

# EU - CROATIA JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

**Eighth Meeting**  
**6-7 October 2008**  
**Brussels**

## **DECLARATION and RECOMMENDATIONS** *adopted on 7 October 2008*

The Joint Parliamentary Committee EU-Croatia held its 8th meeting on 6-7 October 2008 in Brussels, under the co-chairmanship of Mr Pal SCHMITT (HU, EPP-ED), for the European Parliament Delegation and Mr Mario ZUBOVIC (HDZ -Croatian Democratic Union), for the Croatian Parliament Delegation.

It exchanged views with:

- **Mrs Claire RAULIN**, First Secretary at the Permanent Representation of France to the European Union and Counsellor for Accession Negotiations with Croatia and Turkey on behalf of the Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union;
- **Mr. Vladimir DROBNJAK**, Chief Negotiator for the Accession of the Republic of Croatia to the European Union,
- **Mr. Miroslav BOŽIĆ**, Director of the Directorate for agricultural policy, EU and international relations, Ministry of agriculture, fisheries and rural development
- **Mrs. Ružica GELO**, Member of the Negotiating Team responsible for the chapters: Agriculture and Rural Development, Fisheries, Food safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy, Consumer and Health Protection, (and Deputy Director of the Agriculture, Food Industry and Forestry Department at the Croatian Chamber of Economy)
- **Mr. Kristian TURKALJ**, Member of Negotiation team responsible for chapters 23, Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and 24 - Justice, Freedom and Security (Director of the the Directorate for EU and human rights, Ministry of Justice)
- **Mrs. Ivana MALETIĆ**, State Secretary, Ministry of Finance  
on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Croatia;
- **Mr. Jan TRUSZCZYNSKI**, Deputy Director General at Directorate General "Enlargement", 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 overall preparations for the accession of Croatia to the EU,

- Croatian policy on agriculture and rural development and adjustments of Common Agriculture Policy (CAP 's "health check")
- State of implementation of the reform of the judiciary
- Policies against corruption in Croatia
- Anti-discrimination policies and review of progress in the areas of protection of minorities and refugee return in Croatia
- Management of EU funds in Croatia and priorities of the Multi-Annual Indicative Planning Document (MIPD)

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

### **On EU-Croatia negotiations for accession to the EU and the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement**

1. welcomed the overall efforts and achievements of the Institutions of Croatia and reviewed the negotiation process over the months since the last JPC; considered that the negotiations should as from now proceed more and more smoothly and at an accelerated pace, in particular during the remaining part of the French Presidency and the Czech Presidency-in-Office;
2. recalled the European Parliament's resolution of 10 April 2008 which shares the Commission's view that, with increased efforts on the part of Croatia and continuous support by the EU Institutions, accession negotiations should, in any event, be concluded in 2009, and, according to the declared Croatian goal, expressed their wish that this would happen before the end of mandate of the current Commission;
3. welcomed the opening, so far, of twenty-one negotiation chapters as well as the provisional closure of three of them (Chapters 25 on Science and Research, 26 on Education and Culture and 20 on Enterprise and Industrial Policy); was pleased to note the progress in the fulfilment of benchmarks with a view to the opening of remaining negotiations chapters; noted that the process of fulfilling a number of closing benchmarks has been underway; expected from the Commission a positive assessment on the fulfilment, by Croatia, of all opening benchmarks, the observance of all legal obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the improvement of the management of EU financial assistance, and the submission this Autumn, together with the Progress Report, of a calendar for the conclusion of negotiations in 2009;
4. stressed that, independently from the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty, the present institutional rules of the European Union do not impede, as such, the accession of Croatia, for which appropriate arrangements have to be negotiated in due course and, at the earliest convenience, incorporated in the Treaties;

5. encouraged the work of the Croatian National Committee, as the body in charge of monitoring the accession negotiations with the EU, and welcomed the fact that the Committee helps to maintain political consensus on both the negotiation process and the European integration process as a whole;

6. was pleased to note that Croatia has contributed to the smooth functioning of the various joint bodies connected to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and that the implementation of the latter has continued without difficulties;

7. as regards financial management, further encouraged the efforts invested by the Croatian Government to continue strengthening the administrative capacity of all relevant agencies and bodies, including those at the local level, in order to benefit more fruitfully from the pre-accession assistance programmes; commended intensive preparations for management and implementation of IPA (Pre-Accession Instrument) programme, and expressed confidence that the EC will be in a position to confer management powers to Croatia, thus allowing the implementation of IPA funds as of 2009; was of the opinion that the recently revised and adopted IPA Multi-Annual Indicative Planning Document 2008-2010 duly emphasised the need of more targeted funding, within its institution building envelope, towards judiciary, public administration reforms and fight against corruption on one hand, whilst on the other hand duly emphasised the need of streamlining other IPA funds to intervention areas similar to the ones funded by various EU policies (i.e. preparation for successful participation in various EU policies upon accession);

