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Enlargement report for Kosovo

European Parliament resolution of 29 March 2012 on the European Integration Process of Kosovo (2011/2885(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication of 12 October 2011 entitled ‘Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012’ (COM(2011)0666) and the Commission’s accompanying 2011 Progress Report on Kosovo (SEC(2011)1207),
- having regard to the conclusions of the General Affairs Council meeting of 7 December 2009, 14 December 2010 and 5 December 2011 stressing and reaffirming that Kosovo, without prejudice to Member States’ position on its status, should also benefit from the perspective of eventual visa liberalisation once all conditions are met, welcoming the intention of the Commission to launch a visa dialogue towards the end of the year and inviting it to move forward with a structured approach to bring the people of Kosovo closer to the EU,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1244/2009 of 30 November 2009 amending Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement¹, and in particular its Annex I in which a reference to persons residing in Kosovo was made for reasons of legal clarity and security,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 28 February 2012 on Enlargement and the Stabilisation and Association Process;
- having regard to Council Joint Action 2008/124/CFSP of 4 February 2008 on the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, EULEX KOSOVO, amended by Council Joint Action 2009/445/CFSP of 9 June 2009 and by Council Decision 2010/322/CFSP of 8 June 2010,
- having regard to Council Joint Action 2008/123/CFSP of 4 February 2008 appointing a European Union Special Representative in Kosovo and Council Decision 2011/478/CFSP of 28 July 2011 extending the mandate of the European Union Special Representative in Kosovo,
- having regard to the Statement by European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Commission Vice-President on the situation in Kosovo, 27 July 2011,
- having regard to the Council of the European Union’s press releases on the EU-facilitated dialogue,
- having regard to the joint statements of the EP-Kosovo Inter-Parliamentary meetings of 28-29 May 2008, 6-7 April 2009, 22-23 June 2010, and 20 May 2011,

¹ OJ L 336, 18.12.2009, p. 1.

- having regard to the final report of European Union Election Expert Mission to Kosovo of 25 January 2011,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions,
 - having regard to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244(1999),
 - having regard to the consensus resolution of UN General Assembly of 9 September 2010 (A/RES/64/298) tabled jointly by Serbia and the 27 EU Member States on the Belgrade-Pristine dialogue, stating that its aim would be to ‘promote cooperation, achieve progress on the path to the European Union and improve the lives of the people’ and welcoming the EU’s willingness to facilitate it,
 - having regard to the UN Special Envoy’s final report on Kosovo’s future status and the Comprehensive Status Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement of 26 March 2007, and in particular its provisions on Human Rights and Fundamental freedoms of Communities and their Members, Religious and Cultural Heritage, and decentralisation,
 - having regard to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 22 July 2010 on the accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo,
 - having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas at the Thessaloniki European Council of 19 and 20 June 2003 a promise was made to all the Western Balkan States that they would join the European Union, and whereas this promise was reiterated at the High-Level Meeting on the Western Balkans in Sarajevo on 2 June 2010;
 - B. whereas the European Union has always defended the sustainability of multiethnic and pluri-religious states in the Western Balkans, based on the values of democracy, tolerance and multiculturalism;
 - C. whereas regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations are essential for the process of European integration and for ensuring security and stability in the region;
 - D. whereas the Ahtisaari Plan remains a good framework for resolving the conflict over the north and for maintaining the territorial and political integrity of Kosovo;
 - E. whereas the persistent weakness of the rule of law delays the maturing of democracy and harms the economy, undermining long-term development;
 - F. whereas among key priorities of the EULEX mission are the fight against corruption and organised crime and the investigation and prosecution of war crimes;
1. Notes that the declaration of independence of Kosovo has been recognised by 88 countries, including 22 EU Member States; would welcome the remaining five EU Member States to do likewise; would equally welcome their more active participation in mediation between Serbia and Kosovo; reiterates how important it is for the EU to engage with Kosovo, and considers this commitment vital for preserving stability and security in the EU’s immediate neighbourhood; considers regrettable the diplomatic pressure exerted by Serbia to prevent some countries from recognising Kosovo;

