Report on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Montenegro

2019/2173(INI) - 19/05/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 595 votes to 66, with 34 abstentions, a resolution on the 2019-2020 Commission reports on Montenegro.

Commitment to enlargement

Parliament welcomed Montenegro's continued commitment to the EU integration process and the overall progress. It proposed the swift implementation of the revised enlargement methodology to **speed up the overall negotiation process** and provide clear and tangible incentives of interest to the citizens of Montenegro.

Members welcomed the fact that the elections of 30 August 2020 resulted in the first transition of power since the introduction of multiparty politics, in full compliance with democratic standards and the Constitution of Montenegro. They welcomed recent opinion polls showing that more and more Montenegrin citizens (76.6%) support the country's future membership of the Union and want reforms based on European values.

The resolution also welcomed the **progress made** by Montenegro in several areas of the accession negotiations, including international police cooperation and the fight against organised crime. The authorities are urged to speed up political and economic reforms, particularly in the areas of rule of law and fundamental rights, the judiciary, media freedom and the fight against corruption, where substantial progress is needed.

Democracy and the rule of law

Parliament welcomed the measures adopted to improve the supervisory role of the Parliament as well as its transparency and openness to citizens and civil society. However, it expressed concern about recent developments concerning the special prosecutor for organised crime and corruption and plans to change the composition of the Judicial Council. It regretted that little progress had been made on independence, professionalism, efficiency and accountability of the judiciary.

Montenegro is encouraged to continue its efforts in the area of **organised crime**, in particular by combating internationally active criminal networks, paying particular attention to the fight against money laundering, trafficking in human beings, drugs and arms, illegal gambling and cigarette smuggling, and investigating their possible links with politicians and representatives of state institutions.

The Montenegrin authorities are urged to continue their efforts to establish an efficient public administration and to avoid politically motivated dismissal and recruitment of professionals in the public service.

Respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights

Parliament regretted the lack of progress in the area of **freedom of expression** and freedom of the media and called for further measures to ensure the independence of the media and journalists. It called for enhanced European cooperation with Montenegro in the fight against disinformation, cyber threats and hybrid threats aimed at undermining the region's European perspective.

The resolution stressed the need to protect all rights of **national minorities**, calling for respect for the country's multi-ethnic identity, including the languages used, the cultural heritage and traditions of local communities.

In the face of **domestic violence**, gender-based violence and violence against children, which continue to be of great concern, Parliament called on the authorities to ensure the effective implementation of the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence, as well as the standards set by the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention).

Members welcomed the progress made in protecting the rights of LGBTI persons and the fact that Montenegro is the first country in the region to adopt a law on same-sex partnerships.

Environment, energy and transport

Parliament welcomed Montenegro's progress in diversifying its electricity production to include renewable energy sources, as well as the progress made towards aligning Montenegro's national environmental and climate change legislation with the EU acquis. It stressed the importance of EU support for the **transition to cleaner and sustainable energy**.

Montenegro, Europe's 4th largest country in terms of forest cover, is urged to improve the management of its forests, including by allocating more resources to them and actively combating illegal logging.

Reconciliation, good neighbourly relations and international co-operation

Parliament commended Montenegro for its commitment to inclusive regional cooperation and its **constructive role** in the Western Balkans region. It welcomed the signing of the protocol on the determination of the border point between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia in May 2019 and encouraged Montenegro to continue resolving its remaining bilateral issues with its neighbours, including the unresolved border demarcation issue between Serbia and Croatia.

Members condemned the denial of the Srebrenica genocide and the doubts expressed by the Minister for Justice, Human and Minority Rights about the decisions and legitimacy of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

The economy and the COVID-19 pandemic

Parliament encouraged Montenegro to step up efforts to better align the education system with the labour market, so as to more effectively combat the skills mismatch and brain drain among young people.

Concerned about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Montenegro's economy (with the country's gross domestic product falling by 14.3% in 2020), Members called on the government to pursue a responsible macroeconomic and fiscal policy in view of the high public debt and to make the best possible use of EU assistance.

Parliament called on the Commission to support Montenegro's efforts to reduce unemployment, which has increased significantly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the tourism sector, which directly and indirectly accounts for over 20% of Montenegro's GDP. It called for solidarity by including Montenegro in the EU's joint procurement of COVID-19 vaccines.