2018 Commission report on Kosovo

2018/2149(INI) - 16/10/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Igor SOLTES (Greens/EFA, SL) on the 2018 Commission Report on Kosovo.

Whilst welcoming the important pieces of legislation adopted within the framework of the European Reform Agenda (ERA), Members pointed to the slow pace in implementing fundamental reforms, caused by a lack of cross-party consensus and continued political polarisation. They called on all political parties to establish an inclusive political dialogue and condemned the obstructive behaviour of some parliamentarians.

The committee also welcomed the fact that the area of **public administration has registered some progress**, but called for the state administration to be depoliticised and restructured.

The report went on to discuss progress still required in several areas, including:

- **electoral shortcomings**, including a lack of transparency on funding for political parties, and allegations of widespread voter intimidation, particularly within many Kosovo Serb communities, requiring measures to address the outstanding recommendations of EU and European Parliament observation missions and of the Venice Commission;
- Kosovo's under-financed **judiciary**, widespread corruption, elements of state capture, undue political influence and issues of a lack of respect for fair trials and due process;
- corruption and **organised crime**, including drug and human trafficking, and cybercrime, which remain issues of concern that require concerted efforts;
- the need for a comprehensive approach to **investigations and prosecutions**, which should be substantiated by the freezing, confiscation and recovery of assets;
- the necessity for genuine and constructive **judicial and police cooperation** between Kosovo and Serbia's authorities and support for the creation of a regional commission (RECOM) for the establishment of the facts about war crimes and other gross human rights violations committed in the former Yugoslavia between 1991 and 2001;
- **gender-based violence** and the under-representation of women in decision-making positions;
- the fact that **minorities,** such us Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, continue to face problems acquiring personal documents, which affects their ability to access citizenship, education, healthcare and social assistance.

The committee considered it vital to grant visa liberalisation to Kosovo without undue delay, and welcomed the Commission's confirmation, issued on 18 July 2018, that the **benchmarks for visa liberalisation have been fulfilled,** and called on the Council to swiftly adopt its mandate to move forward towards the adoption of a visa-free regime.

Relations with Serbia: the report noted the ongoing debate and public statements concerning **possible adjustments of the border between Serbia and Kosovo**, including exchanges of territories, and it stated that any agreement could only be acceptable if mutually agreed, taking into account the overall stability in the region and international law. Members underlined the multi-ethnic nature of both Kosovo and Serbia and that ethnically homogeneous states should not be the objective in the region. They supported the dialogue facilitated by the EU as the framework to reach a comprehensive normalisation agreement between Serbia and Kosovo.

Members added that a **full normalisation of relations with Serbia**, under a legally binding agreement and its implementing arrangements, will not be possible without a comprehensive and mutual **application of the existing agreements** and is a key element of both parties' paths towards European integration. They noted that five EU Member States have not yet recognised Kosovo and invites them to do so; stresses that recognition would be beneficial to the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

Lastly, the committee regretted the fact that many of the agreements signed hitherto have not been implemented or have been delayed, such as those on energy and on the association of Serb majority municipalities. It called on the European External Action Service (EEAS) to carry out an evaluation of the performance of both sides in fulfilling their obligations so as to address all the challenges facing implementation.