2016 Commission report on Montenegro

2016/2309(INI) - 16/03/2017 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 471 votes to 98, with 41 abstentions, a resolution on the 2016 Commission Report on Montenegro.

Parliament 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**.

It encouraged Montenegro to increase its efforts towards meeting all benchmarks and to continue focusing on the fundamentals of the accession process. It stressed that it is **essential to deliver concrete results** with a strong and sustainable implementation record.

Elections in Montenegro: Parliament commended the competent authorities for holding parliamentary elections on 16 October 2016 in an orderly manner in which fundamental freedoms were generally respected. It regretted the need for the temporary shutdown of internet communication platforms on election day as well as the hacking of the website of the Centre for Democratic Transition (CDT) a few days before the elections. It called on the competent authorities to address shortcomings and investigate the alleged procedural irregularities, including alleged abuses of state funds and abuse of office.

Parliament expected that the independence of the State Election Commission (SEC) be sustained and recalled that an **improvement of the electoral process is required in order to build full confidence in the electoral process.** Parliament noted with regret that the opposition has not recognised the results of the elections. It recognised the attempts by external actors to discredit the electoral process and the difficulties this has caused. It expected the new government to maintain the political commitment to the reform process and invites all political parties to re-engage in a constructive dialogue.

Parliament noted with concern the alleged attempts by **Russia to influence developments in Montenegro** , as this pattern of behaviour in the region could imply further destabilisation of the Western Balkans. It is also concerned 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: Parliament called for measures to allocate the appropriate budgetary resources for public administration reform strategy's implementation, as well as to rationalise public administration. It 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, Parliament expressed deep concern about the polarised domestic climate and the boycott of parliamentary activities by members of the opposition. It invited the opposition to take advantage of the Montenegrin Prime Minister's offer of participation in the government in exchange for ending the boycott. It 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, Parliament 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: Parliament 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. It considered it essential to ensure their independence in investigations.

It also 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: Parliament noted some progress in improving the situation of minorities, including the completion of several legislative reforms to ensure greater alignment with EU and international human rights standards. Parliament expressed concern about the double discrimination faced by women and girls in the Roma community and about the access of the Roma community, Egyptian minorities and Ashkali people to healthcare, education, housing and employment. It encouraged the competent authorities to continue to strengthen efforts to safeguard the **rights of LGBTI people**. It also called on the competent authorities to make further efforts to raise awareness about anti-discrimination among the general public.

It also remained concerned that most public buildings, including medical centres and university faculties, are still not accessible to people with disabilities.

Members called for further measures to protect the multi-ethnic identity of the **Boka Kotorska** region.

As regards women, Parliament 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. It called for measures to establish adequate protection services and to implement the 2016-2020 strategy on combating domestic violence.

Freedom of the media: Parliament remained concerned about the state media freedom in Montenegro. Once again, it 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: Parliament called on the competent authorities to undertake the necessary protection and conservation measures in relation to Lake Skadar in order to maintain its ecological characteristics including its ecological integrity. It called on the government to ensure that the transformation of national parks into a state-owned limited company will have no adverse effects on their protection. It recognised, in this context, the concerns expressed in the framework of the Ramsar and Bern conventions regarding the special-purpose spatial plan for the Skadar Lake National Park, including the Porto Skadar Lake project. Members expressed concern about significant delays in establishing protection for areas which are identified as potential Natura 2000 network areas such as the Skadar Lake National Park and recalled the need for **sound and strategic environmental impact assessments** in line with the EU acquis and international standards.

Neighbourhood: Parliament welcomed Montenegro's proactive participation and continued constructive role in good-neighbourly cooperation. It encouraged further cooperation in this regard. It also encouraged it 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**, as early as possible in the accession process.

It reiterated its call for authorities to help resolve the succession issues relating to the legacy of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and welcomed the border demarcation agreement with **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and the ratification of the border demarcation agreement with **Kosovo**.

Lastly, it urged Montenegro to comply with the EU common positions on the integrity of the Rome Statute and related EU guiding principles on bilateral immunity agreements.