2022 Commission Report on Serbia

2022/2204(INI) - 10/05/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 508 votes to 76, with 37 abstentions, a resolution on the 2022 Commission report on Serbia.

Commitment to EU membership

Parliament welcomed the fact that EU membership remains a strategic goal for Serbia. It stressed that progress on the rule of law and fundamental rights, on the functioning of democratic institutions, on commitment to shared European rights and values, and on normalisation and healing of relations with Kosovo will determine the dynamics of the accession process.

Members regretted Serbia's weak alignment with the CFSP. Pointing out that Serbia is one of the very few European countries not to associate itself with EU sanctions against Russia, they called on the competent authorities to demonstrate an unambiguous commitment to international law and EU values and to align themselves with the EU's restrictive measures against Russia. As a candidate country, Serbia must respect the principles and policies of the Union and end any alignment with a warmongering autocratic regime.

Parliament recalled that the EU accession process is essentially based on the genuine will of the candidate country to respect the values and principles of the Union. It is concerned about the recent downward trend in public support for EU membership in Serbia, which has reached its lowest level, and the growing support for the Russian regime.

The EU is Serbia's main political and economic partner and by far its biggest donor. Members called on the EU to reconsider the extent of its financial assistance to Serbia, if the latter continues to support undemocratic regimes and does not adhere to the EU's restrictive measures and the CFSP. They called on Serbia's political leaders to communicate clearly and unambiguously about Serbia's European orientation and its close relationship with the Union.

Democracy and the rule of law

Parliament welcomed the steps taken by Serbia to align itself with the EU list of third countries whose nationals require a visa to travel to the EU and called on it to continue this alignment immediately, in particular with third countries posing irregular migration or security risks to the EU. It welcomed Serbia's good cooperation with the EU on managing irregular migration.

Members noted that the laws on the judiciary still allow the executive to exert undue influence on its work, while the views of civil society may not have been sufficiently taken into account. They called on Serbian state institutions to make it a priority to strengthen the guarantees of independence and efficiency of the judiciary.

Parliament noted the conclusions of the final report of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe / Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights election observation mission, according to which the 3 April 2022 parliamentary elections presented diverse political options, but a number of shortcomings resulted in an uneven playing field, favouring the incumbents. It called on the Serbian authorities to fully implement outstanding OSCE recommendations, in particular those concerning access to the media for individual candidates, improved transparency and accountability of campaign financing. It reiterated his call on Serbia to present convincing results in corruption cases in which the public has a strong interest.

Fundamental freedoms and human rights

Respect for human rights is an essential element of democracy and progress on the European path. The Serbian authorities are called upon to step up their efforts to protect and promote human rights, especially with regard to certain vulnerable groups, including by strengthening human rights institutions and by investigating and prosecuting human rights violations.

Parliament deplored the further deterioration of freedom of expression, cases of hate speech and defamation campaigns and the increasing number of strategic litigation against public participation (SLAPPs) in the country. It reiterated that the state of freedom of expression and media independence remains a serious concern that must be addressed as a matter of utmost priority.

Concerned about the spread of disinformation about the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, Parliament called on the Serbian authorities to take a firm stand against disinformation. It called on the Serbian authorities to monitor the situation and prevent Serbian citizens from joining the Wagner group and participating in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Serbia is called upon to ensure respect for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, including access to education, information and religious services in minority languages, as well as appropriate representation in public administration. Members stressed the importance of further combating discrimination and gender-based violence and condemned the fact that women with disabilities living in institutions still face specific forms of violence.

Reconciliation and good neighbourly relations

Parliament reaffirmed that good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation remain essential elements of the enlargement process. It encouraged Serbia to intensify its reconciliation efforts and to adopt and implement measures that would actively contribute to resolving outstanding bilateral issues. It strongly condemned the widespread denial of international war crimes verdicts and stressed that there was no place for genocide denial. It stressed the importance of regional cooperation on war crimes and disappearances.

Members reaffirmed their full support for the EU Special Representative for the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, Miroslav Laják. They called on Serbia and Kosovo to conduct this dialogue without further delay in good faith and in a spirit of compromise, in order to reach a comprehensive and legally binding agreement on the normalisation of their relations, based on the principle of mutual recognition, in accordance with international law.

Socio-economic reforms

Despite Serbia's progress in establishing a functioning market economy, Parliament stressed that the country's economy is hampered by long-standing structural problems, including weaknesses in the rule of law. It reiterated that reforms in these fundamental areas and efforts to fight corruption remain essential for economic development. It stressed the need to respect environmental, social and labour standards for all investments and called on Serbia to better harmonise its labour law with that of the EU.

Members deplored the fact that foreign actors, especially Chinese companies, have been able to benefit from lower social and environmental standards. They called for the necessary safeguards to be put in place to prevent Chinese companies from circumventing fair competition rules and environmental and labour standards.

Parliament reiterated its concern that several places in Serbia are often on the list of the world's most polluted areas in terms of air quality. It urged the authorities to take swift action to improve air quality, especially in large cities and industrial areas. It called on the government to continue to align with the EU acquis on water quality and nature protection.