2. Stresses the European perspective of Kosovo, in line with the European perspective of the whole Western Balkans region, which is a powerful incentive for the necessary reforms; underlines that the EU strategy to make this perspective tangible to Kosovar citizens has not been successful so far and that few results have been achieved; welcomes the appointment of the double-hatted EU Special Representative/Head of EU Office;
3. Welcomes the intention of the Commission to launch a feasibility study for the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between Kosovo and the Union, as taken note in the General Affairs Council conclusions of 28 February 2012 and welcomes in particular, the official launch of that study by Commissioner Füle on 27 March 2012 during the first meeting of Kosovo's National Council for European Integration and hopes that it can be finished at the latest in autumn 2012.
4. Underlines the need for better cooperation between EU missions and other international missions present in Kosovo, in order to avoid that their activities overlap and to ensure efficient resource management;
5. Reiterates its view, as expressed in its resolutions of 29 March 2007¹, 5 February 2009² and 8 July 2010³, that the possibility of partitioning Kosovo should be rejected;
6. Is concerned about serious irregularities during the parliamentary elections in December 2010; calls for proper investigation of the electoral frauds, also exposing individuals politically responsible for irregularities, and for swift and adequate punishment of all perpetrators, including local electoral officials, in order to end the culture of impunity that undermines society's trust in – and the legitimacy of – state institutions; urges that priority be given to the resolution of election cases and, to this end, calls on Kosovo's state institutions (the State Prosecutor, the Supreme Court and the Kosovo Judicial Council) to improve the way they coordinate their work; underlines that a well-functioning electoral framework is essential for the workings of democratic institutions;
7. Calls on all parties, whether in government or in opposition, swiftly to proceed with the promised constitutional and electoral reforms, as pledged to the electorate after the elections, in order to make the electoral system more transparent and to bring it in line with international standards, in particular those of the Council of Europe;
8. Takes note, in this connection, of the Kosovo Government's intention to end the process of internationally supervised independence during the course of this year with the phasing-out of the International Civilian Office; calls on the Kosovo Assembly to preserve and enshrine in the new constitution the principles of the Ahtisaari Plan, which laid the basis for Kosovo's independence;
9. Notes that the Kosovo institutions dealt successfully with the crisis in early 2011 surrounding the presidency; commends Kosovo on having its first female Head of State, and notes that President Jahjaga also is the youngest democratically elected Head of State in Europe;
10. Welcomes the start of the visa dialogue, in accordance with previous commitments

¹ OJ C 27 E, 31.1.2008, p. 207.

² OJ C 67 E, 18.3.2010, p. 126.

³ OJ C 351 E, 2.12.2011, p. 78.

regarding the European perspective of the Western Balkans and without prejudice to Member States' positions on the status of Kosovo, in order to counter the increasing isolation among Kosovar citizens, which has a negative impact, primarily on the most vulnerable groups and on young people, and expects the Commission to present the roadmap on visa liberalisation this spring, adopting the same approach as it has for other Western Balkans countries, namely through the preparation of a roadmap addressing four blocks of issues, the main objective being to achieve visa liberalisation at the end of this process; welcomes the Council conclusions of 5 December 2011, in which it reaffirmed that eventual visa liberalisation would be granted to Kosovo once all the conditions were met; stresses that improved people-to-people contacts are a powerful incentive for democratisation and a driver for further reforms in the region;

