Resolution on the 2015 report on Albania

2015/2896(RSP) - 14/04/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the 2015 Progress Report on Albania.

It welcomed the steady progress made by Albania with respect to the reforms on the key priorities required for opening accession negotiations, and encouraged the government, the parliament and political parties to **maintain the reform momentum**. Members noted that sustained progress, especially in the areas of the rule of law, judicial reform, the fight against corruption and organised crime, public administration reform and fundamental rights, is of crucial importance in the reform process. Albania needs to intensify reform efforts in these areas and in other key priorities in order to open accession negotiations and consolidate its democratic transition.

Judiciary: Parliament called for **more progress on a substantial reform of the judiciary**. It recommended that the Commission closely monitor the progress made in the reform of the judiciary and encouraged it to report to Parliament and Council as soon as Albania has sufficiently advanced in this reform and to take into account Albania's progress in the implementation of the five key priorities when considering recommending the opening of accession negotiations.

It noted that the **current shortcomings in the functioning of the judicial system** including its independence from other branches of power, political interference, selective justice and limited accountability, a high level of corruption, inefficient mechanisms of control, insufficient resources, the overall length of judicial proceedings and the lack of clear professional criteria for appointment and promotion of judges. Members want to see the implementation of stresses the relevant recommendations made by the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) in its fourth-round evaluation report on corruption prevention in respect of judges and prosecutors.

Corruption: Parliament continued to be concerned about widespread corruption, particularly in education, healthcare, the judiciary, public procurement, public private partnership concessions, construction and spatial planning, local government and the public service. Whilst welcoming the adoption of the 2015-2020 national anti-corruption strategy it called on the competent authorities **to improve the track record** as regards investigation, prosecution and conviction in corruption cases at all levels, to enforce anti-corruption legislation strictly and to enhance the independence of and cooperation between anti-corruption institutions. Members strongly believed that progress in judicial reform would also substantially enhance the fight against corruption and organised crime.

Organised crime: whilst noting the government's commitment to fighting organised crime, which has led to a number of successful large-scale law enforcement operations, Parliament remained concerned about the low number of final convictions. It stressed the need to further develop cooperation between prosecution services and the police and to ensure effective judicial follow-up, calling for adequate resources to be allocated to the police and prosecution services. Trafficking remains a significant problem for Albania, and competent authorities must strengthen their efforts in the fight against the production and trafficking of drugs and narcotics.

Public administration: Members welcomed the adoption of the 2015-2020 public administration reform strategy and its action plan for 2015-2017, as well as the 2014-2020 public financial management reform strategy. They noted the efforts towards more citizen-friendly public administration, and urged the government to pursue its efforts to enhance administrative capacities, depoliticise public administration, fight corruption in the civil service and improve recruitment procedures based on merit and performance.

Press and media: re-emphasising the critical importance of an independent and pluralist public service broadcaster and private media, Parliament was concerned about **widespread self-censorship among journalists**, who are sometimes physically obstructed from covering specific events, assaulted, or threatened because of their work, and about cases of direct interference in editorial autonomy.

Economic development: Members remained concerned about the high level of unemployment, especially youth and long-term unemployment, which is more than 50 % of total unemployment, and also expressed concerned about the regulatory environment, property rights enforcement and the fight against corruption which are hampering efforts to improve the business environment;.

Lastly, Members welcomed Albania's commitment to the **fight against radicalisation** and terrorism and adoption of relevant security strategies and an action plan, but expressed concern that Albania, as well as other countries, is affected by the phenomenon of returning foreign fighters, Islamic radicalisation and violent extremism.