2018 Commission report on Serbia

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by David McAllister (EPP, DE) on the 2018 Commission Report on Serbia.

It welcomed the Commission's assessment in its communication that, with strong political will, the delivery of real and sustained reforms, and definitive solutions to disputes with neighbours, Serbia could become a member of the EU. They called on the Council and Commission to support the opening of the technically prepared chapters **on condition that there was sufficient progress**, in particular in the fundamental area of rule of law. Members also called on Serbia to increase its alignment with the EU's foreign and security policy and expressed concern about Serbia's continuing military cooperation with Russia and Belarus. In addition, they noted with concern that Serbia's **nonaligned visa policy** opened a possibility for illegal migration and smuggling towards EU countries, as well as neighbouring non-EU countries.

Rule of law: the committee urged special efforts in this area, particularly in ensuring the **independence of the judicial system** since the scope for political influence over the judiciary remains a concern. It acknowledged that **some progress** has been made in the fight against corruption and organised crime and called for tangible results in this fight, notably through a convincing track record of investigations, prosecutions and convictions, and the publication of statistics about the results of investigations. Serbia was asked to continue with the full implementation of the action plan agreed with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

Democracy: the report stressed that the Serbian Parliament still **does not exercise effective oversight of the executive**, and that the still-frequent use of urgent procedures undermines parliamentary and public scrutiny. It expressed concern that some politicians are misusing public discourse to fuel the rise of radicalism, and called for additional measures to ensure cross-party dialogue and effective involvement of civil societ.

Members also stressed the importance of **regular consultation** between the government and social partners, and social dialogue, which should go beyond the exchange of information. Interested parties should be consulted on important laws before they are subject to parliamentary procedure.

Human rights: whilst the legislative and institutional framework for upholding human rights is in place, Members stressed that consistent and efficient **implementation** across the whole country is needed. They condemned the continued occurrence of **hate crimes** against Roma and LGBTI persons, and also urged the better protection of vulnerable groups, including women, children and people with disabilities and better cooperation between the police, public prosecutors and social services in this regard. The report expressed concern about freedom of expression and harassment and intimidation of journalists. It also called for the adoption of a national strategy to regulate the environment in which civil society organisations operate.

Protection of minorities: the report stressed that the promotion and protection of human rights, including the rights of national minorities, is a precondition for joining the EU. It stated that progress in the field of guaranteeing the rights of national minorities is **not satisfactory** and called for full implementation of the action plan for the realisation of the rights of national minorities, including in relation to education and culture, the use of minority languages, representation in public administration and the judiciary, and continued access to media and religious services in minority languages.

Serbia was asked to set clear targets and indicators to monitor the implementation of the new Roma strategy.

Regional cooperation: Members noted the ongoing debate and public statements concerning **possible adjustments of the border between Serbia and Kosovo, including exchanges of territories**. They supported the dialogue facilitated by the EU as the framework to reach a comprehensive normalisation agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, and considered that any agreement could only be acceptable if mutually agreed. The report underlined the multi-ethnic nature of both Kosovo and Serbia and that ethnically homogeneous states should not be the objective in the region. Members reiterated their call to move forward with the **full implementation of all the agreements already reached**, including the ones on energy, and encouraged both sides to determinedly continue the normalisation process. They also welcomed the adoption of a national strategy for the investigation and prosecution of war crimes, and discussed the issue of the fate of missing persons, and the need for a reparations scheme for victims and their families.

Energy and transport: the committee welcomed the joint commitment signed by Serbia and Bulgaria on 17 May 2018 to build the gas interconnector between the two countries. It called on Serbia to fully implement the connectivity reform measures in the energy sector;

Lastly, Members expressed concern about the alarming level of air pollution in Serbia, where, in 2016, some 6 500 people died of respiratory ailments and called for reform in transport and mobility policies.