced persons;
 - respect for human and minority rights;
 - implementation of active policies against corruption, organised crime and trafficking in human beings, arms and drugs;
 - effective economic cooperation;
61. Welcomes the Sofia declaration on a Decade for Roma Inclusion and asks the Commission to support the efforts of the countries of the region in improving the situation of the Roma population decisively;

62. Notes that the key objectives of EU policy should include a systematic and progressive transfer of responsibilities regarding the implementation and management of EU assistance, increasing the role of local and national authorities and a steadily increasing engagement of civil society and democratic forces, as and when the countries in question have the capacity to do so;
63. Asks the Commission to now include the countries' institutions directly in the Financial Management System of EU Assistance as envisaged in the CARDS programme;
64. Calls on all the countries in the region to work together on the coordination of regional infrastructure, as development in this sector is essential if the region is to integrate economically;
65. Regrets that the return of refugees and internally displaced persons in the region has still to be fully implemented;
66. Continues to be seriously concerned about the exodus of youth and the brain drain in the region and about the not-unrelated levels of poverty and unemployment;
67. Notes that minefields in the Balkans are still a major obstacle to the development and integration of the regions of south-eastern Europe and that, although much work has been successfully undertaken in the past years, the EU's Mine Action activities in countries of the region need to continue in order for the Ottawa Convention's objective of declaring mine-safe areas by 2010 to be achieved;
68. Is of the opinion that the development of, and support for, a genuine civil society is an indispensable factor which is bound to strengthen democratic institutions and pave the way for a full reconciliation between the parties;
69. Calls on the Commission to make further efforts to assist the countries of the region in having their multi-ethnic heritage fully reflected in their education systems, and to ensure that they can take part in European Union educational exchange programmes;
70. Urges the Commission to come up with a concrete project on the creation of areas of facilitated freedom of movement between neighbouring regions, which will thus enhance the development of cross-border and regional cooperation;
71. Urges the Commission to promote and support the setting-up of twinning programmes at municipal level and to support all actions facilitating networking among the various actors in the EU and SAP countries;
72. Proposes that the EU, acting in cooperation with the UN, play a decisive role in creating the platform for immediate talks between all relevant political stakeholders on the status of Kosovo, and looks forward to a productive outcome to these discussions;
73. Urges western Balkan states to adopt and implement the EU Code of Conduct on arms exports;

74. Calls on the Commission and the Agency for Reconstruction to further encourage and support a broad-based truth and reconciliation process, complementary to the judicial processes, which should involve civil society, political actors and cultural figures, and lay the ground for lasting peace and stability in the region; considers that this reconciliation process must, in particular, target young people and should include a thorough review of school books and curricula for history studies;

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75. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and candidate countries, all the governments and parliaments in the region, the EU Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, the EU Special Representatives in the region, the UN Special Representative in Kosovo (UNMIK), the OSCE and the Council of Europe.