2016 Commission report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

2016/2310(INI) - 06/03/2017 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Ivo VAJGL (ADLE, SI) on the 2016 Commission Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Early elections 2016: Members welcomed the early elections on 11 December 2016, which were held in a transparent and inclusive manner. They called for a swift formation of a new, stable and accountable government and for the promotion of cross-party and inter-ethnic cooperation in order to maintain the positive recommendation to **open EU accession negotiations**.

Members called however for more controls on the financing of political parties in the country.

Accession reforms: Members reiterated their support for the opening of accession negotiations, conditional on the progress of the implementation of the Pržino Agreement to ensure its full, tangible and sustainable implementation and substantial progress in the implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities on systemic reforms. They called on the Council to address the issue of the accession negotiations at its earliest convenience.

Members underlined that implementation of the Pržino agreement is vital also beyond the elections to ensure political stability and sustainability in the future.

They drew attention to the potential negative political, security and socio-economic consequences of further delays in the **country's Euro-Atlantic integration process** and in this regard called on the Commission and the EEAS to increase the visibility of EU-funded projects in the country in order to bring the EU closer to the citizens of the country.

The current challenges facing the European Union (Brexit, migration, radicalism, etc.) should not hinder the enlargement process, but rather that these challenges have demonstrated the need to fully integrate the Western Balkans into EU structures in order to enhance and deepen partnership and overcome international crises.

Members expressed concern about the politicised public administration. It urged new government to demonstrate a strong political commitment to enhancing professionalism, merit, neutrality and independence.

Further measures are awaited such as:

- a comprehensive e-governance strategy accompanied by the further development of e-services for citizens and businesses in order to reduce the bureaucratic burden for the state, citizens and business;
- strengthening the judiciary, by improving transparency in the appointment and promotion procedures and by reducing the length of court proceedings and putting an end to judicial obstructions faced by the Special Prosecutor's Office.

Anti-corruption measures are also for.

Fight against criminality, radicalisation and discrimination: although Members welcomed the dismantling of criminal networks and routes related to trafficking in human beings and drugs, they called

for the rapid implementation of prevention measures against radicalisation. They called for **continued monitoring of returning foreign fighters by security services**, their proper reintegration into society and a constant exchange of information with the authorities of the EU and neighbouring countries.

The importance of a regular and constructive dialogue and cooperation with civil society organisations was stressed.

Members reiterated their condemnation of hate speech against discriminated groups, in particular LGBTI people and the Roma people.

Moreover, they called for further efforts to promote gender equality and increase the participation of women in political life and employment. Measures are also called for to review the law on prevention and protection against domestic Violence.

Inter-ethnic reconciliation: Members urged all political parties and civil society organisations to actively promote an inclusive and tolerant multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. They condemned any form of irredentism and any attempt to disintegrate different social groups. According to Members, the authorities and civil society should take appropriate measures to achieve historical reconciliation in order to overcome the divide between and within different ethnic and national groups, including citizens of Bulgarian identity. Measure should also be put in place to combat stereotypes and to improve the freedom of the media.

Economic reforms and reduction of unemployment: Members remained concerned that the political situation represents a serious risk to the Macedonian economy. They called for measures to enhance job creation, especially among young people, women and the disabled.

On an environmental level, Members expressed concern about industrial pollution and air and water pollution and called for a comprehensive policy and strategy on climate action in this country.

Migration policy and refugee policy: Members commended the country for its constructive role and cooperation and its tremendous efforts in addressing the challenges of the migration crisis, thus substantially contributing to the security and stability of the EU.

They noted that the country lies on the so-called “Western Balkans route” and that approximately 600 000 refugees and migrants, including vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly, have so far travelled through it on their way to Europe. The urged the Commission to continue the work on migration-related issues with all the countries of the Western Balkans, in order to make sure that European and international norms and standards are followed.

Regional cooperation and relations with Greece: Members considered that regional cooperation is an essential element in the EU accession process and should be a priority for the government. They called on the Macedonian authorities to also align with the EU’s restrictive measures against Russia following the illegal annexation of Crimea.

Moreover, they stressed the importance of finalising the negotiations on a treaty on friendship and good neighbourliness with Bulgaria.

Members welcomed the tangible results from the initiative for confidence-building **measures between this country and Greece**, which could contribute to a better understanding and stronger bilateral relations, paving the way for a **mutually acceptable solution to the name issue**. They reiterated their invitation to the Vice-President/High Representative (VP/HR) and the Commission to develop new

initiatives to overcome the remaining differences and to work, in cooperation with the two countries and the UN Special Representative, on a mutually acceptable solution on the name issue and to report back to Parliament thereon.