

Enlargement – Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Albania

Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) were both (along with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro) formed as a result of the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Albania has existed as an independent state since 1925. All three countries are found in the Western Balkans region, with Albania and FYROM sharing a border. They are all engaged in membership talks with the EU. Croatia and FYROM are both candidate countries for EU membership although only Croatia has begun formal membership negotiations.

Recent History

Croatia and FYROM both declared their independence from Yugoslavia 1991, although this was not recognised by the EU until the following year. This break-up sparked several wars across the Balkan region.

Croatia became involved in a bitter conflict with Serbia, and the Serb population living in Croatia, known as the Croatian War of Independence (1991-95). Fought mainly along ethnic lines, thousands were killed and it left a legacy of division that the region is still coming to terms with.

FYROM remained largely at peace in the immediate aftermath of the break-up, but was later severely destabilised by ethnic Albanian radicals taking refuge from the Kosovo War in the late 1990s. The resulting conflict only ended with the intervention of NATO and the signing of the Ohrid Agreement. In this agreement, FYROM's government agreed to devolve some political power to the Albanian minority, in exchange for the group giving up their separatist demands.

Albania itself went through a period of great uncertainty following the collapse of Communism in 1992. Manipulated election results and an economic crisis caused widespread riots in 1997, which saw the rule of law collapse momentarily until a government of national unity was built and new elections called. The country was also unsettled by the large number of refugees from Kosovo in 1998 and 1999, but managed to stabilise without any great conflict.

Issues concerning membership

All three nations have commenced efforts to become members of the EU. At the Zagreb Summit in 2000, they agreed on a *Stabilisation and Association Process* with the EU's political leaders. This was reiterated in the Thessaloniki European Council in 2003. Croatia and FYROM are now both considered official candidate countries for EU membership, although only Croatia has actually begun formal negotiations.

Croatia began official membership negotiations in October 2005 and accession negotiations were closed in June 2011. Croatia's Accession Treaty was signed at the EU Council Summit on 9 June 2011, and its accession is expected in 2013. The European Commission has praised it for enacting reforms to develop stable democratic institutions, respect for the rule of law and a market economy. However the protection of minority rights remains an issue.

FYROM was formally recognised as an EU candidate country in 2005, although membership negotiations were delayed by an on-going dispute with Greece about its name (a region in Greece is also called Macedonia). FYROM also witnessed violence during elections in June 2008 as tensions remain between the centre-right Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the country's largest ethnic Albanian party, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI). These tensions have significantly slowed reform, especially in key areas such as fighting corruption and reforming the police and judiciary. In February 2007, Olli Rehn, the EU Enlargement Commissioner at the time, criticised all parties for 'obstruction and a lack of faith'. However, some progress has been made; the EU granted FYROM visa liberalisation in December 2009.

Albania is currently a 'potential' candidate for EU membership, and completed a *Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA)* with the EU in June 2006. Albania is a fledgling democracy; it has made progress on strengthening its democratic institutions as part of its SAA, but falls short of the *Copenhagen Criteria* on certain measures, particularly with regard to the judiciary, public administration, corruption and organised crime. Albania also faces large challenges to deliver genuine economic reform.

Facts and Figures

- Croatia has opened and closed all 35 *negotiating chapters* between the beginning of negotiations in 2005 and June 2011.
- During 2011, Croatia will receive €156.5million in EU aid. FYROM will receive €98million, and Albania will receive €95million.

Quotes

'Croatia has made excellent progress in recent months and we are very much in the final stage of accession negotiations.' Štefan Füle, Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Commissioner, March 2010

'We are absolutely committed to working on everything that poses itself as a problem or an unresolved issue [in order to join the EU].' - Jadranka Kosor, Croatian Prime Minister, March 2010

Technical Terms

Stabilisation and Association Process: strategy, based on an SAA, to prepare countries for membership negotiations with the EU. SAAs typically offer the incentive of free trade in exchange for commitments to political, economic, trade or human rights reform.

Copenhagen Criteria: rules set down in the 2002 Copenhagen Accords that must be met before a country can join the EU.

Acquis Communautaire: the entire body of EU law.

Negotiating chapters: the EU acquis is divided into 35 chapters, each relating to specific policy area. To join the EU, states must 'close' negotiations on each chapter.

Links

- http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/index_en.htm
- <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/eu-croatia-relations-links-dossier-188293>