

Report on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on North Macedonia

2019/2174(INI) - 25/03/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 558 votes to 70, with 59 abstentions, a resolution on the 2019-2020 Commission reports on Northern Macedonia.

The country continues to make good progress in adopting EU reforms, especially in key areas such as the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, intelligence services, and reform of public administration and the functioning of democratic institutions and procedures.

Parliament welcomed the clear strategic orientation of North Macedonia and its commitment to EU integration. It called on EU Member States to demonstrate real political will to enable the Council to approve the negotiating framework and to hold the first Intergovernmental Conference with North Macedonia as soon as possible.

Members consider that the Union's enlargement policy is the most effective instrument of the Union's foreign policy and that its breakdown could lead to instability in the Union's immediate neighbourhood.

Rule of law

Parliament stressed the importance of upholding the rule of law through judicial reforms and the consistent prosecution of high-level corruption and criminal networks. It called for continued efforts to combat organised crime and corruption in a systematic way and through systematic preventive measures, financial investigations, the prosecution of financial crimes, including money laundering, and the financing of terrorism, and the imposition of appropriate sanctions.

Members encouraged the implementation of measures to ensure the professionalism, independence, integrity and accountability of judges and prosecutors, and the conclusion of institutional reforms in the security and intelligence sectors. They recommended measures to strengthen the recently established Asset Recovery Office and to improve the fight against money laundering and economic crimes.

Functioning of democratic institutions

Members considered it essential that the opposition plays a constructive role in ensuring the proper functioning of Sobranie, the Assembly of North Macedonia, and the adoption of key legislation in the context of the EU and NATO reform process. They called on Sobranie to improve the legislative process by minimising the use of fast-track procedures and increasing transparency.

The resolution called for further measures to improve transparency in the financing of political parties and called on the new government to prioritise reform of the public administration by integrating and systematically applying merit-based standards in public appointments and promotions, strengthening the culture of transparency, professional independence, accountability, integrity and gender and ethnic balance throughout the civil service and public enterprises. The protection of whistleblowers should be guaranteed.

Fundamental rights, media

Members expressed their support for efforts to ensure inclusive policies to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens, with particular attention to women, young people, people with disabilities, ethnic communities, ethnic minority groups, LGBTQI+ people and the low-skilled unemployed. They called for increased measures to combat hate speech and hate crimes against LGBTI+ people, to encourage reporting of such crimes and to end impunity.

The resolution called for continued constructive efforts to strengthen inter-ethnic relations and to recognise and protect all communities and their cultural heritage. It called for the rights of non-majority communities to be safeguarded and for their proper integration and representation in public life and the media to be ensured.

Members also considered that the overall enabling environment for freedom of expression and media independence needs to be further improved through a more effective legal framework, self-regulation and transparency in ownership and advertising markets.

Socio-economic reforms

Parliament welcomed the package of grants worth EUR 70 million from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance II (IPA II) to fund the access of Western Balkans partners. It called on the Commission and the Member States to allocate a sufficient number of COVID-19 vaccines to citizens in all Western Balkan countries.

The resolution encouraged the government to prioritise measures to mitigate the economic downturn and address structural needs, such as shortcomings in education and training, as well as the outflow of skilled workers and infrastructure investment gaps, boosting diversification, competition and digitalisation and tackling the informal economy.

Members considered that that substantial efforts will still be needed to meet the target for energy efficiency, renewable energy, security of supply and emission reductions. They called for political will to implement the Paris Agreement. They reiterated the call to address alarming levels of air pollution by ensuring compliance with emission ceiling for large combustion plants and by developing a national strategy for phasing out coal.

Regional cooperation and foreign policy

Parliament regretted the continuous lack of progress in implementing the previous European Parliament recommendations regarding discrimination against citizens openly expressing their Bulgarian identity and /or ethnic background. It encouraged the authorities and civil society to take appropriate measures for historical reconciliation in order to overcome the divide between and within different ethnic and national groups, including citizens of Bulgarian identity.

It called on all parties to ensure the implementation of the Prespa Agreement with Greece and the Good Neighbourliness Treaty with Bulgaria, as essential elements of the respective bilateral relations.