

2018 Commission report on Bosnia and Herzegovina

2018/2148(INI) - 17/12/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Cristian Dan PREDA on the 2018 Commission Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

It noted that the Commission is preparing its opinion on BiH's application for EU membership and that on 20 June 2018, BiH received more than 600 follow-up questions to the Commission's questionnaire and has not yet been able to send its replies to the additional questions.

The committee stated that it was concerned about the **marked slowdown in the pace of EU-related reforms since 2017**, noting that no substantial progress has been achieved apart from the adoption of the countrywide strategies in the field of the environment, rural development and energy, and the amendments to the Law on Excise Duties necessary for ensuring IMF and EBRD funding. Members stressed that the declared commitment of the BiH authorities to the European path must be matched by consistent implementation of reforms stemming from the Reform Agenda and translated into concrete results, regardless of citizens ethnic and religious affiliation. The committee deplored the fact that **BiH remains in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights** by not implementing the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Sejdi-Finci and related cases, which allows overt discrimination between citizens in BiH in flagrant contradiction with EU values and norms.

Members also deplored the **nationalistic and inflammatory rhetoric** leading up to the elections on 7 October 2018 elections and also stressed the continuing shortcomings in the democratic election process and expected the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations to be addressed without delay. Members noted that the **electoral campaign was focused mainly on divisive issues linked to the past**, rather than on proposing concrete solutions to resolve citizens' day-to-day problems. They regretted that the issue of democratic and legitimate representation of three constituent peoples and of all citizens remains unresolved. All parties were urged to find a timely compromise as the new legislators should address this issue as soon as possible. Members also regretted the lack of progress on **freedom of expression** and the independence of the media, and rejected continued attempts to put political and financial pressure on the media.

They called on the authorities in Bosnia to proceed with **constitutional, political and electoral reforms** in order to advance in the EU integration process, and transform BiH into a fully effective, inclusive and functional state based on the rule of law. The report noted that the country's EU membership application represents a strategic choice and a commitment to advance towards the EU.

The committee renewed its call for the adoption of a **countrywide strategy on human rights**, and called for additional steps to be taken to reinforce the **protection of minority rights**. In this respect it stressed the need for:

- the establishment of a national preventive mechanism for the prevention of torture and ill treatment;
- a state law on the rights of civilians tortured during the war;
- more effort to bring the conditions in prisons and police holding facilities into line with international standards;
- repeal of the provision on the death penalty from the Republika Srpska's constitution;

- non-discriminatory access to justice throughout the country through a harmonised and sustainable system of free legal aid;
- decisive action be taken at all levels in order to find systemic solutions that will ensure inclusive and non-discriminatory education for all children;
- more effective implementation of the legal provisions regarding equality between men and women, reducing pay gaps between men and women and enhancing access to the labour market for women, and for the combating of gender stereotypes in society;
- measures to further improve the education, employment rates, health, housing and living conditions for Roma people and other minorities.

Lastly, the committee deplored the fact that, owing to the attempts to introduce **ethnic blocking into the EU-BiH Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee's (SAPC) voting rules**, delegates from BiH have still been unable to agree on the rules of procedure for the SAPC, which has consequently not met for three years. It regretted the failure to cooperate with the European Parliament, recalling that this is a clear breach of the obligations stemming from the SAA and urges all actors to agree to and accept the SAPC's rules of procedure based on the European Parliament's recommendations on the subject.