Resolution on the 2012 progress report on Montenegro

2012/2860(RSP) - 18/04/2013 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on Montenegro.

It welcomes the decision of the Council to open accession negotiations with Montenegro on 29 June 2012, which represents a positive signal for other countries in the region, and it notes that **significant progress has been achieved by Montenegro on the path to EU membership.** However, some **shortcomings** in the accession process continue to persist, especially the fight against organised crime and corruption at high level.

General considerations: Parliament welcomes the free and fair conduct of the early parliamentary elections and encourages **all political forces to remain focused on the country's EU integration agenda.** It also welcomes the EU's new negotiating approach under which the crucial issues of Chapters 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (justice and home affairs) will be tackled early in the negotiations, thus reinforcing the focus on **the rule of law**.

Political criteria: Parliament welcomes the fact that the Montenegrin Parliament's oversight role has been strengthened and calls on the latter to continue improving its oversight role especially with regard to the **fight against organised crime and corruption**, and to **reinforce the legal independence, integrity and accountability of the judiciary**, with clear criteria for the promotion and professional assessment of judges and prosecutors. Members regret the fact that **corruption remains common**, and they encourage the Government to:

- build up a track record in terms of convictions, in particular in high-level corruption cases, reinforce the legal framework in combating organised crime;
- protect citizens' reporting on corruption cases;
- adopt a code of conduct for the prevention of conflict of interest, and publish information on financial interests of members.

Members go on to stress the importance of measures to promote **media pluralism** and freedom of expression, to make progress on **protecting minorities** particularly the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, and to **promote women's rights and gender equality**, noting that only limited progress has been made on the latter.

Economic criteria: Parliament commends Montenegro for being at the vanguard of structural reforms in the Western Balkans and for maintaining macroeconomic and fiscal stability, despite the economic crisis. Noting, however, the rise in public debt and that unemployment is at 20%, it encourages the Government to continue carrying out structural reforms, rationalise spending, and increase labour market flexibility. It also stressed the need to maintain the balance between economic development and environmental protection.

Ability to assume the obligations of membership: the Government is asked to enhance the institutional and administrative capacities of state institutions dealing with key areas of the acquis, and speed up preparations for decentralised management of the IPA components in preparation for the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund.

Regional cooperation and bilateral issues: Members welcome Montenegro's constructive role in regional cooperation, but regrets that **the delimitation of borders with almost all neighbouring countries remains pending**, and calls for efforts to resolve all remaining open issues in a good neighbourly spirit. The Commission and the Council are asked to start developing a generally applicable arbitration mechanism aimed at **solving bilateral issues** between enlargement countries and Member States.