Report on the 2021 Commission Report on Serbia

2021/2249(INI) - 06/07/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 523 votes to 78, with 34 abstentions, a resolution on the 2021 Commission report on Serbia.

Commitment to EU accession

Parliament expressed its support for Serbia’s future membership of the European Union and recalled that a credible enlargement perspective requires **sustained efforts and irreversible reforms** in all areas, especially those related to the rule of law, as well as an unwavering commitment to European standards and values. Members stressed that progress in the **rule of law and fundamental rights** chapters, full alignment with the EU's foreign, security and defence policy, including with regard to sanctions against Russia, as well as the normalisation of Serbia's relations with Kosovo, will determine the pace of the accession negotiations.

Parliament welcomed the increase in voter turnout for the elections on 3 April 2022 and the return to a more pluralistic National Assembly, which now includes many parties representing national minorities. However, it deplored the deep antagonisms that marked the political landscape during the campaign and condemned the attacks on members of the opposition, journalists, members of civil society organisations and members of the various election observation missions, which undermined the integrity of the electoral process.

Members urged the new majority to respect previously adopted political decisions on the EU accession process and to speed up Serbia's alignment with European policies and values.

Parliament expressed concern about **Serbia’s low alignment rate with the EU CFSP**, which is the lowest in the region.

It deeply regretted that Serbia had still not aligned itself with the EU's sanctions policy following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It called on the newly elected authorities to align themselves swiftly and fully with the restrictive measures against Russia and Belarus. It urged Serbia to review its defence policy relations with Russia and to end all military cooperation with Russia.

Members are concerned about the **very limited impact of the European integration process in Serbia**. They are also concerned that Serbian public support for EU membership is much lower than in the rest of the region and that, according to the latest polls, the majority of Serbian citizens are opposed to EU membership. Serbian political leaders are urged to communicate more actively and engage in dialogue with Serbian citizens on the concrete benefits of EU membership.

Democracy and rule of law, human rights

Parliament called on the newly elected majority to address structural shortcomings and achieve **concrete results** in the areas of the rule of law, fundamental rights, freedom of expression, freedom of the media, the fight against corruption and disinformation, and the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration. It called on Serbia to fully implement the separation of powers in accordance with its constitution and democratic standards and asked the newly elected majority to make it a priority to strengthen the guarantees of independence and efficiency of the judiciary.

Members reiterated their concern about the limited progress in the fight against corruption and organised crime and about several high-profile corruption scandals which point to probable links between state officials and organised crime.

Parliament urged the Commission to implement the recommendations of the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 01/2022 to ensure that EU financial assistance to the Western Balkans has an effective impact on the rule of law, in particular by drawing up guidelines on the application of the modulation provisions of IPA III and strengthening parliamentary scrutiny of funds.

Members condemned restrictions on the freedom and independence of the media and deplored the continued physical attacks, intimidation, hate speech and political defamation against journalists and civil society, including by Members and senior officials. They called for general respect for the fundamental right to peaceful assembly and called on the police to refrain from using excessive force.

Parliament welcomed the adoption of the Gender Equality Act and the amendments to the Anti-Discrimination Act and urged the government to ensure that these laws are implemented without delay. It also welcomed the adoption of a new strategy to combat violence against women and domestic violence but stressed the need to implement and improve it.

Parliament called on the Serbian authorities to step up their efforts to ensure non-discriminatory treatment of ethnic, religious and sexual minorities and other vulnerable groups, and to ensure that minority groups enjoy equal opportunities. It called for strengthened measures to combat harassment, hate speech and hate crimes against LGBTI+ persons.

Concerned about the spread of disinformation about Russian aggression against Ukraine, especially by media close to the government, Members called on the Serbian authorities to take decisive action to combat disinformation.

Reconciliation

Parliament called on Serbia to work at all levels to promote reconciliation and improve good neighbourly relations, to implement bilateral agreements and to resolve outstanding bilateral issues with its neighbours, including border demarcation, inheritance, restitution of cultural property and disclosure of military archives. It underlined Serbia's commitment to working with neighbouring countries to resolve the issue of missing persons and stressed that reconciliation with neighbouring countries is a precondition for the normalisation of regional relations.

Parliament reiterated its unequivocal support for the EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and stressed the importance of constructive engagement by the Serbian and Kosovar authorities in order to reach a comprehensive and legally binding normalisation agreement based on mutual recognition.

Socio-economic reforms

Parliament noted with satisfaction the progress made in establishing a functioning market economy, although the state retains a strong footprint, and welcomed the fact that the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the economy have been sufficiently mitigated. Despite some improvements, the labour market still suffers from structural problems and faces demographic and migration challenges. Members are concerned about the depopulation and continued emigration of Serbia's human capital. In addition, they expressed concern about Serbia's growing dependence on Chinese investment.

While welcoming the concrete steps taken towards the phasing out of coal-fired power plants, Parliament was deeply concerned that Serbia was still investing in a new coal power plant. It called on Serbia to step

up efforts to diversify its energy supply and overall energy mix, in particular to reduce its dependence on Russia, and to increase investment and modernise energy infrastructure in order to achieve the necessary transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.

Members reiterated their concern about the high levels of air pollution and called on the authorities to speed up the implementation of air quality plans. They expressed concern about the serious problems of corruption and violations of the rule of law in the environmental field.