2022 Commission Report on Albania

2022/2199(INI) - 31/05/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Isabel SANTOS (S&D, PT) on the 2022 Commission report on Albania.

Commitment to EU membership

Members welcomed Albania's unwavering and strategic commitment to EU integration, reflecting the consensus across political parties and overwhelming support from citizens. They welcomed its consistent and comprehensive alignment with the Union's foreign and security policy, including its unequivocal response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. They welcomed the opening of accession negotiations with Albania.

The report stressed the need for the government to make further progress in implementing the EU's reform agenda, in cooperation with the opposition and all sections of society, and for the Albanian government and the EU to enhance the transparency, accountability and inclusiveness of the accession process, including its parliamentary dimension.

The Albanian government is called upon to redouble its efforts to improve the functioning of the rule of law and the judicial system, to fight corruption and organised crime, to guarantee freedom of the media, to empower civil society, to guarantee fundamental rights and minority rights, in particular those of the LGBTIQ+ community, and to strengthen its cooperation with EU institutions.

Decision-makers are called upon to work together to meet the accession criteria by 2030 at the latest.

Democracy and the rule of law

The report welcomed Albania's progress and its commitment to complete the implementation of its comprehensive justice reform, which will strengthen the independence, transparency, efficiency and accountability of the Albanian judicial system. The Albanian government must improve the operational capacity of the judicial system, in order to meet the demand for qualified judges and thus reduce the large backlog of cases.

Deploring the ongoing political confrontation and expressing concern about the shrinking space for the role of the opposition in parliamentary scrutiny, Members stressed the importance of developing a constructive parliamentary culture by promoting consensus among all political actors and defending the rights and responsibilities of the opposition. They called on the Albanian authorities to urgently implement the outstanding changes to the election and party financing framework well in advance of the 2025 parliamentary elections.

Members expected improvements and concrete results in the prevention, investigation and prosecution of corruption and organised crime, including environmental crime, cybercrime and trafficking, as well as non-selective final convictions for the latter. They stressed the need to establish a solid track record in corruption cases and to pursue the seizure, confiscation and recovery of criminal assets resulting from corruption and organised crime offences, including through legislation targeting unjustified wealth, the digitalisation of transactions and the extensive freezing and confiscation of illicit assets.

The Albanian authorities are invited to focus on modernising the tax system and tax administration, to strengthen anti-money laundering controls and to prosecute possible cases of offences against the EU

budget within the framework of the working agreement on cooperation between the European Prosecutor's Office and the Albanian Prosecutor's Office. The report stressed the authorities' obligation to guarantee transparency and competition with regard to public procurement, public contracts, privatisations, state aid and concession procedures. It also encouraged Albania to redouble its efforts to reduce the number of unfounded asylum applications lodged by its nationals and to bring its visa policy more into line with the EU's list of third countries subject to visa requirements.

The report condemned malicious foreign interference and hybrid attacks, including manipulation and disinformation campaigns, incitement to all forms of radicalisation, and cyber-attacks against Albanian citizens and critical infrastructure aimed at destabilising the country and discrediting the EU.

Fundamental freedoms and human rights

Members called for concrete measures to ensure the inclusion of LGBTIQ+, Roma, Egyptian and all other ethnic and cultural minorities. They also called on the authorities to redouble their efforts to combat gender-based violence, strengthen child protection and adopt and implement legislation on minority rights. Efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights must be stepped up. Concerned about discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people, Members called on the authorities to adopt legislation on the recognition of gender identity and same-sex partnerships or marriages.

The report deplored the lack of progress on the rights of people with disabilities. It also deplored the lack of progress in institutional transparency, and the deterioration of the situation with regard to freedom of expression and media freedom. The authorities must take immediate action against political and economic interference in the media and put an end to verbal attacks, defamation campaigns and intimidation of journalists. All political actors and authorities are called upon to stop and condemn hate speech, defamation campaigns and harassment of independent civil society organisations and human rights defenders.

Members welcomed Albania's continued dialogue aimed at ensuring good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation. They commended Albania for its key role in promoting stability and cooperation in the Western Balkans, including its participation in EU- and NATO-led missions and operations.

Socio-economic reforms

Members called on the authorities to pursue structural reforms and enable a sustainable recovery and inclusive growth by improving public financial management and governance, the rule of law, digitisation and accessibility, reducing social exclusion, formalising the economy, and improving education and health services. They called for further efforts in professional development, improved working conditions and social dialogue through constructive dialogue.

Energy, environment, sustainable development and connectivity

Members welcomed the measures taken by Albania to speed up the energy transition and energy diversification towards wind and solar power. They called for progress on electricity sector reform and carefully planned measures on biodiversity, water, air, climate, regional waste management, recycling and industrial pollution. They reaffirmed the need to fill gaps in transport connectivity and to upgrade the public infrastructure in the Western Balkans.