

EU - CROATIA JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

**13th Meeting
16-17 May 2011
Dubrovnik**

JOINT RECOMMENDATIONS

Tuesday, 17 May 2011

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:

1. Welcomed Croatia's remarkable progress in carrying out and implementing the reforms that are necessary for EU membership; underlines that accession negotiations should be concluded by the end of June 2011, and not later than the summer recess, provided all remaining benchmarks are fulfilled;
2. Noted with satisfaction that, since the latest JPC meeting, three chapters were provisionally closed at the December 2010 Accession Conference and two additional chapters were closed at the 19 April 2011 Accession Conference, therefore bringing the total number of provisionally closed chapters to 30 out of 35;
3. Took note of the resolution of the European Parliament of 16 February 2011 on the 2010 progress report on Croatia, as well as of the Commission's interim report of March 2011 on reforms in Croatia in the field of judicial reform and fundamental rights, which welcomes reforms and activities done by Croatia and has set a detailed roadmap for future progress; commended Croatian authorities for their substantial response to this interim report;
4. Noted Croatia's sustained efforts to strengthen the independence and impartiality of its judiciary, including through the implementation of constitutional changes; welcomed, in particular, the constitution of the State Judicial Council and State Attorneys' Council, as well as the beginning of operations of the State School for Judicial Officials; stressed that these institutions' ability to operate independently, impartially and professionally will be essential to the success of this reform, and hence to the conclusion of chapter 23;
5. With regard to the efficiency of the judiciary, noted that the overall backlog of cases is being further reduced, that the most burdened courts have been strengthened, and that relevant changes of the legal framework are being done in order to reduce the length of judicial

proceedings and further reduce the overall number of case backlog; and welcomed the amendments to the Civil Procedure Act;

6. With regard to the prosecution of war crimes, welcomed the Croatian government's adoption of a new strategy on impunity in February 2011, the government's conclusions of 8 April 2011 on additional measures aimed at improving the processing of war crimes, as well as the relevant legislative amendments adopted to further improve the handling of war crime cases; took note of the good cooperation of Croatian authorities with the ICTY;
7. Was pleased with the Croatian government's continued determination to fight corruption, and welcomed the results in fighting corruption on all levels achieved so far; welcomed the reinforcement of all relevant bodies of the so-called USKOK vertical system for fighting corruption and organised crime; supported Croatia's "zero-tolerance" policy towards corruption to further strengthen the notion of political accountability and responsibility; stressed that continued effort was needed, considering that some high-level corruption cases have yet to reach the stage of court rulings, with the aim to reduce the length of judicial proceedings;
8. Supported Croatia's efforts to promote a climate of tolerance in the country, including through the sustainable return of refugees, the full implementation of anti-discrimination legislation, including on LGBT persons and continue combating violence against women and hate crimes;
9. Noted positive regional developments, including the ratification of the Arbitration Agreement between Croatia and Slovenia as well as agreements with Serbia and Montenegro on extradition; welcomed the second trilateral meeting held between Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia in April 2011 in Serbia to discuss a joint economic strategy;
10. Recalled that the Croatian economy was severely hit by the financial and economic crisis in 2009, and called for the further implementation of structural reforms so as to allow the country to improve its competitiveness in the long run, create jobs, reduce the country's debt and speed up the pace of economic recovery while keeping in perspective the socio-economic dimension of these reforms; underlined that necessary structural reforms include the need to strengthen competition across all Croatian industries as well as labour market reforms, while adopting measures for retraining and for the creation of new jobs, especially for the youth; stressed that Croatia's growth prospects also depend to a considerable extent on the EU's own recovery;
11. Welcomed the stepping up of efforts to encourage an informed debate on the EU among Croatian citizens and called for a continuation of the dialogue between political authorities and all sectors of Croatia's civil society; stressed the necessity to continue communicating the expected benefits of EU membership in the context of the preparations for the accession referendum.