

Com. 116
Legge Carabelli

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AS (2000) CR 10

Feb 2001

We will now proceed to vote on the whole of the draft recommendation in Document 8666, as amended.

The draft recommendation, as amended, is adopted.

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(Lord Russell-Johnston took the Chair in place of Mrs Durrieu.)

3. Address by Mr Ilir Meta, Prime Minister of Albania

THE PRESIDENT.- I am sorry that we kept you waiting outside the Chamber, Mr Meta, but we have had one of those complicated and difficult debates that our Assembly sometimes conducts.

Prime Minister, most politicians - I am quite sure that all my colleagues would agree - are seldom, if ever during their entire career, faced with a challenge of the magnitude that you face in your post: to govern a country and a people who, in recent history, have had to go through so many dramatic and tragic experiences. In a decade, Albania has seen the end of a totalitarian regime of rare, if not unique, brutality and paranoia, as you remarked to me when we talked this morning. It has experienced the near-complete collapse of state institutions, caused by the ruthless exploitation of people's naïve yet understandable desire to create a better life for themselves and their families. Economic duress has created a dramatic exodus of tens of thousands of Albanians, exposing them to the risks and uncertainties of illegal immigration and, sadly, to prejudices which the unprincipled encourage.

Finally, the murderous campaign of Serb forces in Kosovo a year ago forced hundreds of thousands to seek shelter in Albania. In receiving them, the country displayed remarkable solidarity and humanity, as I saw when I visited Kukes. For that, Albania deserves profound respect and gratitude. I said that when the Albanian president came to see us, but I cannot say it often enough.

All of these problems have left marks - psychological, social, economic and political ones. Divisions continue to frustrate efforts to complete the necessary reforms. However, one characteristic of the ordinary people has struck me again and again during my many visits to the country - Albanians not only want a better life, but are ready to do something about it.

That mix of hope, ambition and determination should serve as an inspiration to Albanian politicians. If you succeed in mobilising it properly, it will be the most important asset you have in accomplishing your difficult task.

Mr Prime Minister, I invite you to address our Assembly.

Mr META (Prime Minister of Albania).- It is a great pleasure and honour for me to have the opportunity to speak to you on this day, which marks the approach of the fifth anniversary of Albania's accession to the Council of Europe. However, I wish to emphasise that co-operation with the Council - the oldest European organisation championing democracy and human rights - dates back to before 1995, as co-operation was established between the Albanian Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly in 1991.

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I thank you once again for the interest shown towards my country and my government, as well as the interest shown in our democratic and institutional developments. I am grateful for the opportunity to be present here to outline our most recent developments and efforts, and our resolve to proceed.

Today, Albania - and the government I have the honour to head - is totally involved in the process of democratic transformation. The country has achieved multi-dimensional progress, the most salient achievements being: respect for human rights, both civil and political; respect for the rights of minorities; cultural diversity; linguistic pluralism; and freedom and co-operation among various religious communities.

We have put in place a functioning state based on the principle of the rule of law. On that foundation lies the new constitution, which clearly defines the separation of various powers, the independence of the judiciary, decentralisation of power at a local level, the encouragement of private media and many other things. Significant steps have been undertaken with regard to economic recovery and build-up.

Such steps are closely linked with the stability in the country, the rule of law, the fight against corruption and an active role for our foreign policy in the framework of the Stability Pact, the general economic improvements of the country and the adoption and implementation of relevant legislation. These create the proper ground for the government to have clear and concrete perspectives for development.

We are committed to conducting the upcoming local elections in a free and fair manner and we will not permit such elections to create rifts and to be an excuse for division. Therefore, we are co-operating closely with the international community, particularly the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe, to find a consensus on a few pending issues.

However, we note with regret that the major opposition party seems to lack such a will and defies the constitution. Its representatives have attended some of our meetings with the OSCE and the Council of Europe and we hope for their continued participation.

Law enforcement and strengthening the rule of law remain high on the agenda of my government. The fight against corruption and illegal trafficking and the strengthening of the judiciary and the police along the lines agreed upon with our international partners continues with great determination.

Recently we adopted a package of laws aimed at the police forces. Following the adoption last November of the law on state police, which finally marks its separation from politics, we are currently working to strengthen police co-operation among the countries of the region to increase efficacy in the fight against organised and cross-border crime. We have achieved important results and, in 1999, there was a sharp decrease in crimes committed.

With regard to corruption - still a major challenge for the entire region, Albania included - we have focused our attention on two aspects; namely the fight against corruption in the national and regional frameworks. By the latter, we mean co-operation with the countries of the region, not to mention adherence to a series of European conventions and

agreements. Of course, this entails the efficient implementation of obligations stemming from those conventions.

As the chairman of the government programme against corruption, I am aware of my specific obligations and I am committed to fight to the very end against corruption. However, the fight against corruption is not a task simply for the police, the courts or the government alone. It must encompass all society, with the government carrying a specific responsibility.

Albania's strategic goal is to strengthen ties with the European Union and Nato, with the long-term aim of becoming members of those organisations. We can achieve that by the consistent implementation of reforms, the modernisation of the state and society and a continuing policy of reliable and predictable partnership with the international community.

In this respect, I would like to single out the fact that, during the last few months, we have worked hard to achieve the main targets of Albania's integration in Europe and the Euro-Atlantic structures. In our relations with the EU, essential developments have been achieved. Late last month in Brussels, I officially handed over Albania's status report. I hope that, by the end of this year, we will be able to start the negotiation of an association and stabilisation agreement with the EU. We are fully dedicated to honouring our commitments.

Bilateral relations with Nato have witnessed new and important developments following the Kosovo crisis. With regard to the membership action plan, we are now in the phase of consultation and we are accomplishing step by step the requirements set forth by the organisation.

The Albanian Government is fully committed to continuing reforms to the legal and judiciary system. I want to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the contribution that the Council of Europe and the European Commission have made, through the action plan, to the reform of the judiciary and the legal system in Albania. In this framework, there have been some major achievements related to the independence and efficacy of the judiciary. These will definitely help to recover its lost credibility.

The Government of Albania has focused major attention on the expansion of the progress of structural reform in the basic areas of governance. Important progress has been made in the framework of the joint action plan between Albania, the Council of Europe and the European Commission to carry out further reforms in the field of justice.

However, we are aware that democratic, economic and social prosperity is linked intricately with the entire development of the region and, in particular, with the stability and strengthening of relations with and among neighbouring countries. For that reason, Albania gave full support from the very beginning to the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, which we believe offers a new framework for the stabilisation and development of southeastern Europe. The Stability Pact promotes democracy, economic development and security which, in the end, will enhance the integration of the countries of the region into the Euro-Atlantic structures. However, we believe that strengthening our internal policies and institutions is a prerequisite to using the opportunities offered by the Stability Pact properly. The Government of Albania believes that the active participation of the Council of Europe in the three round tables of the pact - in particular, in table one, on democracy, and table three, on human rights - is vital to the countries of the region.