2022 Commission Report on Kosovo

2022/2201(INI) - 10/05/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 452 votes to 87, with 76 abstentions, a resolution on the 2022 Commission report on Kosovo.

Commitment to EU accession

Parliament welcomed Kosovo's application for EU membership, which reflects the consistent pro-European orientation of its citizens and a general cross-party consensus on EU integration, as well as a clear geopolitical strategic choice. It asked Member States to instruct the European Commission to present the questionnaire without delay and to prepare an opinion on the merits of the country's application for membership.

Members welcomed the long-awaited agreement to liberalise the visa regime for Kosovo's citizens, which is due to enter into force on 1 January 2024 at the latest. They called on the Commission and the Council to avoid any further delay, recalling that the European Parliament has repeatedly asked Member States in the Council to proceed with the adoption of this agreement, as Kosovo has met all the benchmarks since 2018.

Parliament urged Member States, including Spain, Slovakia, Cyprus, Romania and Greece, which have not yet recognised Kosovo as a sovereign state, to do so and thus allow it to move forward on the path to the Union on an equal footing with the candidate countries.

Members welcomed Kosovo's ongoing alignment with the EU's foreign and security policy, in particular its firm condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the implementation of the EU's restrictive measures against Russia and Belarus.

Democracy and rule of law

Parliament welcomed Kosovo's progress in strengthening democracy and the rule of law, as well as its increased legislative activity on EU-related reforms. It welcomed the progress made in implementing the priorities of the European Reform Agenda II and the adoption of important legislation on the fight against corruption.

Members are concerned about Kosovo's judicial system, which remains inefficient and vulnerable to undue interference. They called on the government to step up its efforts to create a professional, depoliticised, diverse and citizen-oriented civil service, appointed through a transparent and merit-based procedure. They also reiterated their call on Kosovo to address the remaining shortcomings of the electoral process and to implement the related recommendations of the EU election observation missions.

The increase in malicious foreign interference, in the form of disinformation campaigns organised by several actors, including Russia and China, is a cause for concern. Members called on Kosovo and the EU to strengthen their co-operation to build democratic resilience and comprehensively combat disinformation campaigns and hybrid threats aimed at destabilising the country and undermining its European perspective.

Fundamental freedoms and human rights

Although Kosovo has the necessary institutional framework for the promotion and protection of human rights, Members stressed the need for a stronger commitment from Kosovo to prioritise human rights and to ensure accountability and appropriate sanctions for violations and abuses.

Kosovo has a vibrant and pluralistic media landscape, but Members deplored malicious statements and smear campaigns, often by political groups, against investigative journalists. They called for the introduction of effective measures to ensure the financial viability and independence of the media.

Parliament denounced the increasing number of strategic litigation against public participation (SLAPPs) in the Western Balkan countries, including some initiated by EU companies. It expressed concern about the long-standing impunity surrounding the murders and disappearances in Kosovo of seven Serbian and six Kosovo Albanian journalists between 1998 and 2005.

Members deplored the numerous cases of feminicide and gender-based and sexual violence, including against minors. They called on the police, the courts and the government to step up their efforts to combat domestic and gender-based violence and to improve existing protection and prevention measures. They also called for ensuring that LGBTIQ+ people can fully enjoy their rights and be treated equally with other citizens.

Kosovo is urged to redouble its efforts to provide equal opportunities for minority groups, as well as adequate representation in political and cultural life, the public media, the administration and the judicial system. Members deplored the fact that people with disabilities are still among the most discriminated against in Kosovo.

Reconciliation and good neighbourly relations

Parliament encouraged Kosovo to step up its reconciliation efforts, including by adopting a comprehensive national strategy for dealing with past events. It called for intensified efforts and solutions to the problems of missing persons. The Kosovo government and the representatives of the Kosovo Serbs are invited to further engage in a genuine dialogue. Reconciliation and inclusion of the Kosovo Serb community are essential to ensure the stability of the country and to advance the normalisation of relations between Pristina and Belgrade.

Parliament reaffirmed its full support for the EU Special Representative for the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, Miroslav Laják. It called on Kosovo and Serbia 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 mutual recognition, in accordance with international law.

Members condemned Russia's attempts to exert influence in the Western Balkans by exploiting cultural, ethnic and religious divides and destabilising pro-democratic forces. They expressed concern about hybrid threats and called on the Kosovo authorities to investigate the alleged presence of Russian Wagner group mercenaries in northern Kosovo.

Socio-economic reforms

Parliament reaffirmed the need for structural reforms to boost competitiveness and ensure inclusive and sustainable economic growth. It welcomed the progress made in key areas for economic development, such as competitiveness, the business environment, support for SMEs and the internal market, as well as its reforms to the Law on Inspections, amended Law on Protection of Competition, and the Consumer Protection Programme 2021-2025.

Members reiterated their call on the Commission to develop a regional strategy to tackle persistent youth unemployment and emigration, by reducing the skills mismatch between the education system and the labour market, improving the quality of education, and ensuring sufficient funding for active labour market measures and vocational training schemes. They also called on the Kosovo government to continue to develop a favourable environment for economic activities and to attract foreign direct investment, especially outside the capital.

Parliament stressed the importance of taking measures to address the climate and environmental emergency, by reducing dependence on fossil fuels and phasing out coal, with a view to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It called for urgent action to tackle air pollution and soil and water contamination and to improve soil and water management.