



BULLETIN

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COMMENTARY

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European Parliament Resolutions on Countries Applying for EU Membership

Adam Szymański

European Parliament resolutions appraising Croatia's and Macedonia's state of preparations for the EU accession, as well as the very debate on the subject, are signs of the EU's positive attitude towards these candidate countries. The resolution on Turkey, containing many critical comments, proves that the result of the membership negotiations with Turkey remains open.

On 10 February 2010 European Parliament adopted three resolutions on the progress which the candidate countries (Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey) made on their way to the EU membership. The resolutions are first such documents in the new EP term of office. During the plenary session the vote on the resolutions was preceded by a debate attended by the new Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle.

The resolutions on the Balkan candidates prove that there is some positive attitude towards their EU accession. In the discussion deputies emphasised the importance of Western Balkans for the security of Europe and recognised the need to retain the credibility of the EU. However, there was no reference to the issue of the EU's capacity to absorb new states. The plans to complete accession negotiations with Croatia in 2010 were assessed as realistic. European Parliament appealed to the European Council to accept (during its summit in March 2010) the European Commission's recommendation on starting talks on the membership with Macedonia. The resolutions (containing some criticism on the question of meeting the Copenhagen criteria) received mostly satisfactory comments as regards reforms carried out by these countries. One opinion repeated itself in the debate, namely that ending the Greek-Macedonian name dispute and the Slovenian-Croat border tiff largely depends on Greece and Slovenia.

The resolution on Turkey was rather different in tone. Turkey received more attention in the debate shedding light on the EU states' largely critical approach to that bid. There is no mention in the document of the prospect of ending the negotiations. Although some talked of Turkey's significance for the EU (particularly for its external relations), they also criticised Turkey's ever closer ties with Iran. They also stressed Turkey's failure to meet the political Copenhagen criteria. The Cyprus problem especially came centre stage in the resolution and discussion. Deputies expressed a view that the conflict's resolution is principally dependent on Turkey. The country was thus called upon to immediately commence the pull out of its troops from the island (a claim in line with the position of the Republic of Cyprus).

Judging by the tone of the report on the Cyprus question, the arguments against Turkey's EU membership are becoming more and more explicit. Also, the Strasbourg session clearly indicates that the advocates of the Turkish accession are ineffective, even though it is their efforts (along with the state of preparations) that affect the pace of negotiations between Turkey and the EU. It is also curious that the positive attitude towards the Balkan states' accession is created by the strong coalition of the EU states (with Germany at the forefront). For instance, Foreign Ministers of Austria and Greece made an appeal in the form of a letter to Foreign Ministers of the other EU states and the High Representative of the EU Catherine Ashton in which they proposed keeping up the current pace of Western Balkans integration with the EU.

Therefore, European Parliament resolutions on Croatia and Macedonia will constitute one of those positive signals which stimulate these countries' further accession efforts. When adopting the document on Turkey deputies had a similar purpose, which in this case will not be easy. That prospect is confirmed by the position of Turkey's Foreign Ministry. It specifically criticised the resolution, especially its part on Cyprus. Additionally, the European Parliament resolution may have a negative bearing on the tone of talks about the island's unification.