11. Stresses that the return of refugees and internally displaced persons remains a challenge for Kosovo; welcomes the efforts of the Kosovar authorities in this field, and encourages further efforts on central and local level to ensure the socio-economic integration of the returnees, taking into special consideration the needs of the Serbian, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian returnees;
12. Underlines the need to ensure effective cooperation and coordination between all the relevant ministries and, in cooperation with international stakeholders, to provide further training, capacity-building and technical assistance to local institutions and coordination structures; underlines the importance of resolving property restitution issues of the returnees and of ensuring the restoration of property rights of Serbian citizens in Kosovo;
13. Underlines the necessity of making substantive progress in reaching an agreement between Kosovo and neighbouring countries on the issue of legal succession and property rights;
14. Underlines the importance of the dialogue with Belgrade, carried out after the agreement between Serbia and Kosovo concluded at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2010 and facilitated by the EU, for regional cooperation and for the European perspective of both countries; welcomes the fact that nine rounds have taken place so far, resulting in several preliminary agreements, including that of 2 December 2011 on integrated management for crossing points (IBM) in the northern part of the country, introducing single joint integrated monitoring arrangements, and calls for its implementation in good faith;
15. However, is concerned that previous agreements, important to improve the everyday lives of citizens on both sides, such as those concerning the handover of all civil registries to the Kosovar authorities and customs stamps, respectively, had not been fully implemented by the Serbian side, with its failure to implement the latter agreement leading to the decision of the Kosovar Government in July 2011 to implement reciprocal measures; calls on the Serbian government to show willingness to achieve the aims of the dialogue; welcomes, in this connection, the agreements between Belgrade and Pristina on IBM and on inclusive regional cooperation reached on 24 February 2012, and underlines the utmost importance of implementing in good faith the agreements reached; considers regrettable, in this connection, the recent disagreements between the parties over the use of the footnote for the Kosovo delegation;
16. Stresses that both sides are expected to pursue a pragmatic approach, which requires commitment, perseverance and a sense of responsibility in seeking solutions; hopes that agreements on all remaining topics will be reached soon in order to pave the way for

genuine regional stability and good neighbourly relations, and to enable Kosovo to enter into contractual agreements with the EU;

17. Underlines the importance of ensuring that the parliaments and societies of both states be adequately informed about the outcomes of the dialogue, in order to ensure the transparency and legitimacy of the process; points out that the EU should also play a role in such communication as well as in bringing the two sides closer and facilitating people-to-people contacts;
18. Urges the Council and the Commission of the European Union to negotiate a Trade Agreement with Kosovo as soon as possible, as this is crucial for the development of the country and for a successful fight against unemployment;
19. Is deeply concerned about the unstable and tense situation in the north, and strongly condemns unacceptable violence towards KFOR and Kosovo authorities in the area, leading to loss of life and injuries; calls for efforts to restore the rule of law in this area by intensifying the fight against organized crime and the criminal structures using this area as a safe haven, out of control of any authority; calls for swift and complete removal of all the road blocks and for ensuring free movement of people and goods, including access to crossing points for the international community and for Kosovo customs officers, and welcomes the statement of the President of Serbia in this regard; calls on the Serbian Government to dissolve parallel structures operating on the territory of Kosovo;
20. Underlines that implementation of the Ahtisaari plan in the north would give Kosovar Serbs broad autonomy, guaranteeing their rights and fundamental freedoms; reiterates that only a negotiated result in the dialogue will bring sustainable solutions, and calls on the Kosovar Government to make every effort to develop and implement an effective outreach strategy to citizens in the north in order to facilitate this; urges the international community to continue its support for the Kosovar Government in finding a long-lasting peaceful resolution of the situation in the north;
21. Warns the Serbian authorities that the organisation of local elections in Kosovo would be contrary to international law, with particular reference to UN Security Council Resolution 1244, and would undermine regional stability and the ongoing bilateral dialogue with Kosovo; points out that the modalities for potential participation in Serbia's forthcoming general elections by Kosovars holding Serbian citizenship who are resident in Kosovo should be agreed with the Kosovar authorities in cooperation with the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the OSCE;
22. Stresses that the Kosovar authorities need to take further steps to reach out to the Serbian minority, particularly in the north, in order to fully integrate it into Kosovo society; to this end, welcomes increased representation of Kosovar Serbs in local and national administration, which is necessary to ensure the visibility of the Serbian minority's interests and to increase its capacity to participate in the decision-making process, contributing to the unity of Kosovo;
23. Welcomes the increased engagement of the Serbian community south of the river Ibar in the institutional framework of Kosovo, as demonstrated by the increased participation in the elections and in the census; underlines the crucial role of the decentralisation process to this end and calls for continued efforts to make it successful, and in particular to ensure good cooperation between all levels of administration; calls for increasing the capacity and

budgets of the local administration; hopes that this model of cooperation swiftly can be extended to the north as foreseen in the Ahtisaari plan, and calls also for an effective decentralisation process to be implemented in the area to mitigate ethnic tensions and to foster stability;

