

EU - CROATIA JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

1st Meeting

3 - 4 March 2005

ZAGREB

**DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
(adopted on 4 March 2005)**

SMZ/pel
4 March 2005

The Joint Parliamentary Committee EU-Croatia held its 1st meeting on 3-4 March 2005 in Zagreb, under the co-chairmanship of Mr Gordan JANDROKOVIĆ (HDZ -Croatian Democratic Union), for the Croatian Parliament and Mr. Pal SCHMITT (HU, PPE-ED), for the European Parliament

It had exchanges of views with:

- Mr Hidajet BISCEVIC, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs and European Integration on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Croatia
- H. E. Ambassador Georges SANTER, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg, on behalf of the Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union
- Mr Vladimir DROBNJAK, Chief Negotiator for the Republic of Croatia
- Mr David DALY, Head of Unit, Croatia Team, DG Enlargement, on behalf of the European Commission

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

- Political criteria:
 - reform of judiciary and fight against corruption
 - co-operation with ICTY
 - return of refugees and minority rights
 - media legislation
- Regional co-operation
- EU enlargement: recent experience, perspectives and public opinion in the EU countries 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 recommendations to the Stabilisation and Association Council, the institutions of Croatia and of the European Union:

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

1. welcomed Croatia's application for accession to the European Union; stressed Croatia's natural vocation for EU membership and the wider political signal of its application, being the second country (after Slovenia) coming from the area of the former Yugoslavia;
2. noted that the European Union is aware, from its own historical and recent experience, of the positive impact which the accession perspective can have on all the countries aspiring to become candidates and reaffirmed that enlargement is an evolutionary process open to any European country which complies with the criteria laid down in Article 6 of the Treaty on the European Union and fulfils the Copenhagen criteria;
3. welcomed the entry into force of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Croatia on 1st February 2005, as a legal framework for relations for the entire period prior to the future accession;

4. welcomed the positive *avis* from the European Commission on Croatia's application for EU membership and the European Partnership with Croatia, which will serve as a basis for measuring progress and for programming Community's financial assistance; expressed their satisfaction for the recent submission by the Commission to the EU Council of a draft framework for negotiations and supported the opening of negotiations at the date scheduled of 17 March 2005;

5. welcomed the recent joint initiatives by the Croatian Parliament and Government, as well as the declarations adopted by all the Croatian political parties confirming joint readiness to support and cooperate during the negotiations for EU membership; invited the political parties represented in the Sabor to concentrate on the priority political and legal issues facing Croatia on its way to European integration, in particular, protection and guarantee of minority rights, return of refugees, reform of the judiciary and co-operation with the ICTY; recalled that Croatian legislation should not only be amended in line with EU *acquis* and requirements but such amendments should be concretely implemented;

6. being aware of the conclusions of the European Council of 16 and 17 December 2004;

7. welcomed the overall efforts and achievements of the Government of Croatia to move the country forward to the European Union by introducing the necessary political, social, economic and other reforms, thus preparing the country for the accession negotiations and full EU membership as part of the EU enlargement process;

8. stressed that the EU financial assistance under the Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation Programme (CARDS) and the other programmes is conditional on further progress in satisfying the Copenhagen political criteria and needs an improved administrative capacity in Croatia;

9. expressed the conviction that the support of the Croatian population for their country's EU membership will remain stable and positive and that conditions and challenges of accession to the EU are correctly explained to the public;

On the political criteria:

- reforms of the judiciary and of public administration

- fight against corruption

10. recalled that the European Partnership of the EU with Croatia identifies the reform of the judiciary as a short term priority, through adequate development and implementation of a comprehensive strategy; underlined that the strengthening of the judicial system, its improved professionalism and impartiality and the capacity of appropriate enforcement of judicial decisions, as well as the capacity to make up for the massive case backlog will be essential for the judgement on the fulfilment by Croatia of the overall political criteria for EU integration;

11. urged the Croatian Government to reduce inconsistencies in the multitude of civil service management standards and to take the necessary steps for the introduction of transparent procedures for the recruitment, selection and promotion of human resources in all public administration bodies;

