Resolution on the 2015 report on Serbia

2015/2892(RSP) - 04/02/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 498 votes to 66 with 70 abstentions, a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affair on the 2015 report on Serbia.

Parliament recalled that the European Council of 28 June 2013 decided to open accession negotiations with Serbia, and it welcomed the opening of the negotiations, and called on Serbia to tackle decisively and head-on the systemic and socio-economic reforms.

Whilst welcoming Serbia's progress, it encouraged the Serbian authorities to further improve the investment climate across Serbia and reduce the economic and social disparities between its regions.

It noted the progress on economic reforms, which improved Serbia's budgetary situation, and called on the Commission to continue supporting the government in its plans to conduct further reforms

Migration crisis: Members commended **Serbia's constructive approach** in dealing with the migration crisis, taking positive note of Serbia's substantial effort to ensure that third country nationals receive shelter and humanitarian supplies with EU and international support. They called on Serbia to make greater efforts and to progressively align its foreign and security policy with that of the EU, including its policy on Russia. In this context, they felt that **conducting joint Serbia – Russia military exercises was regrettable.**

Rule of law: Parliament noted that, while some progress has been made in the area of judiciary, namely in adopting rules for evaluating judges and prosecutors, political interference remains high. It called on the government to adopt a new law on free legal aid and to introduce legal changes to address the quality and consistency of judicial practice and judicial education. The Serbian authorities were asked to amend and implement the economic and corruption crimes section of the Criminal Code in order to provide a credible and predictable criminal law framework. Parliament reiterated its deep concern at the provisions and implementation of Article 234 of the Criminal Code on abuse of responsible positions, and it called once again for an independent and thorough review of the **reclassified cases related to abuse of responsible positions,** so that longstanding unjust prosecutions can be dropped immediately. It also noted that more effort must be made in the fight against organised crime.

Democracy: Parliament reiterated its call on the Serbian Government to address fully the recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation missions, in particular those ensuring that campaign financing and the electoral processes should be transparent. It stressed the importance of independent regulatory bodies, including the Ombudsman, in ensuring oversight and accountability of the executive.

Human rights: Members noted, the shortcomings with regard to preventing discrimination against vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, people with HIV/AIDS and LGBTI people. They called on the authorities to actively promote respect for human rights for all. They also expressed concern that no progress has been made to improve the situation regarding freedom of expression and of the media. Parliament was seriously concerned about repeated leaks to the media about ongoing criminal investigations, in breach of the presumption of innocence. **Respect for and protection of minorities**: Parliament underlined the importance of National Minority Councils in their role of promoting the rights of national minorities and their democratic nature. It expressed serious concern about the **interruption of transmission of programmes in minority languages** following the announced privatisation of the media, and called on Serbia to step up its efforts with regard to the effective and consistent implementation of

legislation on protection of minorities and the non-discriminatory treatment of national minorities throughout Serbia, including in relation to education, especially regarding the timely funding and translation of minority native language textbooks. The resolution called on the Serbian authorities to implement concrete measures to improve the situation of the Roma, particularly concerning the provision of personal documents, education, housing, health care and employment.

Regional cooperation and good-neighbourly relations: Members urged Serbia to continue to build on its good-neighbourly relations, and they condemned all forms of hate speech or war-time rhetoric. They welcomed all initiatives focused on the future of the Western Balkans, in particular the Brdo Process, which proves to be an important framework for cooperation in both political and technical fields. Parliament took the view that concrete cooperation in areas of mutual interest can contribute to the stabilisation of the Western Balkans. It called on Serbia to further promote the stabilisation and institutional strengthening of Bosnia and Herzegovina through its existing contacts and good-neighbourly relations with the country. It also reiterated its call on the Serbian authorities to initiate further measures for cross-border cooperation with the neighbouring EU Member States, including the Cross-border and Transnational Cooperation Programmes 2014-2020 and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

Serbia was encouraged to further cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), in order to investigate facts about war crimes and other serious violations of human rights committed in the former Yugoslavia. Parliament underlined the need to strengthen and depoliticise Serbian institutions that deal with war crimes.

While welcoming Serbia's continued engagement in the normalisation process with Kosovo, it urged Serbia to swiftly implement its part of these agreements and to engage constructively with Kosovo in formulating and implementing future agreements. It called for continuous efforts by both governments and the EU institutions to communicate and explain the provisions of the reached agreements, in order to bring ethnic Albanian and Serbian communities in Kosovo closer together. Members encouraged Serbia and Kosovo to identify new areas of discussion for the dialogue with the aim of improving people's lives and comprehensively normalising relations.

Energy, environment and transport: Parliament stressed that Serbia, as a contracting party to the Energy Community, should remain active in the work of the Energy Community institutions and continue to implement the acquis in order to build sustainable and secure energy systems. It encouraged Serbia to develop competition in the gas market and to take measures to improve alignment with the acquis in the fields of renewable energies and energy efficiency. Lastly, it encouraged Serbia to align itself with the average EU commitments on climate change and the agreement reached in Paris at COP 21.