24. Underlines the importance of the EULEX rule-of-law mission, providing tangible proof of the commitment of the entire EU and its 27 Member States to the improvement of rule of law in Kosovo, and asks for initiatives of the European Union to strengthen the efficiency and acceptance of this important mission in the whole territory of Kosovo; calls on Kosovar authorities to enhance their cooperation with EULEX and to ensure support for EULEX's work in all areas of its mandate; notes the activities of EULEX in the north, and calls on the mission to increase its efforts to fulfil its mandate in the area; notes that the mission's mandate, especially as regards planning, operations, management and oversight, is currently undergoing a review with the aim of adapting it to the changing situation on the ground;
25. Acknowledges the good progress made in some areas, such as police and customs, and is of the opinion that the core activities in these areas to address corruption and organised crime as well as war crimes should be stepped up so that the mission can deliver more tangible results; is, in this regard, concerned about the large backlog of cases generated by the transfer, by the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, of a high number of cases to EULEX; stresses the responsibility of EULEX as regards its executive powers as well as its mandate to monitor, mentor and advise; encourages, in this regard, EULEX to take concrete actions to move the process of high-level corruption cases forward; draws, in this context, attention to the utmost importance of the work of prosecutors and judges, and calls on the EU Member States to ensure that their numbers are sufficient by seconding appropriate personnel and, if need be, taking recourse to the contracting procedures to fill the gaps;
26. Calls on the EU and its Member States to ensure adequate logistical arrangements to allow EULEX staff to fulfil the mission mandate also in crisis situations, such as the one currently occurring on the northern gates in the Mitrovicë/Mitrovica region; draws attention to the importance of ensuring continuity in the mission's work; is concerned by the announcement of several EU Member States to withdraw their respective contingents of Formed Police Units, and calls on the Member States concerned to reconsider their decisions in view of the continuous needs on the ground;
27. Underlines the necessity for effective internal management, coordination and cooperation within EULEX; stresses the need for transparency and accountability in the work of EULEX as well as for displaying sensitivity to the political context of its activities in order to strengthen its legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens; underlines, moreover, the importance of keeping close communication with Kosovo's Government, citizens and media; encourages EULEX to communicate the accomplishments of the mission to the citizens of Kosovo, to work to increase trust in the mission and to be alert to the expectations of the citizens;
28. Considers that EULEX should urgently address certain structural deficiencies such as weak internal accountability and weak external oversight;
29. Welcomes the gradual transfer of responsibility, as regards the protection of cultural and religious sites, to local police, which demonstrates the functioning of local authorities;
30. Encourages the Assembly of Kosovo to increase its role in the democratic and legislative

processes in Kosovo; stresses the need for strengthening the Assembly's oversight function of government activities, particularly in controlling budget expenditures; is concerned about the clarity of the Assembly's rules of procedures and its adherence to them; stresses that, in order to fulfil its functions effectively, the institution needs to operate in compliance with a clear set of rules of procedure and with adequate capacities; welcomes the planned twinning programme, and calls for more support to develop the Assembly's operational capacities and expertise;

