Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1440 (2005)[1]

Recent political developments in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" in the context of regional stability

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In 2001, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" was the theatre of an escalation of violence between the two largest ethnic communities of the country, Macedonian and Albanian. The Ohrid Framework Agreement (August 2001), signed by the main political parties, the European Union and the United States, put an end to hostilities and paved the way for wide-ranging reforms.

2. Over these four years, peace has been preserved in the country, despite fears which arose from the outbreak of violence in Kosovo of March 2004. Similarly, Macedonia[2] has made remarkable progress in the adoption of the reforms required by the Ohrid Agreement, despite the accidental death of one of its main political supporters, the late President Boris Traijkovski, and the holding of a referendum on the reform of the system of local self-government which could have delayed the implementation process.

3. Likewise, its efforts towards closer and more integrated relations with the Euro-Atlantic community have led Macedonia on the one hand to become a member of NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP) and on the other hand, to conclude a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union (2001) and apply for EU membership (2004).

4. The Parliamentary Assembly acknowledges that Macedonia has successfully overcome the crisis of 2001 and that it is in the process of finalising a legislative framework capable of ensuring internal stability. This is an important achievement for Macedonia and its citizens, but also for the region of the western Balkans as a whole, which will have to face daunting challenges in the next months such as the beginning of negotiations over the final status of Kosovo.

5. To be lasting, however, this achievement needs consolidating : the recent local elections in 2005 highlighted that Macedonia should make a further effort to address some shortcomings in its democratic system. Furthermore, the wide-ranging reforms introduced over the last four years need to be assessed against their practical implementation, sustainability and acceptance by the population.

6. While recognising the substantial progress made in this field, the Assembly believes that, domestically, Macedonia should strengthen good governance and democratic institutions and reinforce the trust of citizens in the political system. In addition, as regards the protection of minorities and interethnic relations, Macedonia ought to endeavour to overcome a segmentation of society along ethnic lines and avoid the marginalisation of smaller ethnic communities.

7. In the field of external relations, the Assembly encourages Macedonia to continue pursuing the objective of closer integration in the European and international community and address outstanding issues with its neighbours, including the dispute with Greece over the name issue and the final demarcation of the border with Serbia and Montenegro (Kosovo).

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee acting on behalf of the Assembly on 6 June 2005 (see Doc. 10547, report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur : Mr Bianco).
2. The use in the text of the term "Macedonia" is for descriptive purposes and the convenience of the reader ; it does not prejudge the position of the Assembly on the question of the name of the state and does not reflect the position of the Council of Europe.

8. The Assembly is concerned by the potentially destabilising effects of several inter-linked factors of the situation in Macedonia as well as in other parts of the western Balkans, such as the virulence of organised and transnational crime, weak law enforcement capacity and the stagnant economic situation with high unemployment and widespread poverty. As indicated by recent events in Kondovo, crime can also assume political connotations, which increases the risk of domestic and regional destabilisation.

9. In light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on the Macedonian authorities :

to make further efforts to consolidate good governance and democratic institutions, and in particular :

a. to ensure that the electoral process complies with Council of Europe standards of freedom and fairness throughout its territory and in this context prevent, sanction and redress irregularities :

by organising pre-electoral information campaigns targeting areas where irregularities have been recurrent in recent elections, with the involvement of all political forces ;

by providing appropriate training to polling station staff, in co-operation with relevant international agencies including the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) ;

by guaranteeing the independence of the Electoral Commission ; and

by investigating cases of irregularities or malpractices, wherever they occur, and avoiding impunity of those involved ;

b. to finalise its reform of the judiciary with a view to guaranteeing its efficiency and independence and intensify its co-operation with the Council of Europe in this field ;

c. to endeavour to improve the trust of citizens in the political system and state institutions, and in this context :

develop projects and policies to foster civic and democratic education, with a view to promoting the engagement of citizens in the public sphere irrespective of their background ;

promote the introduction of guidelines for the internal democratisation of political parties and encourage the development of a multi-ethnic composition and leadership ; and

continue its fight against corruption by refining its anti-corruption strategy, pursuing its co-operation with the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and complying with GRECO recommendations to establish guidelines for members of the parliament (Sobranie) containing criteria to be applied when deciding on requests for lifting immunities and to reduce the list of officials covered by immunity to a minimum ;

d. with regard to the system of local self-government :

to develop a detailed strategy for the effective implementation of the reform of the system of local self-government, in co-operation with the Council of Europe ; and

to organise activities to inform the population of the impact of the reform on their daily lives, its functioning and objectives ;

e. with regard to the protection of national minorities and interethnic relations :

to devise policies aimed at fostering communication and interaction between individuals belonging to different ethnic groups, with a view to promoting multiculturalism and social cohesion ;

to support policies and measures to avoid the marginalisation of individuals belonging to smaller ethnic communities ;

to give attentive consideration to the recommendations recently put forward by the European Committee against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ETS No. 157) ; and

to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148) ;

to take appropriate and immediate measures to curb organised and transnational crime ;

to continue the process of economic restructuring, with a view to reducing unemployment and attracting foreign investments ;

to pursue its efforts towards Euro-Atlantic integration and inform the public about this process through transparent information.

10. Furthermore, with a view to solving outstanding bilateral issues, the Assembly calls on Greece and Macedonia to intensify their bilateral diplomatic efforts to reach a solution over the name issue.

11. Similarly, the Assembly calls on Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, the Kosovo authorities as well as the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to engage in negotiations to finalise the demarcation of the border between Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro (Kosovo), prior to the beginning of talks over the final status of Kosovo.

12. Finally, the Assembly calls on the European Union :

to continue to support the restructuring of the Macedonian economy and provide advice on economic reform through its European Agency for Reconstruction ;

to consider playing a greater role in facilitating a diplomatic solution between Greece and Macedonia over the name issue following the Conclusions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of 25 April 2005.