

**EU - CROATIA JOINT PARLIAMENTARY
COMMITTEE**

3rd Meeting

20 - 21 March 2006

DUBROVNIK

**JOINT DECLARATION
(adopted on 21 March 2006)**

The Joint Parliamentary Committee EU-Croatia held its 3rd meeting on 20-21 March 2006 in Dubrovnik, under the co-chairmanship of Mr. Gordan JANDROKOVIĆ (HDZ -Croatian Democratic Union), for the Croatian Parliament and Mr. Pal SCHMITT (HU, EPP-ED), for the European Parliament

It exchanged views with:

- **Mrs Kolinda GRABAR-KITAROVIĆ**, Minister of Foreign affairs and European integration of the Republic of Croatia
- **Mrs Martina DALIĆ**, State Secretary, Head of the Central State Administrative Office for the Development Strategy of the Government of Croatia and Deputy Chief Negotiator, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Croatia
- **H.E. Mrs Helga KONRAD**, Ambassador of Austria to Croatia, on behalf of the Presidency in Office of the Council of the EU;
- **Mr Pierre MIREL**, Director for Candidate Countries at DG Enlargement, on behalf of the European Commission.
- **Mr Vincent DEGERT**, Head of the European Commission Delegation to Croatia, on behalf of the European Commission.

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

- State of play of the accession negotiations and the EU-Croatia relations
- Political criteria (return of refugees and situation of the minorities in Croatia)
- Pre-accession aid in the years 2005 and 2006
- The privatisation process in Croatia
- Regional co-operation and cross border activities
- The ongoing debates in the EU on the possible future of the constitutional treaty and the financial perspectives 2007-2013.

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 to the Stabilisation and Association Council, the institutions of Croatia and of the European Union:

On Croatia's accession to the EU

1. welcomed the opening of the accession negotiations with Croatia on October 3, 2005 in Luxembourg, stressing that the objective of the negotiations process is the full membership of Croatia in the European Union;
2. stressed that, according with the European Council conclusions of Copenhagen, each candidate country will be judged on its own merits;
3. welcomed the quality and the dynamics of the screening process conducted by the Commission with Croatia, and looked forward to a rapid opening of the first negotiating chapters based exclusively on Croatia's own individual achievements;

4. welcomed the overall achievements of the Government of Croatia and recalled the important challenges highlighted in the Commission's Progress Report of November 2005 regarding the functioning of democracy, the rule of law and market economy facing the country;
5. welcomed the efforts of Croatia to improve its administrative and absorption capacity with regard to the EU financial assistance under the pre-accession programs; it also strongly supported a speedy adoption by the EU of the IPA regulation, in connexion with the financial perspectives 2007-2013, for which the process of setting up of the future coordination and implementation bodies is ongoing in Croatia;
6. expressed particular satisfaction with the growing rate of support of the Croatian population for EU-membership and welcomed the adoption, in January 2006, by the Croatian Parliament, of a new Communication strategy with the aim of better informing the Croatian public on the advantages of the membership in the EU;
7. called for a rapid adoption of a report on Croatia in the European Parliament that would have an encouraging impact on the ongoing negotiations and reform process, based on Croatia's overall achievements, considering that it did not have its own report in the European Parliament during the current parliamentary term;

On the political criteria:

- co-operation with ICTY

8. expressed satisfaction with the firm commitment of the Croatian Government to continue full co-operation with the ICTY; welcomed the first working visit of newly appointed Justice Minister Ana Lovrin to the ICTY in February 2006;
9. welcomed the first cases of referral to Croatia of trials concerning persons already indicted by the Tribunal of The Hague; expressed the hope that Croatia, with the international monitoring agreed and with a more efficient system of witness protection, would be able to deal with transferred war crimes trials adequately;

- reforms of the judiciary and the police, fight against corruption

10. stressed that further improving of the functioning of the judiciary remains a major challenge for Croatia; welcomed the Strategy for the Reform of the Judiciary adopted by the Government in September 2005 and recognised that the Government started to tackle some of the shortcomings such as backlog of cases, duration of the proceedings, in the framework of the Strategy implementation;
11. concerning war crimes trials at the initiative of Croatia, the JPC welcomed the progress ongoing on tackling the unbalances in ethnic prosecution; encouraged especially the local courts to avoid ethnic bias and invited all the concerned players, from Croatia and the neighbouring countries, to improve their inter-governmental cooperation; it judged essential to improve the efficiency of the system of witness protection;
12. took positive note of the adoption of the comprehensive National Anti-corruption Programme 2006-2008 which contains references to six key areas: judiciary, health care system, government, economy, education and politics and urged it to be implemented resolutely;

