

EU Enlargement: Hearing at the European Parliament

Presentation of TEPSA Briefings on the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

On 15 July 2008, in the European Parliament in Brussels, the authors of TEPSA's briefings on the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance presented their findings to Members of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee.

These briefings, prepared under TEPSA's framework contract with the European Parliament, are available on the website of TEPSA and the European Parliament. They provide an analysis of the 2007 annual action programme for each candidate (FYROM, Croatia, Turkey) and "potential" candidate country (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo) in preparation of the EP's review of the Multi-Annual Indicative Programme. The presentations were followed by a discussion between MEPs and the researchers.



The hearing was chaired by Hannes Swoboda, Vice-Chairman of the Socialist Group and rapporteur for Croatia. Other MEPs included Doris Pack (European People's Party), Gisela Kallenbach (Greens) and Libor Roucek (Socialist Group, Vice-Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee). The hearing was also attended by representatives of political groups and assistants of MEPs as well as by administrators of the secretariat of the Foreign Affairs committee. The Policy Department of the European Parliament (Directorate General for External Policies) organised and managed the event in collaboration with Yvonne Nasshoven and Benjamin Rey from TEPSA.

General recommendations were delivered by Tamás Szemlér (Institute for World Economics, Budapest), coordinator of the series:

1. The authors think that the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is useful, but also that it could be made more useful
2. In order to achieve this objective, access to all the five components should be ensured to potential candidate countries, (The IPA is made up of five components: support for transition and institution-building, cross-border cooperation, regional development, human resources development, and rural development; candidate countries have access to all five of them, but potential candidates have access only to the two) or, at least, the flexibility clause should be more used
3. The IPA should be part of a more general framework of relationship (an element of a coherent strategy of the EU towards the region)
4. On paper, it is so (the IPA is part of the Stabilisation and Association Process), but this more general framework should be more "strategic": it should be better defined (with conditions/rewards/sanctions) and exceptions should be avoided (a system is needed instead of ad hoc reactions on actual events)
5. The EU has to play its leading role wholeheartedly: real prospects of accession are needed for the Western Balkan countries.

Country-specific reports, including an assessment of the progress achieved by each country and an analysis of the remaining challenges ahead, were presented by the following authors:

- Tom Lynch (Institute of International and European Affairs, Dublin) presented the main findings for **Croatia**, on the basis of the briefing which he wrote with Visnja Samardzija (Institute of International Relations, Zagreb);

- Florian Trauner (Institute for Advances Studies, Vienna) presented the briefing on the **Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, written with Tom Lynch.

- Dusan Reljic (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik/SWP, Berlin), co-author of the briefing on regional cooperation (see below) gave a presentation on **Serbia**. The related briefing was written by Tomislav Marsic and Marie-Janine Calic (his colleagues at SWP).



- Tamás Szemlér, author of the briefing on **Bosnia and Herzegovina** with Mladen Stanicic and Sandro Knezovic (both from IMO, Zagreb), presented his results and also the study on **Kosovo**, in the absence of its authors Henriette Regler (IMO, Zagreb) and Filip Tesar (Institute of International Relations, Prague).

- Mladen Stanicic, author of the briefing on **Turkey** with Burcu Gültekin Punsmann, discussed its findings individually with members of the audience (instead of giving a presentation to the MEPs, the rapporteur for Turkey being absent).

These reports gave rise to a lively **discussion** between MEPs and TEPESA experts. Some of the issues addressed dealt with the priorities of EU assistance and the visibility of the EU's action. Doris Pack remarked that the question of EU visibility was particularly problematic for Serbia. She underlined the importance of such programmes as Erasmus and regretted that Serbia hasn't yet been able to join, and stressed the problem of visas - two issues of high relevance for the citizens. Similarly, she noted that the EU had "lost the battle" in Bosnia-Herzegovina because "we only talked about police reform", which is "not very attractive to the citizens".

In the same line, Gisela Kallenbach declared that the EU needs "an information policy". She also talked about the fight against corruption, which has been an EU priority for a long time and which includes not only law-making but also and most importantly law-enforcement. Here again, the credibility of the EU is at stake. Finally, she mentioned the importance of supporting education policies, education being "the first pre-condition to change political climate in all countries".

Hannes Swoboda, chairman of the meeting, took a slightly different line, trying to refocus the debate from sectoral policies to core economic issues. "We can't have everything", he said, "and economic aspects should still be at the forefront". He also asked whether in Bosnia-Herzegovina: the IPA could contribute to re-balancing economic disparities between the two entities, the Federation and Republika Srpska?

In response Dusan Reljic's remarked on the problem of the region's decreasing demography coupled with the lack of qualified labour. The only way to solve the problem, he said, is not to focus too narrowly on the creation of jobs, but to educate the population.

Libor Roucek raised the issue of regional cooperation, and asked more specifically about its parliamentary dimension. On this issue, Dusan Reljic warned against illusions. For him, regional cooperation is a good thing, but national governments are not interested: they rather compete. Moreover, the existence of other international donors should not be forgotten: if the EU wants to impose something, national governments will turn to other international actors. "There is no way to force governments to coordinate", he said, "in the same way as we can't force Mercedes and Renault to cooperate". To which Libor Roucek objected: "even Mercedes and Renault have a common need: roads".

This debate provided a good introduction to the final presentation, by Burcu Gültekin-Punsmann, of the study on **regional cooperation**, which she authored with Tomislav Marsic, Dusan Reljic and Florian Trauner.