31. Takes the view that cases of fraud (as recently highlighted in the media) – regardless of whether they take place in connection with parliament, government or any other institution – need to be investigated properly, and immunity lifted if required; calls on Kosovo's parliament and institutions clearly to distance themselves from such conduct and to adopt adequate measures to make such situations incompatible with public office;
32. Underlines the important role of the European Integration Committee and the Ministry of European Integration, and welcomes the improved relations between the two institutions; calls, however, on the Kosovar Government to strengthen the bodies further and to improve their cooperation;
33. Welcomes the establishment of the EULEX Special Investigative Task Force on the alleged inhuman treatment of people and illicit trafficking in human organs, as called for in the Council of Europe's resolution of 25 January 2011; calls for thorough investigation into these issues; calls on all the actors concerned, including Kosovar and the Albanian authorities, to cooperate fully with the investigations, and on all the neighbouring countries to give their full support to the work of the Task Force;
34. Stresses the need for further efforts to locate persons missing since the 1998-1999 conflict, as well as those who disappeared afterwards; underlines that it is a basic human right for the families to know the fate of their relatives, and that it is a vital precondition for reconciliation between the communities and for a peaceful future in the region; fully supports, therefore, the efforts of the working group on missing persons, and that of EULEX for the modernisation of forensic medicine in Kosovo; calls for more effort in dealing with cases related to the March 2004 events, as the handling of criminal cases in this context continues to be obstructed by unwillingness and inefficiency;
35. Stresses that widespread and systemic corruption continues to be a major challenge in the country, as in the rest of the Western Balkans region, undermining the citizens' trust in the rule of law and affecting their access to public services; welcomes the improvements in the legislative framework that have been announced, and calls for their swift and proper implementation and for efforts to tackle this challenge more proactively, in particular by enhancing the capacities of law enforcement agencies and of the judiciary in this regard, as well as by ensuring transparency in public procurement and tendering procedures; stresses the need for a pro-active approach and for better cooperation between the Anti-Corruption Agency, the police and the prosecution; emphasises that the existing climate of impunity, and the absence of adequate sanctions for corruption, presents one of the biggest problems in Kosovo, and urges the Kosovar authorities to develop a track record of prosecution of anti-corruption cases, including at the highest levels of political and economic power;
36. Takes the view that the issue of the rule of law in Kosovo continues to be of serious concern that requires urgent attention; encourages the authorities swiftly to undertake the reforms necessary to advance the European perspective of Kosovo that, ultimately, will benefit the

population;

37. Is seriously concerned about the role played by Kosovo organised crime in various criminal activities in the region, involving drugs and trafficking in human beings; notes that the capacity of the police and judiciary to fight organized crime remains at an early stage of development, and calls on the Kosovar authorities to take immediate steps to improve this capacity; equally, calls on the Kosovar authorities to increase the quality and transparency of the legislative process in order to provide Kosovo with a sound legal framework and to improve confidence in the legal system;
38. Underlines the importance of international cooperation when it comes to fighting organised crime effectively; regrets the fact that, given the unwillingness of some members of the international community to recognise Kosovo as a state, Kosovo has been unable to establish direct cooperation with Europol and Interpol; regrets that the exchange of information carried out through EULEX and UNMIK so far has not functioned properly; calls on Europol and Interpol to establish effective information flows with Kosovo, either by means of cooperation agreements or by granting Kosovo observer status; underlines the importance of information exchange between FRONTEX and Kosovo;
39. Welcomes the progress in the reform of the judiciary but calls for more efforts to ensure the professionalism of judges and prosecutors, as well as their independence from any political interference, and to tackle corruption in their ranks; welcomes, to this end, the active role of the Constitutional Court in ensuring the constitutionality of the parliamentary processes and in providing clarity on the issue of functional immunity; notes that, despite progress in some areas, the judicial system in Kosovo remains weak and that a significant backlog of cases persists; stresses, in this regard, the need to pursue reforms; underlines that for the justice system to function properly it is of utmost importance that fully functional and effective programmes for witness protection and witness relocation are in place, and calls for immediate steps to implement the witness protection law and to establish witness protection units within the police and the judiciary; calls, moreover, on the EU Member States, and on other countries participating in EULEX, to commit themselves to participate in witness relocation programmes; regrets the fact that the court in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica still does not function at full capacity, and calls on the Kosovar and Serbian authorities to resolve the issue in order to improve access to justice for citizens in the north;
40. Underlines the importance of a professional, independent, accountable and accessible civil service for the proper functioning of state institutions; calls, to this end, for swift adoption of the action plan to implement the reforms foreseen by the public administration strategy; stresses that the administration needs to reflect Kosovar society in terms of gender and ethnic composition, and that its composition should be decided on the basis of professional merit and be free from political interference in the appointment system;
41. Underlines that free, unbiased, strong and independent media, in line with international media standards guaranteeing freedom of speech and access to information, are a cornerstone of democracy; calls, to this end, on the Government to establish an appropriate legal framework and to ensure its effective implementation, including putting an end to defamation as a criminal offence; notes with concern the ongoing political interference in the work of media, and urges the authorities to take immediate steps to protect journalists from threats and other pressures in their work, including by means of selective use of state advertising allocations, in order to promote independent and pluralistic media and thereby

