Report on the 2021 Commission Report on Albania

2021/2244(INI) - 19/05/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 519 votes to 52, with 28 abstentions, a resolution on the 2021 Commission report on Albania.

Reaffirming the European future of Albania and the whole Western Balkans region, Parliament urged the Council to preserve the credibility of European integration by opening accession negotiations with Albania and Northern Macedonia quickly - as regularly recommended by the Commission - given that both countries have fulfilled the conditions set by the European Council and continue to achieve viable results in all key areas.

Members recalled that Albania's final accession to the EU is conditional on the implementation of sustainable, deep and irreversible reforms in key areas, starting with the rule of law and the functioning of democratic institutions. They called on Albania to continue its efforts to consolidate the functioning of the judicial system, strengthen democracy, the rule of law and the economy, empower civil society, fight corruption and organised crime, ensure media freedom and the protection of minority rights, including the LGBTI+ community.

Democratic institutions, media and civil society

Parliament reaffirmed the joint responsibility of Albania's political forces to strengthen constructive political dialogue and cooperation in order to facilitate the effective functioning of the country's democratic institutions by continuing to improve governance, transparency and pluralism and by ensuring the active participation of civil society. It recalled the importance of building the necessary consensus among all political actors to strengthen Albania's democratic parliamentary culture.

Members recalled the need to address remaining electoral shortcomings in a timely manner, before the next parliamentary elections, in line with the recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission, by continuing to improve the accessibility and integrity of the elections and by preventing vote buying and the misuse of administrative resources.

Parliament also noted the urgent need to strengthen freedom of expression, independence and pluralism of the media and is concerned about the lack of progress in this area. It called on the authorities to implement a zero tolerance policy and to take firm action against marginalisation, intimidation and violence against the media and independent reporters. It reiterated the need to strengthen investigative journalism, fact-checking and media education to combat hate speech, disinformation and false information.

Fundamental rights

Albania is called upon to:

- systematically prevent all cases of hate speech and hate crime, verbal and physical attacks and intimidation, both offline and online, including against journalists, human rights defenders and persons belonging to vulnerable and minority groups, such as LGBTI+ or Roma;

- make further progress in implementing gender equality, property rights, data protection, the rights of persons with disabilities and minority rights in the areas of education, languages, self-identification and the protection of cultural heritage;

- strengthen the prevention of gender-based violence and feminicide and take action against all forms of sexual violence, in particular against children, including highly vulnerable refugee and migrant children and children with disabilities;

- effectively guarantee the right to freedom of peaceful assembly;

- ensure due asylum process and address the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

Rule of law

Stressing that the rule of law and judicial reforms are the backbone of democratic transformation, Parliament called on Albania to:

- continue to fight corruption and criminal activities in all areas of public life, including in public procurement procedures and the financing of political parties;

- strengthen the capacity of the judiciary with a view to an irreversible transition to accountable, independent and functional judicial and governmental institutions;

- make further efforts to increase further the seizure and confiscation of criminal assets stemming from corruption-related offences and to secure more convictions in high-level cases;

- take decisive action against money laundering and the fight against terrorism;

- improve standardised procedures and mechanisms to combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

Members welcomed the ongoing bilateral, regional and international cooperation, including with EU justice and home affairs agencies such as Europol, Eurojust and Frontex, and the intensified fight against the production and organised trafficking of drugs, illegal weapons and human beings.

Socio-economic reforms, environment, energy and transport

Parliament stressed the need to strengthen EU assistance and funding to improve the rule of law, and to promote sustainable green growth, biodiversity, innovation, competitiveness, property rights and reversing population decline. It called on the authorities to:

- reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion by improving access to social, education and health services, especially for disadvantaged populations, including Roma and Egyptian communities, minority groups, people with disabilities and the poor;

- empower young people. Members welcomed the designation of Tirana as European Youth Capital 2022;

- intensify efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights;

- strengthen measures on biodiversity, water, air and climate protection, as well as regional waste management;

- prioritise monitoring and annual reporting on air pollution, noise pollution and surface water quality;

- develop modern, environmentally friendly and climate-friendly small and medium-scale agriculture.

Foreign policy and security

Parliament welcomed Albania's swift alignment with the EU in sanctioning Russia and its political leaders for its aggression against Ukraine, including by closing its airspace. It welcomed Albania's continued full compliance with the EU's restrictive measures. Members underlined Albania's major contribution, as a NATO member, to the protection of the EU's external border and called on the EU to step up its support for border security in the region.