Resolution on fundamental rights and the rule of law in Slovenia, in particular the delayed nomination of EPPO prosecutors

2021/2978(RSP) - 16/12/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 356 votes to 284, with 40 abstentions, a resolution on fundamental rights and the rule of law in Slovenia, in particular the delayed nomination of EPPO prosecutors.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled by the S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA and The Left groups.

Rule of law is one of the common values on which the EU is founded. An effective, independent and impartial judicial system is essential to ensure the rule of law and the protection of the fundamental rights and civil liberties of citizens in the EU.

Parliament is deeply concerned about the level of public debate, climate of hostility, distrust and deep polarisation in Slovenia, which has eroded trust in public bodies and between them.

EPPO

The European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), as an independent and decentralised prosecution office of the European Union, has the competence to investigate, prosecute and bring to judgment crimes against the EU budget, such as fraud, corruption or serious cross-border VAT fraud. Parliament considers a fully functioning EPPO to be crucial for protecting the integrity of the EU's budget and ensuring the prosecution of crimes against the EU's financial interests.

The resolution welcomed, after a delay of six months, the appointment of the two Delegated Prosecutors from Slovenia to the EPPO College on 24 November 2021, which means that the EPPO has now been fully constituted and that Delegated Prosecutors have been appointed by all participating Member States. However, Parliament expressed its concerns on proposed amendments to the accompanying law that would allow retroactive changes to appointment criteria. This could lead to the risk of the two new Delegated Prosecutors being dismissed.

Slovenian Press Agency (STA)

The Slovenian Press Agency (STA), as the national and public information provider, has an important role in guaranteeing media freedom and media pluralism in the country. The independence of the agency, without political interference and benefiting from stable financing, is paramount for the public service it provides. It is the state's duty to ensure the STA's institutional autonomy, editorial independence and adequate funding for the performance of its public service function. However, the Slovenian Government withheld for 312 days in 2021 the STA's funding for providing its public service. Parliament called on the Government to resume state funding and to make these payments regularly and in full accordance with national law, while guaranteeing the Agency's editorial independence.

Media ownership

Parliament is concerned about the lack of transparency in media ownership. It called for clear rules on the state's and state-owned companies' advertising expenditure, and they want to ensure proper access to public information. It called on Slovenia to transpose into national law without delay the Audiovisual

Media Services Directive, the European Electronic Communications Code and the EU Whistleblowers Directive.

SLAPPs

Continuing concerns about pressure on independent public institutions and on the media have been reported, including smear campaigns, slander, criminal investigations, as well as strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) brought by prominent public figures and politicians, including members of the Government. The resolution noted that Slovenia has not fully decriminalised defamation, which can have a chilling effect on the freedom of expression and on the reporting of abuses by those in public office and can lead to self-censorship. Parliament called on all actors to cease such actions.