provide the citizens of Kosovo with access to information; calls for the protection of journalists and for the establishment of minimum working rights and conditions for journalists; calls for measures to ensure transparency in media ownership and to ensure the financial and editorial independence of the public broadcaster, i.a. by apportioning an appropriate share – such as 20 %, – of its programming, including current affairs programs, to independent producers;

42. Is concerned that discrimination is still a serious problem in the country, and calls on the Government to implement a broad anti-discrimination strategy in line with international human rights standards, guaranteeing the equality of all people regardless of their ethnic origin, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability, in order to promote tolerance, respect and understanding of others in an effort to raise human rights awareness at central and local levels; stresses the need for further steps to better enforce legal and administrative remedies for infringements of human rights; in particular, draws attention to the situation of women and of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, and to the need to ensure the educational integration of all children through education in their respective mother-tongue; urges the authorities, in view of the ethnical diversity of Kosovo and in line with international and European standards, to ensure access to effective multilingual public services;
43. Underlines the importance of the office of Ombudsman for the protection of citizens' rights and freedoms, and encourages the Government and the Assembly of Kosovo to step up their efforts to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations; calls for more political, administrative and financial support for this institution as it should play a key role as a guarantor of human rights; notes, to this end, that insufficient human and financial resources, as well as the lack of adequate work premises, remain an obstacle for the proper functioning of the office;
44. Urges the government of Kosovo to ensure that the constitutional provisions aimed at securing respect for and protection of minorities are guaranteed in practice;
45. Points out that Kosovo's legal framework sets a foundation for the institutionalisation of gender equality and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security; stresses, nevertheless, that social norms, tradition, poor economic conditions and weak institutions – particularly the judiciary – allow for continued systematic exceptions to the application of existing legislation, exemplified by women's' limited access to property, hesitancy to file for inheritance rights and inability to claim child custody; notes that the insufficient protection of women from domestic violence, their lack of access to justice for crimes committed, the unequal access to education for girls, the economic inequality between women and men, and the continued underrepresentation of women in political decision-making at all levels are further evidence that Resolution 1325 is far from respected; calls, in this regard, on the Kosovo authorities to make all efforts to implement this resolution;
46. Welcomes the progress made in the area of women's' rights and gender equality, as exemplified by the introduction of paid maternity-leave of up to 9 months; is, however, concerned about the high drop-out rates among girls and by the underrepresentation of women on the labour market, including in key sectors of society; calls on the authorities of Kosovo to be more active in promoting the participation of women on the labour market and in strengthening their position;

