Report on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Serbia

2019/2175(INI) - 25/03/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution by 538 votes to 69, with 79 abstentions, on the 2019-2020 Commission reports on Serbia.

Parliament welcomed the fact that EU membership remains a strategic goal for Serbia and that it is among the priorities of the newly formed government. However, it expects Serbia to make a clear and unambiguous commitment to fulfil all its obligations for EU membership in a visible and verifiable manner.

The Council has decided not to open any further chapters with Serbia for the time being. A sustainable track record has yet to be achieved in areas such as the judiciary, fundamental rights (Chapter 23), and justice, freedom and security (Chapter 24).

Re-launching the negotiation process

Members underlined the importance of giving more impetus to the accession negotiations with Serbia and of swiftly implementing the revised method for enlargement. They called on Serbia to strengthen the implementation of its legislation and its harmonisation with the acquis, noting that normalisation of relations with Kosovo and genuine respect for fundamental rights remain essential and will determine the pace of accession negotiations.

Democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights

Parliament noted that, due to the boycott of the elections by some opposition parties, the newly formed Serbian Parliament was marked by the overwhelming majority of the ruling coalition and the absence of a viable opposition, a situation which is not conducive to political pluralism in the country. It called on the opposition to return to the negotiating table and to resume political and parliamentary activities.

The resolution called on the new government to work on effective and verifiable structural reforms and to address shortcomings in the areas of the rule of law, fundamental rights, freedom of the press, the fight against corruption and the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration. It called on Serbia to achieve convincing results in areas of concern such as the judiciary, freedom of expression and the fight against organised crime.

Noting with concern the continued political influence on the judiciary, Parliament noted the need to strengthen the guarantees of accountability, professionalism and independence of the judiciary, including, where necessary, by reviewing current recruitment and human resources management procedures. It called on the newly elected parliament to step up its efforts to ensure transparency, inclusiveness and quality of the legislative process, as well as effective parliamentary oversight.

Members called on Serbia to increase its efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights, with particular attention to gender mainstreaming. They called for more efforts to combat violence against women and children and domestic violence and stressed the need to improve access to health services for people with disabilities and to continue to protect the rights of LGBTI people.

Economy and the environment

Parliament welcomed Serbia's progress in developing a functioning market economy and called on the country to continue its efforts to boost competitiveness and sustainable and inclusive growth through structural reforms, in particular in the energy sector and the labour market, as well as by improving transparency and predictability in the regulatory environment. Further progress is needed in the area of public procurement.

The resolution called on Serbia to increase the sustainability of its energy sector by diversifying its energy sources, launching a low-carbon energy transition and moving towards renewable and cleaner energy while removing non-compliant coal subsidies. Members expressed concern about the high levels of air pollution in Serbia and urged the authorities to take swift action to improve air quality, especially in large cities and industrial areas.

Serbia is urged to align itself with EU standards and policy objectives on climate protection and environment as well as energy efficiency.

Regional cooperation

Members welcomed Belgrade's active and constructive participation in the dialogue with Pristina and the good regional cooperation between Serbia and Kosovo in the fight against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The resolution encouraged Serbia to sustain its efforts at all levels aimed at reconciliation and strengthening good neighbourly relations. It called on Serbia to fully implement bilateral agreements and to engage in the resolution of all remaining border disputes with neighbouring countries in a constructive manner.

Members also recalled the obligation to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals.

Lastly, Parliament stressed the importance of alignment with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which should progressively become an integral part of Serbia’s foreign policy as a condition for the accession process.