Resolution on the 2012 progress report on Albania

2012/2814(RSP) - 13/12/2012 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the 2012 progress report on Albania.

General considerations: Parliament reiterates its full support for Albania's future accession to the European Union and shares the Commission's assessment that the country should be granted candidate status provided that key reforms in the judiciary and public administration, and as regards the revision of the parliamentary rules of procedure, are completed and adopted. **It calls on the Council to grant Albania EU candidate status without further delay, subject to the completion of these key reforms.** Members commend the determined efforts by the government and opposition to cooperate on reforms, and recognise the significance of the November 2011 political agreement that ended a prolonged period of stalemate and paved the way for progress on the twelve priorities. Both the ruling majority and the opposition are asked to sustain cross-party cooperation and to contribute to the successful adoption and consistent implementation of the key reforms needed for the opening of formal accession negotiations.

Members call on political forces in Albania **not to allow the country to drift away from the EU path during next year's electoral campaign**. They strongly believe that the elections will be an important test of the maturity of Albanian democracy and the ability of all political forces to embark on a common European agenda for the country, as well as being essential to further progress in the accession process. They add that it is important that Albania's civil society, media and citizens hold its leaders accountable for specific policy outcomes.

Consolidating democracy and reinforcing human rights: Parliament strongly supports **constructive political dialogue**, which has been an important element in achieving concrete results as regards the implementation of the twelve key priorities, in particular those concerning the proper functioning of parliament, the adoption of pending laws requiring a reinforced majority, the appointment of the ombudsman, the hearing and voting processes for key institutions and the modification of the legislative framework for elections. Members stress the **vital role of parliament,** and urge the country's political forces further to improve its functioning, to implement the pending reform on parliament's rules of procedure, further to strengthen parliament's oversight role, including by making greater use of questioning members of the government, to improve legislative drafting and to reinforce consultation with civil society, trade unions and social organisations.

Parliament notes the **limited progress on judicial reform** and urges the authorities to take further action to ensure the real independence, integrity, transparency, accountability and efficiency of the judiciary, free of political interference and corruption. It considers it important that the judicial reform be a gradual and irreversible process involving solid consultation mechanisms and making the system more efficient and that the judiciary be provided with sufficient funding to enable it to operate effectively throughout the country.

Members welcome the Commission's new approach and its commitment to putting the **rule of law at the centre of the enlargement policy**, and take the view that this approach should be a further incentive for key judicial reforms and further facilitate Albania's progress in these areas. They stress the need to eliminate the risks of politicising public administration, and to create a merit-based and professional public administration, which operates transparently and is able to adopt laws and implement them.

Whilst welcoming the progress made regarding the curbs on organised crime and impunity, Parliament is concerned that **corruption continues to play a prevalent role in citizens' lives**. It strongly recommends the further application of zero tolerance on issues relating to corruption and misuse of public funds, while guaranteeing free and fair trials and due process for all suspects. It is also concerned about **independence of the media**, and in particular the independence of the regulatory authority, the National Council on Radio and Television, as well as the government's direct interference with managerial appointments by the public broadcaster, which is hindering the development of political pluralism.

Whilst recognising the progress that has been made in relation to the **protection of minorities**, Parliament notes that further efforts are needed to combat discrimination, and calls for decisive measures comprehensively to protect human rights and to improve the quality of life of members of all minority groups in the country as a whole, inter alia by implementing existing measures relating to the use of minority languages in education, religion and the mass media, and by tackling any kind of discrimination against them. It stresses the need to secure these rights for all minority groups and not only for national minorities.

Pursuing socio-economic reforms: the resolution invites the government to implement **structural reforms and reforms relating to the rule of law**, the weakness of which is hindering, inter alia, the enforceability of contracts, in order to maintain macroeconomic stability and enhance an economic environment conducive to investment, economic growth and **sustainable economic development** for the benefit of citizens. It encourages the government further to address the issue of property rights, to improve the tax collection system, to focus on infrastructure and human resources and to tackle the large informal economy and the unregulated labour market, which are hampering the country's social cohesion and economic prospects.

Parliament also calls for particular attention to be paid to energy security, and for greater progress in the field of environmental protection and climate change. It adds that it is **greatly concerned about the high unemployment rate**, even though it is lower than in the past, and the number of Albanians still living below the poverty line, urging the government to create a social protection system for financially weaker citizens and those most in need as well as modern public investment to foster sustainable development and reduce unemployment.

Fostering regional and international cooperation: Members commend Albania for fostering **good-neighbourly relations** and welcomes the government's policies towards Albanian communities in neighbouring states, in particular as regards advising them to cooperate with their respective governments in resolving problems.

Lastly, Parliament calls on Albania **to revoke its bilateral immunity agreement with the United States**, as this is not consistent with the EU's policy on the International Criminal Court (ICC) and undermines the integrity of the Rome Statute, and to continue to support the ICC and to cooperate promptly and fully with it.