47. Recalls the vital role of inter-cultural education in Kosovo in fostering a spirit of respect, acceptance and tolerance among nations, and among ethnic or religious groups, where the identity of each group is preserved and the identity of the other is acknowledged; urges the Kosovo authorities to provide an educational curriculum that covers the history, culture and other attributes of all communities traditionally present in Kosovo and thus foster a spirit of tolerance;
48. Encourages the Government and the Parliament of Kosovo to develop a modern educational system of public and private schools, which respects the separation between the religious communities and the state, and which is based on the cultural and religious diversity, and the old tradition of tolerance, of Kosovar society;
49. Calls for greater efforts to protect Kosovo's cultural and religious heritage, in particular its Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries, as well as any other monuments representing universal and European cultural heritage; calls, to this end, for effective implementation of Special Protective Zones, i.a. by means of halting illegal constructions around and within the perimeters of such sites and by ensuring that they are integrated in a sustainable way in the local communities; draws attention to the need to adopt the laws on the protection of medieval Serbian Orthodox Church monasteries, designated by Unesco as world cultural heritage, and of the historic centres of Prizren and Velika Hoča/Hoça e Madhe; calls for the adoption of the comprehensive list of cultural heritage sites qualifying for protection, in order to achieve legal clarity and avoid ambiguities;
50. Stresses, in this regard, the importance of upgrading Kosovo's relations and representation within international cultural and heritage institutions and sports organisations, with particular reference to the International Olympic Committee with a view to enabling Kosovar athletes to participate in the upcoming London Olympic Games;
51. Calls for further efforts to unite the now-divided university of Priština, and calls on the Commission to present proposals on initiatives that the European Union could take to unite the faculties in Mitrovica with those in Priština;
52. Calls on the Council immediately to authorise the Commission to open negotiations for a framework agreement with Kosovo concerning its participation in Community programmes; while noting the Commission's recommendation to start with the programmes 'Culture' and 'Europe for Citizens', underlines the importance of extending Kosovo's participation to other programmes as soon as possible;
53. Reiterates its support to the activities of the civil society, and calls on the Government and the Assembly to develop structures and platforms for dialogue with civil society organizations; encourages, at the same time, institutions formulating social and economic policies to consider input from civil society actors; underlines the importance of NGOs in monitoring the activities of the authorities, in particular in the field of anti-corruption and in building inter-ethnic trust; encourages dialogue between civil society representatives with the view of defining common priorities and centralising their efforts in influencing public policies;
54. Recognizes that although the freedom to join trade unions is guaranteed by law, there is still need to improve the standing of basic labour and trade union rights; encourages Kosovo to strengthen social dialogue within the decision-making process, in policy design and in the capacity-building of social partners;

55. Is concerned about the economic situation of Kosovo; underlines the importance of budget discipline and sustainable macroeconomic policies for the development of the country, and underlines that the privatisation process needs to be carried out in full transparency; welcomes the steps taken to simplify the procedures for business start-ups with the aim of both increasing budget revenues and decreasing high unemployment in the country, particularly among young people; regrets, to this end, the delays in the prolongation of the Autonomous Trade Measures;
56. Welcomes the adoption of the Strategy on SME Development for the period 2012-2016, and calls on the SME Support Agency of the Ministry of Trade and Industry to implement the Strategy; urges the Agency to increase its efforts to facilitate the proliferation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by providing access to funding, reducing the administrative burden and encouraging cooperation among SMEs in Kosovo, the region and the EU;
57. Calls on the Council and the Commission of the European Union to support, in close cooperation with the local, regional, and national authorities in Kosovo, the development of a modern, ecological, and sustainable agriculture and of SMEs for the production of renewable energy;
58. Recalls that a substantive perspective for the sustainability of Kosovo's long-term economic development can only be provided through a trade agreement between the European Union and Kosovo; welcomes the Council's invitation to the Commission to propose the way forward for a trade agreement as soon as sufficient progress has been made, and urges the Commission swiftly to send a first expert mission to Kosovo to assess the country's progress in this field;
59. Welcomes a number of steps taken in the field of environmental protection; regrets that Kosovo's authorities have not undertaken adequate research into alternatives to building a new coal power plant in order to replace energy production at the Kosovo A and B power plants; while recognising the fact that the increasing energy needs of Kosovo in the short-term will have to be met with continuing the use of coal as the most important source of energy, calls, however, for more investment in alternative, cleaner technologies, and in improving the energy efficiency of the electricity system in line with EU targets; calls for a higher proportion of energy coming from renewables, in view of the fact that the Kosovo A and B power plants are to be closed as soon as possible;
60. Considering that solid infrastructure is a vital precondition of sustainable development, underlines the importance of improving the transportation network and interconnecting it with the neighbouring countries, in order to facilitate movement of people and goods; regards the public transport – and in particular the railway – system as a cost-efficient and sustainable alternative to road transportation, and calls on the Government and on international donors to prioritise its development and modernisation in their investment plans;
61. Welcomes the strengthening of Kosovo's relations with most of the neighbouring countries and calls for the full integration of Kosovo in regional cooperation; notes that Kosovo's presidency of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) in 2011 ran smoothly; is, however, concerned by the fact that tensions with Serbia negatively affect both the free movement of persons and goods and the general cooperation in the framework of CEFTA;

62. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Government, President and Parliament of Kosovo.