13. welcomed the steps taken by the Government in developing the Programme Guidelines on the police reform 2004-2007 in accordance with the EU standards, aiming at further strengthening the rule of law;

- return of refugees and minority rights

14. recalled that Croatia, together with Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, set up in the *Sarajevo Declaration* the goal to close the refugee return issue by the end of 2006; noted that progress achieved so far and the considerable financial resources earmarked in the Croatian State budget for 2005 and 2006 should sustain and facilitate the achievement of this goal from the Croatian side; in order to achieve the objective, all the three countries should step up their efforts;

15. stressed the importance of implementation of the provisions for public infrastructure and housing for returnees; recalled that to date approx. 2.07 billion euros have been spent from the Croatian State budget for the reconstruction of destroyed or damaged houses; expressed its satisfaction that the process of repossession of property is in the closing phase;

16. looked forward to the finalization of the plan aiming to resolve the housing issue for former tenancy rights holders, its presentation to the various international actors concerned (EC, OSCE, UNHCR) and to its implementation;

17. welcomed the second phase of the public awareness campaign on the return and reintegration of refugees under the slogan "Croatia is home to all its citizens" and expressed the wish to see a further development of sustainable returns;

18. recalled that minorities form an integral part of the Croatian society and that therefore greater efforts are needed to achieve the objective of peaceful coexistence and reconciliation; emphasized that continuous efforts are needed for further implementation of the Constitutional Law on the Rights of Minorities and for further guaranteeing an adequate representation of national minorities in State bodies, regional and local authorities; welcomed the policy of the Croatian Government to ensure the allocation of budgetary financial resources to the national minorities;

19. took note of the decision by the Council of National Minorities of February 2006 on the allocation of approximately 4.07 million euros for the activities of national minority associations, recalling that also approx. 1.62 million euros have been earmarked from the State budget for the implementation of the National Programme for the Roma community in 2006;

On Croatian economy and the privatisation process

20. was pleased to note the stable macro-economic situation of Croatia, its good integration in the EU and regional trade system and the progress noted in the Commission's Progress Report of November 2005; in order to consolidate it and to prepare for EU accession, it recommended to the Government to gradually reduce the state aid to companies, further encourage fair competition and attract foreign investment;

21. called on the Government to further pursue the restructuring process of the largest state-owned enterprises in important economic sectors such as the tourism, ship-building, steel and energy; called on it, in good co-operation with the EU Institutions, to search for the most appropriate measures to accommodate legal certainty, market economy and the legitimate interests of those communities where the businesses are run;

On regional co-operation and cross-border activities and subsidiarity

22. emphasising the importance of regional co-operation and good neighbourly relations, supported the positive efforts of Croatia for the further strengthening of relations with its neighbours and for actively pursuing initiatives in all matters of common interest; welcomed in particular the recent decision of the Prime Ministers of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to establish a Joint Task Force for the solution of remaining open issues, and the ongoing co-operation between Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro in the framework of the joint commissions for protection of minorities and for missing persons;
23. welcomed the European Commission's Communication "*The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: consolidating stability and raising prosperity*" of 27 January 2006 confirming the European perspective of the SAP countries;
24. encouraged and strongly supported Croatia's commitment and efforts to further promote the process of trade liberalization in the region building on CEFTA, which would be a useful instrument for all countries in Southeast Europe;
25. welcomed the participation of the representatives of Croatia's local and regional authorities and of the EU Committee of Regions on the margins of the 3rd EU-Croatia JPC with the aim of strengthening the involvement of Croatian regional and local authorities in the pre-accession assistance coordination mechanisms;

On the EU financial perspectives and the future of Europe

26. encouraged the two branches of the EU budgetary authority to find modalities and financial means in the new financial perspectives 2007-13 for the inclusion of Croatia's special needs, as a negotiating country and future Member state;
27. encouraged Croatia, as a candidate and negotiating country, to take an active part in the parliamentary debates and meetings on the future of Europe contributing to the development of the best possible constitutional framework for the enlarged Union.

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