Resolution on the 2013 progress report on Montenegro

2013/2882(RSP) - 06/02/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 474 votes to 42, with 34 abstentions, a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the 2013 progress report on Montenegro.

Accession negotiations: Parliament welcomed the opening of five new negotiation chapters in December 2013, as well as the governments action plans on Chapters 23 and 24. It encouraged swift continuation of the accession negotiations, provided that reforms were pursued and implemented, and concrete results delivered. Members commended the inclusion of civil society representatives in the negotiation structures whilst noting that maximum possible transparency must be shown by engaging a broader selection of organisations in the working groups and conducting extensive nationwide consultations.

Political criteria: Members stressed the importance of the enforcement of the rule of law, notably through judicial reform, and the fight against corruption and organised crime. Stressing that additional efforts are needed in the fight against corruption, they insisted that impunity for criminals convicted of corruption or organised crime offences is not acceptable;

Although welcoming the enhancing of the Montenegrin Parliaments oversight role, Parliament called, nevertheless, for reinforced follow-up of hearing conclusions, stronger oversight of the implementation of adopted legislation, and more active parliamentary involvement in the negotiations. It regretted the fact that a committee of inquiry formed to investigate alleged misuse of public funds for party-political purposes failed to draw political conclusions in its final report, and that judicial follow-up remains incomplete in this regard.

Members also stressed the need to improve public confidence in the electoral system and democratic structures and called on the Montenegrin Parliament to speed up the electoral reform in line with the long-standing OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and in full transparency, involving civil society. Supporting the Commissions call for a clear, broadly accepted delineation between public and party interests to be established, they wanted the Government to publish proactively information on state aid for individuals and companies, employment in the public service sector and other expenditures that might affect voting behaviour.

Parliament insisted on the importance of public administration reform for applying the acquis, and called for further legislative and other measures to be taken and implemented in order to diminish the politicisation of the judiciary in practice.

Expressing grave concern about the increase in verbal and physical intimidation of journalists, Parliament underlined the importance of free, independent and unbiased media in a functioning democracy. It was deeply shocked by the fact that since August 2013 at least two bomb attacks and around half a dozen physical attacks have been carried out against journalists, and deplored the fact that Montenegro is now ranked 113th in the Reporters Without Borders media freedom index.

Socio-economic issues: Parliament wanted the government to focus on increasing economic growth to combat poverty and improve living standards of all citizens. It called for enhanced efforts to tackle the large informal sector, to improve protection of intellectual property rights and the overall legal system in order to systematically fight corruption and improve the business environment, and to implement structural reforms with a view to attracting and sustaining foreign direct investment. It emphasised the need for commercial dispute resolution processes to be free from political interference and based on the rule of law in order to further improve the business climate, and also encouraged a swift resolution of the KAP aluminium plant dispute. Members expressed concerns regarding the unchanged labour market situation and high unemployment, and wanted measures to improve the poorly performing labour market.

Regional cooperation: Parliament welcomed Montenegros proactive participation in initiatives on regional reconciliation and the Western Balkans Six project, and called on Montenegro to enhance its cultural and economic cooperation with neighbouring EU Member States. Whilst commending the government for maintaining good bilateral relations with all its neighbours, including Kosovo, Parliament stressed the need to swiftly settle the dispute with Croatia on land and maritime borders, and the final delimitation of borders with Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. It also called on the to assist the Montenegrin Government to resolve the issue of internally displaced persons, and help close a painful chapter in the regions history.

Lastly, Parliament welcomed the Montenegrin Governments commitment to joining NATO, but noted the strong divergence of opinion among parliamentarians and in society at large. It commended Montenegros contribution, despite its limited defence resources, to UN and CSDP missions.