



2019/2170(INI)

26.11.2020

DRAFT REPORT

on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Albania
(2019/2170(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Isabel Santos

CONTENTS

Page

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....3

[shqiptarja.com]

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Albania (2019/2170(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 28 June 2018, the Council conclusions of 18 June 2019 and the European Council conclusions of 17-18 October 2019, which postponed the decisions on opening accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 26 March 2020 on opening accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, which endorsed the Council conclusions of 25 March 2020 on the enlargement and stabilisation and association process,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 February 2020 entitled ‘Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2020)0057),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 29 May 2019 entitled ‘2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy’ (COM(2019)0260), accompanied by the Commission Staff Working Document entitled ‘Albania 2019 Report’ (SWD(2019)0215),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 6 October 2020 entitled ‘2020 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy’ (COM(2020)0660), accompanied by the Commission Staff Working Document entitled ‘Albania 2020 Report’ (SWD(2020)0354),
- having regard to the 2020 Sofia Summit of the Berlin Process,
- having regard to the European Councils decision of 26-27 June 2014 to grant the status of candidate country for EU membership to Albania,
- having regard to its resolution of 25 November 2020 on strengthening media freedom: the protection of journalists in Europe, hate speech, disinformation and the role of platforms¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2019 on opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania²,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on Albania,
- having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0320.

² Texts adopted, P9_TA(2019)0050.

- having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0000/2020),
- A. whereas Albania has continued making sustained efforts on its path towards the EU, meeting the conditions for holding the first intergovernmental conference;
- B. whereas the country needs to keep making progress in the consolidation of democratic institutions and procedures, in ensuring the proper functioning of its judicial institutions, and by safeguarding media freedom and minority rights;
- C. whereas consistent efforts on the key reforms require the joint engagement of all stakeholders;
- D. whereas the Commission submitted a draft negotiating framework on 1 July 2020;
- 1. Welcomes the clear strategic orientation and commitment of Albania to European integration, manifesting itself in good neighbourly relations and the continued implementation of the accession-related reforms;
- 2. Supports the convening of the first intergovernmental conference without further delay, following the adoption of the negotiating framework by the Council;
- 3. Recalls that progress in accession under the revised enlargement methodology depends on lasting, in-depth and irreversible reforms across fundamental areas, in particular the rule of law and the fight against corruption;
- 4. Urges the authorities to step up their efforts to strengthen the political dialogue and the functioning of the country's democratic institutions, while improving the climate for media pluralism and civil society;

Functioning of democratic institutions

- 5. Encourages political leaders to create a climate of confidence by overcoming the lack of dialogue and expresses its serious concern about the polarised political climate and lack of sustainable cross-party cooperation that continue to hamper the democratic process;
- 6. Recalls the joint responsibility of political forces to move on from mutual accusations, unilateral decisions and boycotts, building instead on positive examples of the consensus-building efforts, such as those leading to the 5 June 2020 agreement on the electoral reform;
- 7. Stresses that the general elections of 25 April 2021 will be key for the country's democratic consolidation;
- 8. Underlines the importance of implementing the electoral reform measures codified in July 2020, which are in line with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) recommendations; welcomes the commitment to implement the forthcoming Venice Commission opinion regarding the amendments to the Electoral Code adopted in October 2020;
- 9. Underscores the need to step up the Albanian Parliament's involvement in the EU integration process, further advancing its legislative, oversight and budgetary scrutiny capacities to ensure legal alignment with EU *acquis*;

Rule of law

10. Commends the steady progress made in implementing the comprehensive judicial reform, underpinned by the unprecedented vetting process and the establishment of the relevant institutions and specialised bodies, enabling a tangible shift towards an accountable and independent judiciary;
11. Encourages Albania to complete the relevant steps towards re-establishing the Constitutional Court's ability to function fully and efficiently, and urges all involved to swiftly conclude the appointment process;
12. Welcomes the fact that the High Court has regained its ability to function and that it has been reviewing more than a thousand cases, and encourages it to make further progress in the appointment of additional judges;
13. Expresses satisfaction that the National Bureau of Investigation has been established, that its Director is performing her duties and that investigative staff are currently being recruited;
14. Welcomes the creation of anti-corruption bodies and the fact that sustained investigations are being carried out by the newly established Special Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime Structure (SPAK), and indictments are being handed down by the Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime Courts, and underlines the need to maintain their independence and effectiveness in fighting impunity;
15. Notes the increase in proactive investigations, prosecutions and final convictions targeting illicit wealth and money laundering, leading to the systematic freezing and seizure of criminal assets, and calls for their further intensification;
16. Welcomes the steps taken to improve the legislation and mechanisms for tackling money laundering and terrorism financing, and calls for further measures aimed at swiftly implementing the Financial Action Task Force action plan, in particular on reducing the size of the informal economy;
17. Calls for the efforts to dismantle local and international criminal networks, and to eliminate drug production and trafficking, to be intensified further, building on the significant efforts of recent years; welcomes the increased cooperation with Europol and the law enforcement institutions of EU Member States, and encourages the Albanian authorities to swiftly finalise the posting of an Albanian liaison prosecutor to the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust);