### **On the political criteria:**

8. welcomed Croatia's actions to continuously address all matters related to the rule of law, and in particular the ongoing reforms of the judiciary and public administration, the fight against corruption and organised crime, the border management in accord with EU requirements;

#### **- the judiciary**

9. took note with satisfaction of the reduction in the backlog of pending and enforcement cases, the ongoing digitalisation of the land register and the promising launch of projects for the electronic case management and case tracking in courts; having taken note of the adoption by Parliament of the law "on the Territorial Jurisdiction and Seats of Courts", encouraged Croatia to pursue the rationalisation of the system of the Courts, which should go hand in hand with consistent investment for judicial infrastructure, a further improvement of impartiality, independence and professionalism of the judiciary, also through the career management system and well planned intensive training;

#### **- public administration**

10. noted the adoption by the Government of the State Administration Reform Strategy 2008-2011 and looked forward to its implementation as well as to renewed commitment towards administrative decentralization; encouraged to continue with the de-politicisation of the Croatian public administration, merit-based personnel policy as well as with the completion of the Civil Service Training Plans;

## **- fight against corruption**

11. whilst emphasizing that the fight against corruption remains a challenge for Croatia and that additional progress is needed, was pleased to note that the legal framework to combat corruption has been further improved and that the rating of Croatia on corruption perception is improving, according to Transparency International; welcomed the stepped-up activities of the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime (USKOK), thanks to which an increasing number of cases are being processed and looked forward to their continuation, especially with regard to high level corruption cases, as well as to the continuation of awareness raising campaigns; welcomed the new National Anti-Corruption Strategy and related Action Plan, the new Acts on Public Procurement, on Concession, on Public Private Partnerships and the Act on Amendments to the Act on the Prevention of Conflict of Interests in the Exercise of Public Office, and encouraged Croatia to focus on the implementation of all these measures as well as to ensure timely judicial follow-ups;

## **- on anti-discrimination, minorities' rights and refugee return**

12. welcomed the adoption of the new Laws on Anti-Discrimination and on Gender Equality which contribute to aligning Croatia with the relevant EU acquis and to animate the debate among society on the challenges of their implementation; took note of Croatia's increased attention to the implementation of the Constitutional Law on National Minorities, particularly of its provisions related to the employment of members of national minorities; encouraged Croatia to continue its efforts with regard to representation of minorities in state administration, the judiciary and the police; welcomed Croatia's active participation in the "Decade for Roma Inclusion"; called however for continued efforts to improve equal access to quality education for Roma children (desegregation) and to strengthen their possibilities to full participating in society;

13. welcomed the overall progress achieved as regards refugee return, including the reconstruction and repossession of housing, the challenging implementation of housing programmes for former tenancy rights holders and the long awaited validation of pension rights; encouraged the Croatian authorities to address disadvantage and social exclusion and to create the economic conditions necessary for the sustainability of refugee return; praised Croatia for its engagement in regional discussions on this issue;

14. encouraged Croatia to continue full cooperation with the ICTY and to pursue continuous impartiality and professionalism for the conduct of domestic war crime trials; in particular, encouraged the relevant authorities to build on the progress made with the positive measures taken for facilitating witness hearing and witness protection;

## **On the regional implications of the Croatian EU accession process and regional cooperation**

15. welcomed the successful action of Croatia for the further strengthening of multi-lateral relations with its neighbours and for its initiatives in all matters of common interest, thus acting as a dynamic player in the region;

16. confirmed that Croatia's EU accession process has wider regional implications, can be seen as a test of the commitments made by the EU to the countries of the Western Balkans and should become a significant incentive for all the other countries of the region;

17. encouraged Croatia and its neighbours to continue enhancing work for finding definitive solutions to all pending bilateral issues, in particular those on borders; recalled that addressing border-related issues is defined as a priority for Croatia in the Accession Partnership; at the same time, underlined that bilateral issues should not, as such, jeopardize or slow down the ongoing accession negotiations process, which involves each and every one of the European Union Member States and Croatia, nor the accession process of any other country of the region;

### **On agriculture and rural development**

18. noted that Croatia has a rich potential for sustainable development of rural areas and as a producer of agricultural products, which is at present under-exploited due to the large number of small fragmented family farms and to the consequences of the war in the Nineties (in particular, decreasing of the number of livestock, depopulation and mined agricultural areas); Croatia therefore presents a large trade deficit in the field of agricultural and food products; expected a robust recovery of the sector to happen in Croatia also as a result of the EU accession process, in line with the latest objectives outlined for the Common Agricultural Policy: simplification, ability to grasp new market opportunities, ability to face new challenges like climate change, water management, bio-energy and in general environment protection.

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