12. encouraged the Government to step up efforts for the implementation of the anti-corruption legislation and welcomed new legislation providing for increased administrative and operational efficiency of the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime (USKOK); considered that the awareness of the public on such a serious criminal phenomenon should be raised and welcomed therefore the measures undertaken to increase public awareness of this issue;

13. welcomed the signing of the Agreement of Cooperation between Croatia and Serbia-Montenegro, as well as between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, on cooperation in investigating war crimes and fighting organized crime in the region; were pleased with the initiatives aimed at improving the effectiveness of control at the Croatian borders;

- co-operation of Croatia with the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal of the former Yugoslavia)

14. confirming that respect of international legal provisions is to be regarded as a basic condition for the fulfilment of the political criteria conditional for the opening of negotiations for Croatia's accession to the EU, took note of the recent public order to intelligence services by the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister of Croatia and expected Croatia to take the necessary steps for full co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY);

15. encouraged the competent authorities to continue and improve fair and professional prosecution of war criminals in domestic courts in line with Croatian obligations towards the ICTY;

- minority rights and return of the refugees

16. recalled that minorities are an integral part of the Croatian society; welcomed the policy of the Croatian Government to ensure the political participation and representation of minorities in the legislative and executive bodies and state and local administration, judiciary, police etc; recommended to the Government of Croatia to continue to implement the Constitutional Law on the rights of minorities and to proceed in overcoming any possible hindrance on local and lower administrative levels; appreciated the importance of further promoting social and inter-ethnic tolerance in Croatian society; asked the Government to take the appropriate measures for ensuring TV and radio broadcasting for minorities in their languages;

17. in the light of the opinions expressed on several occasions by the EU on the process of refugee return, expected Croatia to strengthen efforts to facilitate the return of refugees still abroad, in particular the Serb refugees from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, also through the raising of public awareness; welcomed the signing, on 31 January 2005, of the Declaration on the Return of Refugees by Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro, which confirms the commitment of the three countries to create the conditions for the return, to provide support to those who would decide to stay in the country where they currently reside and to solve the status of remaining refugees and exiled by the end of 2006;

18. welcomed the signing of a bilateral agreement on the protection of minority rights – Serbs in Croatia and Croats in Serbia and Montenegro – on the occasion of the official visit of the

Croatian Prime Minister to Belgrade, in November 2004;

19. stressed the importance of the implementation of the provisions for housing of refugees and internally displaced persons, 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 must be overcome; commending the policy of the Government in this respect, called also for a permanent commitment in this important issue;

- media legislation

20. took note of the efforts made by the Government and Parliament of Croatia to complete and implement the legislative framework on the media with provisions aimed at guaranteeing full transparency, freedom, independence and professional standing;

On the economic situation in Croatia

21. took note with sincere satisfaction of the Commission's opinion of April 2004 establishing that Croatia can be regarded as a functioning market economy and should be able to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union in the medium term, provided that it continues to implement the reform programme intended to remove remaining weaknesses;

22. considered that, to improve the working of market mechanisms, the performance of the judicial sector and of public administration, especially its sections dealing with land property and enterprises' market entry and exit, should be enhanced significantly, and other important challenges will be represented by tackling unemployment, speeding up the restructuring and privatisation process, especially of the largest loss making companies, redressing the balance between the imports and exports and improving fiscal consolidation;

On regional co-operation

23. stressed that the European Partnership of the EU with Croatia identifies the enhancement of regional co-operation as a priority policy issue; emphasising the importance of regional co-operation and good neighbourly relations through a reconciliation process based on compromise and dialogue among the countries of Central and Southeast Europe, welcomed the contribution of Croatia to the policy of cooperation and coexistence among the countries of the region;

24. supporting the efforts of Croatia to overcome the legacy of the war and promote an internal and inter-state truth and reconciliation process with full normalisation of relations, welcomed also the efforts of Croatia to address all remaining open issues with neighbouring countries through political dialogue;

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25. looked forward to their next meeting in order to discuss progress in negotiations of Croatia for accession to the European Union.

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