

Resolution on the 2013 progress report on Bosnia and Herzegovina

2013/2884(RSP) - 06/02/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 468 votes to 80 with 35 abstentions a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

General considerations: Parliament was deeply concerned at the **continuing lack of common vision** displayed by the political leaders of the country's three ethnic communities. It noted that the complex and inefficient institutional architecture deriving from Annex 4 of the Dayton Agreement, as well as the inaction of the BiH political leaders and their inability to compromise, had continued to have a negative impact on the country's capacity to progress towards the EU and to improve citizens' lives.

Political groups at all levels of power in the country were urged to step up cooperation and dialogue in order to make progress on the reform path. Members called for a shift away from the nationalist and ethnocentric rhetoric coming from the leadership of the three constitutive peoples in BiH. They reiterated that constitutional reform remained key to transforming BiH into an effective and fully functional state, and urged the Federation to consider concrete proposals in this regard, including the merger of some cantons and the redistribution of competences. All political parties were asked to take part in this process in a constructive and open manner and to make use of the advice and guidance that the Venice Commission can provide during this process.

Whilst welcoming the six-point agreement reached in Brussels on 1 October 2013, Parliament deplored the obstruction of its implementation by centralist forces.

It invited the Commission to further strengthen efforts to facilitate an agreement on the implementation of the Sejdi-Finci ruling guaranteeing equal rights for all constituent peoples and citizens.

Members asked the EU's Heads of State and Government and Foreign Ministers to strengthen their personal commitment to the country.

Political criteria: Parliament condemned political posturing and called for more political accountability of political leaders to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It wanted all political parties represented in the BiH Parliamentary Assembly to urgently adopt the changes to the electoral law needed to enable the October 2014 general elections to be held, reiterating that the decisions of the BiH Constitutional Court were final and binding and must therefore be implemented.

Members expressed serious concern about the inefficiency of the judicial system and the growing inability to implement court rulings. They also expressed concern about the financial sustainability of the public administration, its fragmentation and politicisation and the lack of political will for its reform. Parliament stressed the need for action to counter the high rates of corruption at all levels of public life and the complex connections between political actors, business and the media, and noted that that organised crime, money laundering and trafficking in human beings, drugs and goods continued to take place in the absence of effective institutions. It welcomed the agreement between BiH, Montenegro and Serbia on the establishment of a joint coordination centre to strengthen the fight against cross-border crime.

Members went on to express concern about the growing political and financial pressure on the media, and threats against journalists, and about hate speech, threats, harassment and discrimination, particularly towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual and intersex (LGBTI) community.

Parliament was satisfied that the backlog of war crimes cases has also been reduced but called for efforts to be stepped up as regards the investigation and prosecution of these crimes, including an adequate level of witness protection.

Socio-economic issues: Members urged the competent authorities to strengthen domestic economic policy coordination and to improve the composition and efficiency of public spending and of the large ineffective public sector, with its multiple overlapping competences, and to safeguard financial sector stability by strengthening the legislative and regulatory framework. They stressed that the weak enforcement of the law and anti-corruption measures hampered the business environment and discouraged foreign investment. Parliament was also concerned about the country's inefficient social protection arrangements despite a high level of public expenditure. It called for labour market reforms in order to tackle the very high unemployment rate, and further measures to facilitate the participation in the labour market of the country's many young unemployed.

Regional cooperation: whilst commending BiH for its constructive role in regional cooperation, Parliament called on it to continue its efforts to resolve outstanding border and property issues with its neighbouring countries. BiH should also continue to cooperate with the Commission regarding the adaptation of the Interim Agreement / Stabilisation and Association Agreement, especially in terms of cross-border trade.

Lastly, Parliament called on EU Member States to shorten the asylum procedures for citizens of Western Balkan countries that enjoy visa-free travel within the Schengen zone as an effective means of reducing the number of unfounded asylum applications, while still giving the applicants the right to make their case in a full interview.