

## 2016 Commission report on Kosovo

2016/2314(INI) - 09/03/2017 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Ulrike LUNACEK (Greens/EFA, AT) on the 2016 Commission Report on Kosovo.

Members recalled that the European Union has repeatedly reiterated its willingness to assist in the economic and political development of Kosovo through a clear European perspective, in line with the European perspective of the region and Kosovo has shown aspiration in its path towards European integration.

In this regard, they welcomed the launch of the European Reform Agenda on 11 November 2016 and the adoption of the national strategy for the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) as a platform to facilitate implementation of this Agreement.

They called on the government of Kosovo to focus on the implementation of the comprehensive reforms that are required to meet its obligations under the SAA, in particular holding free, fair and transparent municipal elections in 2017 which are crucial for the democratic future of Kosovo as well as for the future of its EU integration process.

Political situation: Members expressed concern at the extreme polarisation of the political landscape in Kosovo. They urged the leaders of the Kosovo-Serbian community to take full ownership of their place and role in the institutions of the country, acting independently from Belgrade and constructively for the benefit of all the people of Kosovo.

Members strongly condemned the violent disruption of activities by some members of the opposition which occurred in the parliament of Kosovo and stressed the importance of political dialogue, the active and constructive participation of all political parties in the decision-making processes.

Recognition of Kosovo: Members noted that five Member States have not recognised Kosovo. According to Members, this recognition would be beneficial to the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia and increase the EU's credibility in its own external policy. They welcomed the proposal by the Commission to grant visa liberalisation, which would be a very positive step for Kosovo on the path to European integration.

Relations with Serbia: Members welcomed the progress made in implementing the various agreements signed since August 2016 in the normalisation process with Serbia. They called on both Kosovo and Serbia to show more engagement and sustained political will as regards the normalisation of relations. They stressed the importance of good neighbourly relations with all countries in the Western Balkans.

They also condemned the act of sending a Serbian nationalist train from Belgrade to Northern Kosovo and expressed serious concerns about warmongering statements and anti-EU rhetoric. They urged both parties to refrain from provocative steps and unhelpful rhetoric that could hamper the normalisation process.

Reconciliation process: Members welcomed the establishment of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor Office in The Hague as an essential step for ensuring justice and reconciliation. They called on Kosovo to address the issue of missing persons, including: guaranteeing property rights effectively, barring the usurpation of properties and guaranteeing the return and reintegration of displaced persons.

Political reforms: Members noted that the administration of justice remains slow and inefficient and is hampered by the remaining shortcomings of criminal legislation, political and economic expediency.

They encouraged Kosovo to reform their legal system and tackle corruption.

They also called on the authorities of Kosovo to strengthen:

- the protection of freedom of expression and media freedom, and at the increased political interference and pressure and intimidation on the media;
- efforts to protect the rights of all minorities in Kosovo, including Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian and Gorani communities, as well as the LGBTI community;
- the fight against drug use and trafficking in human beings;
- gender mainstreaming and the fight against domestic violence;
- the combat against violent extremism and radicalisation.

Economic reforms: while Members welcomed the improvement of the economic situation and the increase of tax revenues in Kosovo, they expressed concern about the sustainability of Kosovo's budget.

According to Members, it is urgent to:

- bolster local industry while focusing on the competitiveness of locally manufactured products;
- improve the regulatory environment of SMEs;
- increase the level of employment and improve labour market conditions in particular as regards recruitment procedures.

EULEX: Members welcomed the extension of the mandate of EULEX Kosovo and called for continued EU efforts in further strengthening independent justice, police and customs systems beyond 2018 with a view to Kosovo taking full ownership of these functions. They noted the termination of the criminal investigation into allegations of corruption in the EULEX mission.

Refugee crisis: Members noted that so far Kosovo has not become a major transit route for refugees and migrants travelling along the Western Balkan route. They urged the Kosovar authorities to ensure that those passing through are treated in accordance with European and international law.

Cultural heritage: lastly, Members acknowledged Kosovos commitment to protect cultural heritage sites and called on the authorities to implement all UN conventions on cultural heritage at all levels regardless of the status of Kosovo vis-a-vis UNESCO. They welcomed the EU-funded programme aimed at protecting and re-constructing small cultural heritage sites with a view to fostering intercultural and interreligious dialogue in all multi-ethnic municipalities.