Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1517 (2006)[1]

General policy debate on the situation in the Balkans

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to Resolution 1453 (2005) on the current situation in Kosovo, Resolution 1513 (2006) on the constitutional reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Resolution 1514 (2006) on the consequences of the referendum in Montenegro.

2. The year 2006 is crucial for the entire region of the Western Balkans, that is Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia (including Kosovo) and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". This region is witnessing significant developments, not least of which the recent independence of Montenegro and the beginning of the status talks on Kosovo.

3. The Parliamentary Assembly trusts that these developments will contribute to further stabilisation, democratic progress and prosperity in the countries of the Western Balkans.

4. While peace has been maintained in the region for seven years now, thanks to the presence of thousands of foreign troops, much remains to be done in a number of fields in order to pave the way for the further European integration of the countries of the region.

5. The Assembly believes that, while the Western Balkan countries still have to address a significant number of shortcomings, it is also the duty of the international community, especially the Council of Europe and the European Union, to actively support these countries by recognising the progress achieved so far and their continued efforts for improvement.

6. Western Balkan countries have been criticised repeatedly as far as their democratic development is concerned, but the international community should assume its share of responsibility for lack of democratic development in the region. European institutions in particular should recognise that the Western Balkans is a key region for the whole continent and resolutely invest themselves in supporting democratic progress in the region by offering the countries of the region clearer perspectives for European and European Union integration.

7. The Assembly is concerned that if stronger interest is not shown by Europe in the Western Balkan region, there is a danger that the feeling of marginalisation will continue to grow, leading to undesirable consequences.

8. The Assembly is fully aware that each country of the region has its own specificities which justify a targeted approach to each of them. However, it also believes that it is of paramount importance to initiate a platform for dialogue on the situation of the countries in the Western Balkans as a whole and wishes to initiate the first steps towards more regular discussions on the future of this region.

9. The Assembly believes that the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is essential for establishing justice in all countries comprising the former Yugoslavia and in helping to deal with the past and thus pave the way for future reconciliation among the people of the region and between neighbouring states. It is therefore crucial for the relevant Western Balkan countries to co-operate fully with the ICTY, notably in the cases of Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic. It considers it to be of the utmost

1. Assembly debate on 3 October 2006 (26th Sitting) (see Doc. 11050, report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Eörsi). Text adopted by the Assembly on 3 October 2006 (26thSitting).

importance that the ICTY conclude the examination of the ongoing cases in a reasonable time frame, allowing the families of the victims to come to terms with their past, while at the same time avoiding violations of the basic human rights of the accused, including the right to trial within a reasonable time.

10. In light of the above, the Assembly resolves to continue to follow closely the situation in the countries of the Western Balkans and report on it as and when appropriate.

11. The Assembly resolves to step up its parliamentary assistance programme with Montenegro and Serbia and extend it to other countries of the region.

12. The Assembly invites its relevant committees to promote regional parliamentary co-operation in their respective fields of competence by organising meetings, conferences and seminars jointly with national parliaments.

13. The Assembly calls on the international community, in particular the European Union, to:

13.1. define more clearly their strategy towards the countries of the Western Balkans;

13.2. offer better incentives and perspectives to the region;

13.3. recognise the efforts and achievements made so far by the countries of the region in their effort to establish democracy, the rule of law, the respect for human rights and good governance, as well as in their fight against corruption, organised crime and trafficking;

13.4. take more account of the domestic political challenges the countries in the region are facing;

13.5. increase their support to institution building in the region through improved co-operation and support for Council of Europe programmes, namely in the field of the judiciary and law enforcement, in order to establish the rule of law, secure respect for human and minority rights and fight corruption and other forms of organised crime.

14. Furthermore, the Assembly especially calls on the European Union to:

14.1. liberalise its visa regime with respect to Western Balkan countries by bringing in zero-cost visas and initially allowing their citizens to travel to the 10 new European Union member states, while welcoming at the same time the European Council conclusions of 15 and 16 June 2006, to the effect that negotiation mandates for visa facilitation and readmission agreements will be adopted as soon as possible;

14.2. encourage university exchanges and favour accession to the Bologna Process for all Western Balkan countries;

14.3. increase political co-operation to bring the Western Balkan region together;

14.4. prolong the presence of high European Union representatives in the region;

14.5. take the opportunity of the handover of the international presence from the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to the European Union in Kosovo to demonstrate the European Union's commitment to the region;

14.6. following the decisions of the European Council of Thessaloníki, offer a clear perspective of European Union integration to Western Balkan countries by putting forward realistic strategies for enlargement, thus gaining legitimacy in the region by integrating those countries into the European Union process;

14.7. set a clear road map for European Union integration.

15. The Assembly calls on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to invite, as a matter of urgency, the Western Balkan countries not yet part of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) to join it at the earliest opportunity to ensure security in the region.

16. The Assembly calls on the countries of the Western Balkan region to:

16.1. pursue their efforts to comply with all the obligations and commitments set out by the Council of Europe for its member states in terms of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and pursue the full implementation of the Standards for Kosovo;

16.2. endeavour to create all the preconditions conducive to the signature of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union in the nearest possible future for the countries which have not yet entered into such an agreement;

16.3. prove the credibility of their endeavour to condemn war crimes and provide tangible proof of their co-operation with the ICTY;

16.4. focus on regional and local co-operation, as set out in the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, by enhancing existing regional initiatives and partnerships and extending them to all countries neighbouring the Western Balkan countries;

16.5. increase regional parliamentary co-operation;

16.6. address with the greatest attention the issue of internally displaced persons and refugees;

16.7. ensure full protection for minorities living or returning to their territory;

16.8. combat organised crime and illegal immigration into other countries of Europe;

16.9. join the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), if they have not yet done so, in order to start economic co-operation among themselves.

17. Finally, the Assembly invites its Political Affairs Committee to follow the situation and report on it when necessary.