2018 Commission report on Albania

2018/2147(INI) - 16/10/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Knut FLECKENSTEIN (S&D, DE) on the 2018 Commission Report on Albania.

Albania has continued to make **steady progress** towards meeting the political criteria and the five key priorities for the opening of accession negotiations, and accordingly, the Commission has recommended the opening of accession negotiations with Albania. The committee fully supported the Commission's recommendation in recognition of the reform efforts made by Albania, and **called on the Council to open accession talks** without delay since doing so would provide further incentives for the reform process and enhance its scrutiny.

Members underlined the fact that **judiciary reform** is a major demand by Albania's citizens and a prerequisite for re-establishing trust in the rule of law, public institutions and political representatives. They welcomed the progress made in justice reform aimed at increasing the independence, accountability, professionalism and efficiency of judicial institutions, but regretted that the administration of justice continues to be **slow and inefficient**, and stated that the vetting process should be accelerated.

They also commended the significant improvements made in the legal and institutional framework but called for **additional efforts to reduce the corruption** affecting the daily life of Albania's citizens. The report pointed to the need to complete the establishment of the National Bureau of Investigation, the Special Tribunal and the Special Prosecution Against Corruption and Organised Crime. It called for increased attention to be given to political and public-private corruption, and stressed that a convincing track record can only be attained through proactive investigations, prosecutions and final convictions in all cases and especially high-level cases of corruption. Members noted that corruption, rule-of-law deficiencies and cumbersome regulatory procedures continue to **deter investment**.

They went on to underline the importance of an effective **property rights** regime for guaranteeing the rule of law and an attractive business environment and urged the Albanian authorities to effectively ensure the enforcement of property rights, while at the same time taking into account property registration, restitution and compensation.

In addition, Albania was called upon to:

- further improve the education, employment rates and living conditions for Roma, Egyptians and other ethnic minorities;
- effectively combat hate speech and the exclusion and discrimination of minorities, including LGBTI persons;
- enhance cooperation with civil society organisations, ensuring effective public participation throughout the decision-making process;
- take measures to improve the financial transparency of state advertising in the media;
- foster cooperation with trade unions and take measures to address the high unemployment rate, especially among young people, and to further improve the quality of education;
- take further measures to disrupt financial flows aimed at financing terrorism and to address online radicalisation;
- align itself with the EU common position on the integrity of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and to renounce its bilateral immunity agreement with the United States;

Lastly, Members called on the Commission to ensure strict conditionality of Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funds and to assess, as part of its country reports, the effectiveness of IPA support for Albania, especially on the key priorities and relevant projects.