Fundamental rights

18. Expresses its support for inclusive policies and calls for progress to be made in adopting measures to effectively protect the fundamental freedoms and rights of all citizens;
19. Welcomes Albania's nomination of its Observer to the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), and encourages the authorities to take full advantage of the FRA's expertise in order to bring Albania's legislation and practices in line with EU *acquis* and standards;
20. Welcomes the update on the anti-discrimination legislation and urges the authorities to

ensure the effective prevention and prosecution of hate speech and hate crimes;

21. Urges the authorities to ensure that sufficient resources are provided to the Ombudsman, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Data Protection, and that their respective recommendations are implemented systematically;
22. Calls for the creation of an effective mechanism for the prevention of gender-based and domestic violence, and for protection and support to be given to its victims, combined with the effective and efficient prosecution of its perpetrators;
23. Reminds Albania of its calls for further improvements to be made in the education and health, and the employment rates and living conditions of Roma and other ethnic minorities;
24. Recalls the importance of measures ensuring the protection of national minorities, including self-identification, the use of languages and property rights;
25. Encourages Albania to make further progress on measures consolidating property rights, implementing the law on transitional ownership, and completing the comprehensive land sector reform;
26. Welcomes Albania's efforts in promoting tolerance, inter-religious harmony and addressing prejudice and discrimination, including antisemitism;
27. Recalls the authorities' obligation to ensure due process for asylum seekers in compliance with Albania's international obligations, and to properly address the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants; calls for increased capacities to process asylum requests and investigations into the reported cases of breaches of the return procedures;
28. Stresses that border protection and the prevention of cross-border crime, including in cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), must be conducted in full respect for fundamental rights;
29. Welcomes the ongoing efforts being made and urges the authorities to take a robust approach in preventing, investigating, prosecuting and punishing human trafficking and the exploitation of its victims, who include children and other vulnerable groups;
30. Welcomes the ongoing measures and calls for further progress to be made in considerably reducing the number of unfounded asylum claims by Albanian nationals, including the arrivals of unaccompanied minors, in the EU Member States;

Civil society and the media

31. Underlines the need to improve the climate for the functioning of civil society and urges the authorities to ensure meaningful, timely and representative consultations, and to enhance the financial sustainability of the non-governmental sector;
32. Notes with concern the lack of progress on freedom of expression and the obstacles to the proper functioning of the independent media;

33. Recalls the importance of ensuring quality journalism and media literacy for the functioning of democracy and in tackling disinformation;
34. Condemns the violence, intimidation, smear campaigns and indirect political and financial pressure directed against journalists, which seriously stifle media freedom, induce self-censorship and gravely undermine efforts to uncover crime and corruption;
35. Expresses grave concern about the proposed measures under the draft media law and welcomes the commitment to adopt amendments only if they are assessed as being fully in line with the Venice Commission's recommendations;

Socio-economic reforms

36. Encourages the Albanian Government to prioritise measures aimed at mitigating the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while taking further steps to enhance the representativeness of the social dialogue and to tackle the widespread informal economy;
37. Stresses the need to substantially strengthen social care coverage and improve access to social and healthcare services;
38. Calls for the measures addressing the demographic decline and the brain drain to be stepped up through active labour market policies that address skills mismatches and reduce long-term unemployment;
39. Welcomes the positive trends in women's participation in politics, and calls for additional steps to address the gender pay gap and workplace discrimination;
40. Urges the authorities to step up their efforts to eliminate child labour throughout the informal sector and to bolster the prosecution of child abuse;

The environment, energy and transport

41. Recalls that substantial efforts are still needed to meet the goals of energy efficiency, security of supply, emissions reductions and renewable energy and its diversification through the transition to sustainable energy, heating and transport;
42. Encourages the diversification of energy production, moving from hydropower towards wind and solar sources; urges the authorities to minimise the impact on biodiversity by restricting hydropower development in protected areas; underlines the need to improve both environmental and impact assessments across eco-sensitive sectors and boost the prosecution of environmental crimes;
43. Urges the authorities to ensure full compliance with the Energy Community Treaty; underlines the contribution of the newly launched trans-Adriatic pipeline to regional energy security;
44. Calls for continuing progress in strengthening strategic transport networks in line with the trans-European transport network (TEN-T) regulatory framework;

Regional cooperation and foreign policy

45. Welcomes Albania's unremitting efforts in promoting good neighbourly relations and regional integration;
 46. Commends the constructive steps towards the resolution of outstanding bilateral issues, including a joint undertaking by Greece and Albania to resolve a dispute over their Ionian maritime border through international justice;
 47. Welcomes the inclusive steps in deepening regional integration, facilitating connectivity and the free movement of people, goods, capital and services and contributing to the common regional market;
 48. Welcomes Albania's constructive role in multilateral initiatives, including under its chairmanships of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and the OSCE;
 49. Welcomes Albania's ongoing full alignment with the common foreign and security policy decisions and declarations since 2012 and its active contribution to the EU crisis management missions and operations;
-
- ◦
50. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the European Council, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and to the President, Government and Parliament of the Republic of Albania.