Basic information

2021/2002(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
Cooperation on fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans **Subject** 6.40.03 Relations with South-East Europe and the Balkans 7.30.30 Action to combat crime	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
AFET Foreign Affairs	MANDL Lukas (EPP)	02/12/2020
	Shadow rapporteur SCHIEDER Andreas (S&D) ȘTEFĂNUȚĂ Nicolae (Renew) VON CRAMON-TAUBADEL Viola (Greens/EFA) DZHAMBAZKI Angel (ECR) VILIMSKY Harald (ID)	

Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
LIBE Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	

European Commission

Commission DG	Commissioner
Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations	VÁRHELYI Olivér

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
11/02/2021	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
26/10/2021	Vote in committee		
03/11/2021	Committee report tabled for plenary	A9-0298/2021	Summary
14/12/2021	Debate in Parliament		

15/12/2021	Decision by Parliament	T9-0506/2021	Summary
15/12/2021	Results of vote in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2021/2002(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 165
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	AFET/9/05269

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE680.959	05/05/2021	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE696.513	08/09/2021	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A9-0298/2021	03/11/2021	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T9-0506/2021	15/12/2021	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2022)238	31/05/2022	

Cooperation on fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans

2021/2002(INI) - 15/12/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 531 votes to 48, with 117 abstentions, a resolution on cooperation in the fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans.

Western Balkan countries must step up their efforts

Parliament stressed that the fight against organised crime and progress in the EU integration process are mutually reinforcing, which is why it is necessary to **accelerate the EU integration process** of the Western Balkan countries. It called on the countries of the Western Balkans to redouble their efforts to implement the necessary reforms, while inviting the EU to place the correct transposition of international instruments supporting the rule of law and targeting corruption and organised crime through financial assistance and practical cooperation at the heart of enlargement policy priorities.

Members called for greater efforts to tackle a range of problems, such as the lack of employment opportunities, corruption, disinformation, elements of state capture, inequality, foreign interference from non-democratic regimes such as Russia and China, and the slow process of EU accession are among the factors that make Western Balkan societies vulnerable to organised crime.

Parliament deplored the **lack of genuine political will** on the part of some of the local political elites to fight organised crime and corruption and eliminate any element of state capture. It also regretted the lack of independence and the often poor functioning of the judiciary. Members called on the Western

Balkan countries to **address the shortcomings of their criminal justice systems** and on the Union to encourage a culture of professionalism and performance within the criminal justice system with a view to improving the integrity of the judiciary.

The Western Balkan countries are invited to focus on criminal organisations as a whole in addition to individual cases, to achieve tangible results in **asset recovery** for the benefit of all their citizens and to establish the confiscation of proceeds and instrumentalities of crime as a priority in the fight against corruption and organised crime.

Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)

Around EUR 64 million has been allocated to projects dealing with the fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II). Members recalled that the instrument provides for strong conditionality and that funding should be modulated, or even suspended, in case of significant regression or persistent lack of progress in particular as regards the rule of law and fundamental rights, including the fight against corruption and organised crime. It is therefore in the interest of EU security to ensure that EU funds do not turn out to be counterproductive by strengthening the clientelist networks of corrupt politicians.

Specific types of organised crime

The resolution stressed in particular the importance of:

- increasing focus on prevention and building resilience of groups at risk of trafficking in human beings as the Western Balkan countries are countries of origin, destination and transit for trafficking in human beings, mainly women and girls used for sexual exploitation;

- enhancing efforts to combat migrant smuggling and protect the fundamental rights of smuggled persons, in particular unaccompanied minors: the EU should provide more assistance in addressing these issues, such as financial and technical support;

- tackling financial crime to expose criminal activities and prevent infiltration into the legal economy;

- implementing measures to reduce informal payments where possible, given the importance of the grey economy (estimated to be worth over 30% of the region's GDP);

- supporting the Western Balkan countries in the fight against cybercrime and other online threats;

- developing law enforcement authorities' capacities to better monitor and combat drug trafficking.

