

# **12<sup>th</sup> European Parliament-Croatian Sabor Interparliamentary Meeting**

**17-18 February 2004  
Brussels**

## **JOINT STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSONS OF THE DELEGATIONS**

The Delegation of the European Parliament was chaired by Mrs. Doris PACK, chairperson of the delegation for relations with the countries of South-East Europe.

The Delegation of the Croatian Parliament was chaired by Mr. Neven MIMICA, chairman of the ad hoc delegation for relations with the European Parliament.

### **On the Stabilisation and Association Process and on Croatia's application for EU membership**

1. looked forward to the European Commission's opinion on Croatia's application for EU membership, recalling that this application reflects a natural aspiration and a right which belongs to each country of South East Europe; considered that this application should be regarded by the EU on the basis of the same criteria outlined in Copenhagen in 1993 for the current enlargement process; noted with pleasure that most of the neighbouring countries expressed their solidarity and support for Croatia's candidature for EU accession and were convinced that Croatia's example would be useful for all the countries in the region towards EU integration;
2. called on the Council of Ministers, as soon as a positive opinion from the European Commission will be available, to discuss and evaluate it and to take a decision on the opening of accession negotiations, so that this could take place before the end of 2004;
3. invited the political parties represented in the Sabor to co-operate closely on the priority issues facing Croatia on its way to European integration; that is, protection and guarantee of minority rights, return of refugees, reform of the judiciary and co-operation with the ICTY, and recalled that the European Parliament has repeatedly asked the Council and the Commission to link assistance to the countries participating in the stabilisation and association process and the possible progression to a further stage, in order to move forward on the above-mentioned priority areas;
4. urged the Government and Parliament of Croatia to complete the legislative framework on the public Radio and Television Broadcasting Service with provisions aimed at guaranteeing its full freedom and independence from any possible political interference;
5. hoped that the reserves of three EU Member States on the ratification of the EU-Croatia Stabilisation and Association Agreement would soon be resolved through active efforts of Croatia in addressing the issues which still need progress;

6. welcomed the ongoing preparations of the EC to open some EU programmes and agencies to the participation of Croatia as well as of the other Western Balkan countries;
7. looked forward to the presentation of the European Partnership for Croatia which should contribute, by identifying priorities for action, to support Croatia's efforts to move on towards integration into the EU, under appropriate financial perspectives;

### **On the reforms of the judiciary and of public administration and some aspects related to Justice and Home Affairs**

8. recalled that the EU instances and in particular the European Parliament have repeatedly urged the Croatian Government to step up the reform of the judiciary, through adequate implementation of the strategy adopted in November 2002, and looked forward to prompt action in this field by the new Government; underlined that the strengthening of the judicial system, its improved professionalism and impartiality and the capacity of appropriate enforcement of judicial decisions will be essential for the judgement on the fulfilment by Croatia of the overall political criteria for EU integration;
9. recalled that Croatia needs to pay special attention to strengthening its public administration, to ensure implementation and enforcement of the legislation, in particular with reference to the part concerning incorporation or harmonisation with the EU acquis or as a result of important reforms or of decentralisation; asked the Government of Croatia and the European Commission to look together for the best way to improve performance in the capacity of absorption of CARDS and donors' assistance;
10. encouraged the new Government to step up efforts for the implementation of the anti-corruption legislation and to address procedural, training and infrastructural weaknesses in the field of asylum and foreigners legislation;
11. called on the Government of Croatia and the European Commission to look together for measures aimed at a more efficient fight against crime, trafficking in human beings and smuggling of arms and drugs, through strengthened regional co-operation and effective implementation of the National Plan of November 2002 on combating trafficking in human beings;

### **On the situation of minorities and on refugees' return**

12. in the light of the opinions expressed on several occasions by the EU on the ongoing process of refugee return, expressed the wish to see a substantial improvement in the record of returns, the stability of re-installment and the quality of life of those who chose to return, also through a better allocation of financial resources; recalled that, to achieve such a goal, local problems of housing reconstruction, property re-possession, possible discrimination in employment and for pensions, possible abuses in criminal prosecutions, have to be seriously tackled; in this context, welcomed the agreement concluded on 18 December 2003 between the present Prime Minister and Serbian political representatives, which contains very ambitious targets and deadlines, and looked forward to its timely implementation;

13. recommended, in the framework of the implementation of the constitutional law on the rights of minorities, to improve the rate of representation of minorities in Croatia's political institutions, state administration, in the judiciary and the police; recommended to the new Government to make up for lost time and un-respected deadlines in the overall implementation of the constitutional law; encouraged the new Government to take the appropriate measures in the field of education;

### **On the economic situation in Croatia**

14. underlined the positive signals, such as the GDP growth rate, declining inflation, price stability, better than expected revenue collection, and the important and continuous increase of the influx of tourists, which merits the deployment of resources for infrastructure-building and environment protection;

15. nevertheless, asked the Government to step up efforts to improve export performance and competitiveness of Croatian products, to attract more Foreign Direct Investments and to address the current account deficit and the rising external debt;

16. encouraged the Government to keep high on its agenda the fight against unemployment and social aspects related to that, taking stock on the first positive signals showing a relative decrease of the unemployment rate;

17. further asked the Government to deploy more efforts to speed up the privatisation of state-owned companies, and to establish the appropriate implementation capacity in the legal procedures related to commercial, company, competition and labour law;

### **On regional co-operation and open issues with neighbouring countries**

18. recalled that border issues are still pending with some neighbouring countries of Croatia, in particular Slovenia, and expected from the new Government and all the other interested parties clear gestures of good will to resolve them and achieve full normalisation of relations through diplomatic instruments and intensive bilateral, or, whenever appropriate, multi-lateral dialogue; expressed the hope that a negotiated solution can be found, following the Croatian Parliament's unilateral decision, on 3 October 2003, to declare an exclusive ecological and fishing zone in the Adriatic Sea;

19. invited Croatia to ratify the Framework Agreement on Succession to the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of 29 June 2001, which has already been ratified by all the other parts;

## **On the co-operation of Croatia with the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia)**

20. invited the Institutions of Croatia to bear in mind that respect of international legal provisions is to be regarded as a basic condition for the fulfillment of the political criteria conditional to the future opening of negotiations for accession to the EU, and that this process needs to be fully understood by all concerned players, as well as by the Croatian civil society;
21. welcomed the declarations of good intents by the new Government and looked forward to Croatia's full and effective co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), in particular regarding the transfer to the custody of the tribunal of those indicted, and the availability of witnesses and other sources of proof of crimes, and to ignore in this regard any political agenda;
22. encouraged the competent authorities, in the cases where this would be consistent with the Croatian international obligations towards the ICTY, to continue and improve fair and professional prosecution of war criminals in domestic courts.

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