



# MEPs welcome progress of Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro towards joining the EU

Plenary sessions

**Parliament says the EU should start accession talks with Serbia as soon as possible, welcomes plans to start them with Montenegro in June and calls on the five EU Member States that have yet to recognise Kosovo's independence to do so, in three resolutions adopted on Thursday.**

## Serbia

Parliament welcomes the Council's 1 March decision to grant Serbia EU candidate status and says the EU should start accession negotiations with it as soon as possible, on condition that Serbia continues its reforms, in particular to reinforce democracy and in uphold the rule of law.

Parliament is nonetheless concerned about discrimination of minorities in Serbia. It urges the Serbian government to protect all minorities and ensure that their fundamental rights, including equal access to the labour market and fair representation in institutions, are respected. It also points out that many Serbian asylum seekers in the EU belong to ethnic minorities.

The resolution underlines the utmost importance of continuing the dialogue Between Pristina and Belgrade. It also voices grave concerns about the clashes between NATO soldiers and ethnic Serbs in north Kosovo in the second half of 2011.

Finally, it underlines the need to ensure that the parliamentary and local elections to be held on 6 May are fair and calls on the Serbian authorities not to organize local elections in the municipalities of north Kosovo.

The resolution was passed with 542 votes in favour, 59, against and 47 abstentions.

## Kosovo

Parliament urges the five EU Member States that have yet to recognize Kosovo's independence to do so, noting that 88 countries have already done so.

The resolution welcomes the start of the visa dialogue in January in order to counter the growing isolation of Kosovar citizens. It expects the Commission to present the roadmap on visa liberalization this spring, and backs its plan to produce a feasibility study, by autumn 2012, for an EU-Kosovo stabilization and association agreement.

MEPs also hope that the International Olympic Committee will enable Kosovar athletes to take part in the upcoming London Olympic Games.

Parliament says the key remaining challenges for Kosovo include returning refugees and internally displaced people, fighting corruption and remedying the unstable and tense situation in the north. It also calls for swift constitutional and electoral reforms.

The resolution was passed with 375 votes in favour, 97 against, and 76 abstentions.

# Press release

## Montenegro

Parliament notes the significant progress made by Montenegro and welcomes the European Council's decision to aim to start EU accession negotiations with it in June. It also commends Montenegro on its role in strengthening good neighbourly relations with other Western Balkan countries.

However, the resolution also underlines the need for more effort to put reforms into practice, in particular to combat corruption and organized crime. This "will remain essential throughout Montenegro's accession process", it says.

MEPs also point out that women are still severely under-represented in Montenegro's Parliament, top government posts and decision-making positions in the public and private sectors. The resolution encourages the Montenegrin authorities to step up their mainstreaming of gender-equality policies and introduce the principle of equal pay.

The resolution was passed with 537 votes in favour, 38 against, and 57 abstentions.

*Procedure: non-legislative resolutions*

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