Resolution on the European integration process of Serbia

2011/2886(RSP) - 29/03/2012 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 542 votes to 49 with 56 abstentions a resolution tabled on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the European Integration Process of Serbia.

Parliament welcomes the Council's decision to grant Serbia candidate country status on 1 March 2012 as well as the progress achieved by Serbia in the reform process and the agreement between Belgrade and Pristina on inclusive regional cooperation reached on 24 February 2012. It is of the opinion that, **provided that the key priority outlined by the Commission in its Opinion is satisfactorily acted upon** and that the reform process continues, **accession negotiations should be opened with Serbia as soon as possible**, thereby demonstrating the EU commitment to the country's EU perspective. Members welcome the considerable progress made by Serbia towards meeting the political Copenhagen criteria, and recall that further progress in the European integration process is dependent on continuing the progress in this area. It underlines the importance of holding fair and transparent parliamentary and local elections due to take place on 6 May 2012, and calls on the Serbian authorities not to organise local elections in the municipalities in north Kosovo, as they would be contrary to international law and UNSC Resolution 1244. It asks Serbia to encourage integration of these municipalities within the wider Kosovo.

North Kosovo: Members are seriously concerned about the developments in north Kosovo in the second part of 2011, and in particular the **violence resulting from July 2011 incidents and the subsequent attacks against the international forces of KFOR.** They condemn such actions, reiterating that only continuous political efforts in good faith and negotiated, pragmatic and sustainable solutions within the framework of the EU-mediated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue can permanently eliminate the tensions in the region. They also regret the fact that the state authorities have effectively imposed a **media blackout** in the country with regard to the July 2011 incidents in north Kosovo and misrepresented the role of KFOR in the events. Parliament underlines the importance of **free and independent media** for democracy and a well-informed public. It welcomes the agreements reached so far with Pristina, particularly on freedom of movement and Kosovo's participation in regional organisations. It calls for a proper investigation of cases of violence, especially those involving the international forces of KFOR. It recalls, however, that **dismantling parallel structures** in Kosovo would be the focal point of all cooperation.

Visa liberalisation: whilst welcoming the fact that Serbian citizens have had the opportunity to travel to the Schengen zone without visas since December 2009, as strongly advocated by Parliament, Members are concerned about the **increased numbers of asylum seekers** in some EU Member States. Any measures aimed at preventing abuse of the visa-free travel regime must not unduly infringe fundamental rights, for example by arbitrarily denying individuals the right to leave their country. Member States are asked to assist Serbia in its efforts to **fight organised crime in connection with trafficking of false asylum seekers**. Parliament also points out that a large number of Serbian asylum seekers in the European Union belong to ethnic minorities and it calls on the Serbian authorities to facilitate their integration into society and improve their living conditions. Members also concur with the European Commission that the implementation by Serbia of the legal and institutional framework for protecting minorities needs to be improved.

Organised crime: the resolution welcomes the recent adoption of several laws related to the fight against corruption and encourages the Serbian authorities to focus on their effective implementation, but expresses its concern about the lack of implementation and the increasing influence of the executive branch on the work of independent institutions and the media. It points out that the position of Serbia in

the Corruption Perception Index has not improved over the last three years, and stresses that not **only declaratory but genuine political will is needed to combat corruption.**

Public procurement: Parliament is concerned about the Draft Law on Amending the Public Procurement Law, and calls on the Serbian Government to allow proper public consultation on the draft law and to bring it into line with the government's official public procurement strategy and international standards. It draws attention to the many reported irregularities, in particular in the fields of privatisation and public procurement, and calls for more active engagement on the part of law enforcement agencies to ensure their thorough investigation and that the perpetrators are brought to justice. It is also concerned about repeated allegations of misuse of the Criminal Code on abuse of office, which was accompanied by alleged widespread unjustified freezes of company and private assets, stating that these allegations have undermined trust in the rule of law in the country. It calls on the Serbian authorities to review immediately the controversial privatisation and sale of 24 companies, as the European Commission has expressed serious doubts concerning their legality.

Minorities: Parliament expresses satisfaction about the overall good inter-ethnic situation and the fact that the number and intensity of ethnically-based incidents have decreased in the country, but encourages further efforts by Serbia in the field of minority protection, by consistently implementing legislation which has been adopted. It is concerned about the protests by **ethnic Albanians against discrimination** and about the tense situation in Sandžak and calls on the government to attach higher political priority to improving respect for the fundamental rights of all minorities, including their access to education in their own language, equal access to the labour market and fair representation in institutions. It also calls on the government to address the problem of regional disparities by providing support to the social and economic development of Sandžak and the Southeast region, and to develop strategies for reducing the unemployment rates in these regions.

Parliament also underlines the difficult situation of the Roma community, which continues to suffer from discrimination on the labour market as well as to encounter difficulties with access to adequate housing, education and healthcare.

Lastly, Members welcome the important steps taken towards establishing a functioning market economy but underlines that Serbia needs to **pursue structural reforms** in order to upgrade the productive capacity of the economy and that the country needs to decrease its budget deficit. They underline that a genuine rule of law in the country is necessary in order to attract foreign investment, to improve conditions for a faster transition of the economy towards the open market and to create a better business environment.