Report on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Bosnia and Herzegovina

2019/2171(INI) - 02/06/2021 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Paulo RANGEL (S&D, PT) on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Commitment to enlargement

Members stressed their strong support for the European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina and welcomed Bosnia and Herzegovina's commitment to advancing on its EU path. However, they called for further work on the reconciliation process including the adoption of a law banning the denial of genocide, the Holocaust, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Work on this reconciliation process must focus on the country's youth and start at an early age, embedding reconciliation into the education process. The report stressed the need to urgently put an end to the segregation in education and to remedy unequal access to remote schooling, resulting in many children being deprived of their right to education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Functioning of democratic institutions

Members urged all BiH authorities, institutions, office holders and political leaders to significantly accelerate work and cooperation in order to fully comply with the 14 key priorities in the Commission's opinion on BiH's EU membership application. They underlined the need to considerably strengthen cooperation and data exchange between state, entity and cantonal jurisdictions across all policy areas.

The report underlined the effective establishment, independent functioning and accountability of democratic institutions are essential feature of a viable democracy and a prerequisite for moving forward with the EU integration process, including obtaining candidate status.

The Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) are urged to step up their facilitation activities in BiH, in order to strengthen political dialogue and reconciliation and to provide a framework for dealing with the legacies from the past and for overcoming the divisions in the society.

Rule of law

Members regretted the lack of progress on judicial reforms and reiterated the urgent need to improve the professionalism and accountability of the judiciary to ensure its independence from undue influence as well as to resolve the mounting backlog of cases pending trial. They stressed that these reforms are essential for the country to obtain candidate status and that they depend solely on the necessary political will.

The report stressed the need to enable a unified interpretation of the law across the country. It urged BiH to establish a legal body ensuring consistent and harmonised interpretation of the law.

Moreover, Members called for immediate steps to tackle widespread corruption and impunity in the public sphere to rebuild citizens' trust in the institutions. They suggested that BiH should adopt a new state-level anticorruption strategy and action plan, and ensure its adequate funding.

Fundamental rights, socio-economic reforms

The report expressed concern over the fundamental rights situation and called for more effective and comprehensive country-wide human rights and anti-discrimination strategies. It also stressed the need to improve measures targeting gender-based and domestic violence, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

BiH is called on to:

- step up socio-economic and active labour market measures, including vocational education and training. The authorities should strengthen measures to guarantee social cohesion, poverty and inequality reduction;

- prioritise measures aimed at boosting economic diversification, digitalisation and tackling the informal economy, while developing effective and transparent mechanisms for energy market, transport infrastructure, sustainable tourism and support for SMEs;

- adopt a country-wide strategy on public finance management and for increased budget transparency in BiH, enabling EU-funded budget support.