Cooperation with the EU (its Member States and agencies) and interregional cooperation

The resolution encouraged the EU to support capacity building in the Western Balkans and to help facilitate **police and judicial cooperation** in the fight against organised crime. It recommended strengthening existing EU-supported structures, such as the Regional Cooperation Council, so that they can play a coherent role in promoting further cooperation.

Stressing the important role of Interpol in the fight against organised crime, Parliament called on EU Member States to support Kosovo's application for membership of this organisation. Members believe that the membership of the six Western Balkan countries in Interpol would further improve the effectiveness of measures targeting transnational crime. They also stressed the need to strengthen cooperation between Frontex and the Western Balkan countries in areas related to the fight against organised crime.

Role of civil society and the media

Parliament called for **civil society organisations** to be more involved in the legislative process and to be given the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to key legislative acts. In this context, it called on the Western Balkan authorities to urgently adopt and implement better laws on **freedom of access** to information through inclusive processes.

Members regretted the growing number of SLAPP cases, which are often used to threaten journalists and individuals to prevent them from exposing the wrongdoings of those in power. They called on the authorities in the Western Balkans to step up their work **to ensure transparency in media ownership** and independence of newsrooms and to protect media freedom from political interference, which are essential elements of a free democratic society.

Cooperation on fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans

2021/2002(INI) - 03/11/2021 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Lukas MANDL (EPP, AT) on cooperation in the fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans.

The report stressed that the fight against organised crime and progress in the EU integration process are mutually reinforcing, which is why it is necessary to **accelerate the EU integration process** of the Western Balkan countries. It urged the Western Balkan countries to focus their efforts to implement the necessary reforms, while calling on the EU to make enlargement policy a top priority.

Members deplored the lack of genuine political will on the part of some of the local political elites to fight organised crime and corruption and eliminate any element of state capture. They also regretted the **lack of independence and the often poor functioning of the judiciary**. They called on the Western Balkan countries to address the shortcomings of their criminal justice systems and on the Union to encourage a culture of professionalism and performance within the criminal justice system with a view to improving the integrity of the judiciary.

The Western Balkan countries are invited to focus on **criminal organisations as a whole** in addition to individual cases, to achieve sustained results in the fight against organised crime, corruption and money laundering, and to prepare regular national reports in this area.

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Specific types of organised crime

The report stressed in particular the importance of:

- increased focus on prevention and building resilience of groups at risk of **trafficking in human beings** as the Western Balkan countries are countries of origin, destination and transit for trafficking in human beings, mainly women and girls used for sexual exploitation;

- enhance efforts to **combat migrant smuggling** and protect the fundamental rights of smuggled persons, in particular unaccompanied minors: the EU should provide more assistance in addressing these issues, such as financial and technical support;

- tackle **financial crime** to expose criminal activities and prevent infiltration into the legal economy;

- implement measures to reduce **informal payments** where possible, given the importance of the grey economy (estimated to be worth over 30% of the region's GDP);

- support the Western Balkan countries in the fight against **cybercrime** and other online threats.

Cooperation with the EU (its Member States and agencies) and interregional cooperation

The report encouraged the EU to support capacity building in the Western Balkans and to help facilitate **police and judicial cooperation** in the fight against organised crime. It recommended strengthening existing EU-supported structures, such as the Regional Cooperation Council, so that they can play a coherent role in promoting further cooperation.

Stressing the important role of Interpol in the fight against organised crime, Parliament called on EU Member States to support Kosovo's application for membership of this organisation. Members believe that the membership of the six Western Balkan countries in **Interpol** would further improve the effectiveness of measures targeting transnational crime. They also stressed the need to strengthen cooperation between **Frontex** and the Western Balkan countries in areas related to the fight against organised crime.

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The report called for civil society organisations to be more involved in the legislative process and to be given the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to key legislative acts. In this context, it called on the Western Balkan authorities to urgently adopt and implement **better laws on freedom of access to information** through inclusive processes.

Members regretted the growing number of SLAPP cases, which are often used to threaten journalists and individuals to prevent them from exposing the wrongdoings of those in power. They called on the authorities in the Western Balkans to step up their work to **ensure transparency in media ownership** and independence of newsrooms and to protect media freedom from political interference, which are essential elements of a free democratic society.