2022 Commission Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina

2022/2200(INI) - 03/07/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Paulo RANGEL (EPP, PT) on the 2022 Commission Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

Commitment to EU accession

The report underscoredthat BiH's path towards EU accession needs to be anchored in functioning democratic institutions, the rule of law, good governance, the fight against corruption and organised crime, respect for fundamental rights and equality and non-discrimination for all citizens.

Members welcomed the European Council's decision to grant candidate status to BiH in the context of a changed geopolitical reality, on the understanding that a number of steps are taken to strengthen the country's readiness for accession negotiations. They commended the swift implementation of the results of the October 2022 general elections, the appointment of a new state-level government, the signing of a coalition programme and the resumption of political decision-making.

The report encouraged all political authorities to seize the momentum to meaningfully advance on implementing the 14 key priorities in line with the aspirations of all citizens, respecting the accountability of institutions and the quality and transparency of the process. Moreover, Members strongly supports BiH' s sustained aspirations towards Euro-Atlantic integration and NATO membership and called on all political actors to act on them with concrete political action. They also reiterated their call for targeted sanctions against destabilising political actors in BiH. Members condemned all malign foreign interference, disinformation campaigns and destabilisation efforts by international and regional actors in BiH, notably Russia's continuing destabilisation of the Western Balkans.

The EU is called on to increase cooperation with Western Balkan partners to strengthen democratic resilience and counter hybrid threats, including on cybersecurity, protecting critical infrastructure and food and energy security.

Democracy and the rule of law

The report called on BiH political actors to support and establish a functioning coordination structure to steer public administration reform. It also called on BiH to harmonise party registration rules and to ensure the transparency of political party financing in line with international standards and the recommendations of relevant international bodies.

Members expressed deep concern about the lack of progress on preventing widespread corruption and the increasing signs of state capture, political interference and obstruction¸ pressure and intimidation and called for the transparent use of EU financial assistance.

Fundamental rights and socio-economic reforms

Members strongly condemned attacks and threats, smear campaigns, insults, intimidation and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP) against journalists and media workers, including by politicians and public figures including the recent attacks on journalists Aleksandar Trifunovi and Nikola Moraa, and by private companies. They insisted on appropriate, systematic and effective judicial follow-

up and the protection of journalists, including by a special layer of protection in the criminal code and improved capacities of prosecutors and judges. While stressing the importance of ensuring the transparency of media ownership and the financial sustainability of the public broadcasting system, the UE is invited to increase its financial and technical support for quality media and journalism training, in particular to investigative and independent media.

Furthermore, BiH is called on to:

- prioritise measures aimed at addressing poverty, inequality and social protection, improving competitiveness and the business environment, as well as economic and social cohesion, boosting economic diversification and bringing legislation in the area of VAT and excise duties in line with that of the EU;

- promote the digital and green transitions, address the informal economy and tackle unemployment and poverty, particularly among young people, women and people in vulnerable situations, such as inhabitants of rural areas, Roma people, children and elderly people;

- adopt an ambitious, credible and cohesive energy and climate plan for 2021-2030.