# Resolution on the 2015 report on Bosnia and Herzegovina

2015/2897(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 Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

It welcomed the first more positive Commission Report on BiH and the **submission of the application for EU membership by BiH on 15 February 2016**, and called on the Council to examine this application at the earliest opportunity. In this regard, Members welcomed the adoption by the BiH Council of Ministers (CoM), on 26 January 2016, of a decision establishing a **coordination mechanism on EU matters** and, on 9 February 2016, of the negotiation position on the adaptation of the Stablisation and Association Agreement (SAA) following the accession of Croatia to the EU. These elements are necessary for the EU to consider the membership application as credible, alongside meaningful progress in the implementation of the Reform Agenda.

Reforms: Parliament reiterated the need to continue also with constitutional, legal and political reforms that would transform BiH into a fully effective, inclusive and functional state. The authorities must actively **promote the principles of legitimate representation, federalism, decentralisation and subsidiarity, as well as European values** and the importance of the European perspective. Members felt that the EU institutions should become actively involved in the efforts to find a sustainable solution to BiH's constitutional arrangements. They also urged political and religious leaders to refrain from divisive nationalistic and secessionist rhetoric that polarises society and to continue with political dialogue.

Parliament wen on to raise the following issues;

- the **fragmentation of public administration**, its politicisation and weak policy coordination hamper institutional and legislative reforms and BiH must develop a comprehensive and country-wide strategic framework for public administration reform and a public financial management programme;

- there are insufficient mechanisms for cooperation between government and **civil society organisations** (CSOs), including their limited capacity to participate in policy dialogue on the Reform Agenda;

- the legal and institutional framework for the observance of **human rights** requires substantial improvements, and the authorities must develop of a country-wide anti-discrimination strategy in cooperation with CSOs.

Members were also concerned about **backsliding in the area of freedom of expression**, cases of political pressure on and intimidation of journalists, and the continued polarisation of the media along political and ethnic lines.

**Judiciary:** Parliament was concerned about increased pressure on the judiciary by political actors and particularly about cases of **political interference in court proceedings**, the politicisation of appointment procedures in the judiciary, the continued fragmentation into four different legal systems and the lack of an effective system for assessing the professional qualities of judges. It stressed the urgent need to strengthen the **independence of the judiciary** in BiH, welcoming the updated 2014-2018 Justice Sector

Reform Strategy and called for an action plan for its implementation. Members also remained concerned that access to free legal aid is very limited.

**Referendum on the BiH State-level judiciary:** Members took note of the announcement by the President of the Republika Srpska (RS) to postpone the planned referendum in the RS on the BiH State-level judiciary. They regretted, however, that the RS National Assembly has not passed this decision. Furthermore, they called for this **idea of a referendum to be dropped altogether**, as it challenges the cohesion, sovereignty and integrity of the country and risks further progress towards EU integration. Any shortcomings in the BiH judiciary should be addressed within the broadened Structured Dialogue on Justice, rather than through unilateral initiatives, Parliament added that it was deeply concerned about statements made by the Interior Minister of the Republika Srpska about the future **training of RS special police units in the Russian Federation**, and the intention to buy Russian military equipment.

**Fight against corruption:** Parliament deplored the fact that corruption continues to be widespread and that political commitments have not translated into concrete results. It remained concerned about the weak legal and institutional framework to combat corruption, and about the low number of final convictions in corruption cases. Commending the adoption of the 2015-2019 anti-corruption strategy and action plan, it urged the allocation of a sufficient budget for implementation.

**Organised crime:** Members noted the uncoordinated implementation of the 2014-2016 strategy on combating organised crime, and welcomed the adoption of the 2016-2019 Action Plan for Fighting Human Trafficking in BiH, including its emphasis on problems related to migrant workers and the forced begging of children. They urged the adoption and implementation of a new strategy and action plan on money laundering, and more to combat the uncontrolled proliferation and illicit trafficking of weapons, notably small and light weapons.

**Radicalisation and terrorism:** stressing that BiH has been seriously affected by the phenomenon of foreign fighters and radicalization, especially among young people, a high number of whom – compared to other countries in the region – have joined Daesh, Parliament called for the urgent development of effective de-radicalisation programmes and for urgent efforts to provide a better economic perspective for young people in BiH.

**Economic development:** Members welcomed the rise in registered employment, as well as the first steps taken to strengthen policy coordination and to improve the business climate> However, they remained concerned about state influence on the economy, the quality of public finances, the high degree of dependence on funding from international loan investment, the unclear origin of international investment and the difficult labour market conditions.

**Regional cooperation:** Parliament commended BiH's constructive role in promoting regional cooperation, welcoming the border agreement with Montenegro. It called for further efforts to resolve outstanding bilateral issues, including on border demarcation matters with Serbia and Croatia, and also welcomed the first joint session of the BiH Council of Ministers with the Serbian Government that took place on 4 November 2015 in Sarajevo.

Lastly, Members noted that while post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction in BiH has been largely successful and has brought the country closer towards the EU, challenges still remain concerning the sustainability of the reconciliation process. They stressed, therefore, the importance of education on reconciliation and mutual understanding in society.