Report on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Albania

2019/2170(INI) - 25/03/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 581 votes to 61, with 45 abstentions, a resolution on the Commission's 2019-2020 reports on Albania.

Members welcomed Albania's clear strategic orientation towards EU integration and expressed their support for the formal launch of accession negotiations once the conditions set by the European Council are met. Albania has been a candidate country since 2014 and since 2018 the Commission has been recommending the opening of accession negotiations.

Parliament believes that the Conference on the Future of Europe should involve representatives from Albania and the other Western Balkan countries, both at government and civil society level, including young people.

Functioning of democratic institutions

Recalling that free and fair elections are fundamental for EU integration, Parliament stressed that the general elections on 25 April 2021 will be essential for the consolidation and renewal of the country's democratic procedures and structures and for achieving a higher level of political stability.

Members called on Albania's public institutions to act in a transparent manner and to establish good governance practices. Civil society and the media should be informed on a regular basis about measures concerning issues of high public interest, such as the current health emergency.

Albania should improve co-ordination within government, speed up decentralisation, advance public consultation at local level and push-ahead with public administration reform. The involvement of the Albanian Parliament in the EU integration process should be strengthened with a view to ensuring harmonisation of its legislation with the EU acquis.

Rule of law

Members reiterated the importance of safeguarding the rule of law through a judicial reform and steady and consistent prosecution of high-level corruption. They stressed the need for Albania to develop a more strategic approach to justice sector reform to enable a tangible move towards an accountable, transparent, independent and functional justice system as a precondition for the first Intergovernmental Conference.

Parliament called for concrete integrity plans to be swiftly adopted and implemented within all ministries. It called for the strengthening of the prosecution and punishment of money laundering cases and for further measures to reduce the size of the informal economy.

Albania is called upon to intensify its efforts to dismantle local and international criminal networks, eliminate drug production and trafficking, combat trafficking in human beings as well as trafficking in firearms and counterfeit goods, cybercrime and terrorist threats.

Fundamental rights, civil society and media

Members called for progress towards the adoption of measures that effectively protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of all, with a particular focus on women, children, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ people.

The resolution stressed the need to improve conditions and create an environment for accountability and oversight of public institutions, in particular through cooperation with civil society and journalists by ensuring that they have access to justice and legal certainty.

Concerned about the lack of progress in the area of freedom of expression, Parliament stressed the need to strengthen self-regulation, ethical standards, independence, impartiality, financial sustainability and news quality of public and private media as well as to improve transparency in media ownership, financing and public advertising.

Further progress should be made to reduce irregular migration and the number of unfounded asylum applications by Albanian nationals in EU Member States, including arrivals of unaccompanied minors.

Socio-economic reforms

Parliament urged the Albanian government to:

- prioritise measures to mitigate the health and socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic with a particular focus on marginalised and vulnerable groups;

- strengthen social care coverage and improve access to health and social services, especially for vulnerable groups, in order to reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion;

- take concrete measures to address demographic decline and brain drain, as well as further measures to tackle gender pay gaps and discrimination in the workplace;

- tackle gender pay gaps and discrimination in the workplace and to step up its efforts to eliminate child labour throughout the informal economy;

- diversify its energy production, ensure economically and environmentally sustainable investments in hydropower generation and increase cost-effective investments in wind and solar energy;

- develop a national energy strategy ensuring full compliance with and implementation of the Paris Agreement and the decarbonisation objectives, in line with the European Green Deal.

Regional cooperation

The resolution welcomed Albania's continued efforts to foster good neighbourly relations and regional integration. It stressed the importance of adopting new measures to encourage reconciliation with neighbours and regional co-operation, which should be based on respect for the EU's fundamental values.

Members called for the creation of new opportunities for high-level political and policy dialogue with the Western Balkan countries through regular EU-Western Balkans summits and intensified ministerial contacts.