

2016 Commission report on Kosovo

2016/2314(INI) - 14/06/2017 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 474 votes to 134, with 64 abstentions, a resolution on the 2016 Commission Report on Kosovo.

Parliament 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.

Political situation: Parliament welcomed the entry into force of the EU-Kosovo Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) on 1 April 2016 as the first contractual relationship and an essential step in order to continue the process of the integration of Kosovo into the EU. It welcomed the launch of the European Reform Agenda on 11 November 2016 and the adoption of the national strategy for the implementation of the SAA as a platform to facilitate implementation of the SAA.

It called on Kosovo to continue to show clear political will and determination to implement the agreed roadmap including the setting up of the coordination mechanism for the implementation of the SAA, and to seize the positive momentum created by the SAA.

Parliament noted how free, fair and transparent early general elections and municipal elections in the second part of 2017 are crucial for the democratic future of Kosovo as well as for the future of its EU integration process.

It welcomed the overall peaceful and orderly conduct of the early general elections of 11 June 2017 even if it expressed concern at the problems observed by EU monitors during the election campaign. Members urged parties to swiftly form a government to continue Kosovo's path towards the EU and to commit to ratifying a border demarcation agreement with Montenegro and to continuing to build up a track record of convictions for high-level corruption and organised crime.

It expressed concern at the persistent extreme polarisation of the political landscape and called on all the parties to show responsibility and ownership and to create the conditions for a fruitful, solution and result-oriented dialogue with a view to defusing tension. It 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. It urged Kosovo to continue to support the access of Kosovo Serbs to Kosovo institutions.

In general, Parliament 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.

It underlined that the path towards EU integration requires a strategic long-term vision and sustained commitment in the adoption and implementation of the necessary reforms.

Recognition of Kosovo: Parliament noted that five Member States have not recognised Kosovo. According to Parliament, 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. It 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.

It strongly condemned the act of sending a Serbian nationalist train from Belgrade to Northern Kosovo as well as warmongering statements and anti-EU rhetoric.

It took note of the decision of the court of Colmar (France) to refuse the extradition to Serbia of and to release Mr Ramush Haradinaj, who was acquitted in 2008 and 2012 by the ICTY and arrested in France on 4 January 2017 on the basis of an international arrest warrant issued by Serbia in 2004 according to its law on the Organisation and Competences of State Authorities in War Crime Proceedings. It regretted that this law has hitherto been misused to pursue citizens of countries that belonged to the former Yugoslavia, as proven by this recent case and urged both parties to refrain from provocative steps and unhelpful rhetoric that could hamper the normalisation process.

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

Reconciliation process: Parliament welcomed the establishment of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor Office in The Hague as an essential step for ensuring justice and reconciliation. It 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.

Parliament welcomed the efforts made by the Commission to bring about the unblocking of the power interconnection grid between Albania and Kosovo, which has been blocked for months by Serbia, and called for constructive cooperation between the Serbian and Kosovar electricity authorities.

Plenary called on the Commission to make further efforts to support a true reconciliation process in the region, notably through support for cultural projects dealing with the recent past and promoting a common and shared understanding of history and a public and political culture of tolerance, inclusion and reconciliation.

Political reforms: Parliament noted that the administration of justice remains slow and inefficient and is hampered by the remaining shortcomings of criminal legislation, political and economic expediency. It encouraged Kosovo to reform their legal system and tackle corruption.

It 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 Parliament welcomed the improvement of the economic situation and the increase of tax revenues in Kosovo, it expressed concern about the sustainability of Kosovos budget.

According to Parliament, 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: Parliament 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. It noted the termination of the criminal investigation into allegations of corruption in the EULEX mission.

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

Cultural heritage: lastly, Parliament 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. It welcomed the EU-funded programme aimed at protecting and reconstructing small cultural heritage sites with a view to fostering intercultural and interreligious dialogue in all multi-ethnic municipalities.