2016 Commission report on Montenegro

2016/2309(INI) - 02/03/2017 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Charles TANNOCK (ECR, UK) on the 2016 Commission Report on Montenegro.

Members stated that further progress has been made in the accession negotiations and that **Montenegro is currently considered to be the most advanced in its accession process**. They encouraged Montenegro to accelerate the pace of reforms, to increase its efforts towards meeting all benchmarks and to continue focusing on the fundamentals of the accession process. They stressed that it is **essential to deliver concrete results** with a strong and sustainable implementation record.

Elections in Montenegro: Members commended the competent authorities for holding parliamentary elections on 16 October 2016 in an orderly manner in which fundamental freedoms were generally respected. However, they regretted the alleged **attempts** by Russia to influence developments in Montenegro and expressed concern about the serious incidents, including an alleged coup d'état, that occurred on 16 October 2016, and called on the Vice-President of the European Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR), and on the Commission, to follow closely ongoing investigations by the competent authorities.

Reforms: Members called for measures to allocate the appropriate budgetary resources for public administration reform strategy's implementation, as well as to rationalise public administration. They noted progress in **judiciary reform**, including improved institutional capacities but remained concerned about undue influence on judicial independence, especially with regard to the **appointment of judges**.

On the institutional and parliamentary level, Members are deeply concerned about the polarised domestic climate and the boycott of parliamentary activities by members of the opposition. They invited the opposition to take advantage of the Montenegrin Prime Minister's offer of participation in the government in exchange for ending the boycott. They also reiterated the need for all political forces to reengage in constructive dialogue and cooperation within the **Montenegrin parliament**.

War crimes: while noting some progress in the follow-up of war crimes, Members called on the competent authorities to effectively investigate, prosecute, try and punish war crimes as well as to fight impunity in line with international standards.

Fight against corruption: Members welcomed the further strengthening of the anti-corruption framework, inter alia by making the **Anti-Corruption Agency** (ACA) fully operational and by appointing special anti-corruption prosecutors. They considered it essential to ensure their independence in investigations.

They stressed the need to continue to develop the track record in organised crime cases, especially as regards trafficking in human beings, drugs and money laundering, to ensure stronger inter-agency cooperation and to further intensify regional and international cooperation in the fight against organised crime.

Members welcomed the new strategy to **combat violent extremism in 2016-2018**, which complements the national strategy for preventing and combating terrorism, money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

Minorities: Members noted some progress in improving the situation of minorities. They welcomed the adoption of a 2016-2020 strategy and action plan for the social inclusion of the Roma and Egyptian communities. They called for an appropriate budget to be allocated so that the action plan may be implemented properly. They encouraged the competent authorities to continue to strengthen efforts to safeguard the rights of LGBTI people.

As regards women, Members remained concerned about continued gender-based domestic and sexual violence, the lack of prosecutions and the proper sentencing of perpetrators in line with international standards. They called for measures to establish adequate protection services and to implement the 2016-2020 strategy on combating domestic violence.

Freedom of the media: Members remained concerned about the state media freedom in Montenegro. Once again, they urged the competent authorities to resolve the long-pending cases of violence against, intimidation of and threats made to journalists.

Employment: Members noted the modest decline in unemployment. They welcomed the new 2016-2020 national strategy for employment and human resources development and the accompanying 2016 action plan even though they continued to express concern about high youth unemployment and poor labour mobility.

Environment: Members stressed the need to reinforce implementation efforts, in particular in water quality, nature protection and waste management, as well as related administrative capacities at all levels. They expressed concern about significant delays in establishing protection over the potential Natura 2000 site of Ulcinj Salina.

Neighbourhood: Members encouraged Montenegro to continue to address, in a constructive and neighbourly spirit, outstanding bilateral issues with its neighbours, including the unresolved border demarcation issues with Serbia and Croatia.