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*Plenary sitting*

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**B9-0602/2021**

14.12.2021

## MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 144 of the Rules of Procedure

on forced labour in the Linglong factory and environmental protests in Serbia (2021/3020(RSP))

**Klemen Grošelj, Petras Auštrevičius, Malik Azmani, Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Olivier Chastel, Vlad Gheorghe, Bernard Guetta, Svenja Hahn, Karin Karlsbro, Ilhan Kyuchyuk, Nathalie Loiseau, Karen Melchior, Javier Nart, Frédérique Ries, María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, Michal Šimečka, Nicolae Ștefănuță, Ramona Strugariu, Dragoș Tudorache, Hilde Vautmans**  
on behalf of the Renew Group

**European Parliament resolution on forced labour in the Linglong factory and environmental protests in Serbia  
(2021/3020(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Serbia,
  - having regard to the Commission's "Serbia 2021 Report" on 19 October 2021,
  - having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Communities and their Member States of the one part, and the Republic of Serbia, of the other part, which entered into force on 1 September 2013, and its candidate status,
  - having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
  - having regard to the conventions of the international labour organisation (ILO),
  - having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR),
  - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
  - having regard to Rule 144 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas Serbia must be judged, as any country aspiring to become a Member State of the EU, on its own merits in terms of fulfilment, implementation and compliance with the set of criteria and common values required for accession;
- B. whereas democracy, human rights and rule of law are fundamental values on which the EU is founded and are at the heart of enlargement and stabilisation and association processes; whereas sustainable reforms are needed to tackle the significant challenges that remain in these areas;
- C. whereas Serbia needs to develop an irreversible track record in adhering to, upholding and defending the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights;
- D. whereas freedom of expression and the independence of media remain serious concerns which need to be addressed as a matter of priority;
- E. whereas Serbia has ratified all the fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO);
- F. whereas Serbia is increasing the number of contracts with major Chinese industrialists and granting China more and more legal privileges, even when these are contrary to European law;

- G. whereas the agreement on the employment of foreigners between Belgrade and Beijing allows the application of Chinese labour law in Serbia;
  - H. whereas there have been serious allegations against the Chinese Linglong tire production company in Zrenjanin, North Serbia, regarding the working conditions of 500 workers from Vietnam; whereas these allegations include violation of human rights, human trafficking, and conditions that could endanger human health and lives; whereas contracts of the employees in the Linglong factory prove irregularities that indicate labour exploitation concerning salary, leave and working hours contrary the applicable regulations of the Labour law;
  - I. whereas in March 2021, there had already been press reports of mistreatment of employees of the Chinese company Zijin, which took over a copper mine in eastern Serbia in 2018, while they were deprived of their passports and housed in precarious conditions;
  - J. whereas widespread protests recently have been reported across Serbia on the backdrop of the adoption of the two laws, the Law on a referendum and people's initiative and the Law on land expropriation; whereas citizens of Serbia exercised their fundamental human right to peaceful assembly; whereas strong allegations stress that the police forces violated its obligation to protect the lives, rights and freedoms of the citizens, as well as the protection of the rule of law;
  - K. whereas both cases involve allegation of intimidation against media workers, activists, civil society organisations (CSO) and NGO's;
1. Welcomes the fact that EU membership continues to be Serbia's strategic goal and that it is among the priorities of the newly formed government; encourages Serbian authorities to communicate more actively and unambiguously their commitment to European values in the public debate and expects a clear and unambiguous commitment by Serbia, in both words and deeds to fulfil of its obligations towards EU accession in a visible and verifiable way;
  2. Expects that the welcomed opening of negotiations on the so called "cluster 4", on the green agenda and sustainable connectivity, chapter 14, 15, 21 and 27, will be accomplished by a renewed drive to fully implement EU standards;
  3. Expresses concerns over the alleged forced labour, violation of human rights and human trafficking of around 500 Vietnamese in the Linglong factory in Serbia;
  4. Calls on the Serbian authorities to allow free, meaningful and unhindered access to the Linglong factory in Zrenjanin and the lodging facilities of the Vietnamese workers for NGO's, CSO's, EU officials and other officials from international organisations;
  5. Urges the EU delegation to Serbia, together with the Serbian authorities, to investigate the working conditions of the 500 Vietnamese workers on the Linglong tire factory and inspect the factory itself and the lodging facilities;

6. Calls on Serbia to improve alignment with EU labour law, adopt a new law on the right to strike, tackle undeclared work and amend the law on inspection oversight to comply with the relevant ILO conventions which have been ratified by Serbia;
7. Points out that the Serbian government is responsible for upholding human rights in Serbia and that foreign investors respect human rights on Serbian territory as well;
8. Strongly condemns any violation of the fundamental freedom right to peaceful assembly; stresses that freedom of assembly is a human right; urges the Serbian authorities to properly investigate recent cases of mass protests in which the police force has allegedly overstepped its authority or didn't protect the protesters from violence and their human right to peaceful assembly;
9. Deplores the fact that the Serbian Interior Minister, Aleksandar Vulin, after a meeting with the secretary of the Kremlin's Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, pledged to fight the so-called 'colour revolutions'; stresses that such a pledge is worrying and the timing is inappropriate while citizens of Serbia exercise their constitutional and human right to peaceful assembly;
10. Regrets the long-term trends of media bias and the blurring of lines between the activities of state officials, police and party politicians; points out, in this regard, the role of state-sponsored disinformation campaigns aiming to shift opinions prior to elections;
11. Regrets the deterioration of media freedom and increase in abusive language, intimidation and even hate speech towards members of the parliamentary opposition, independent intellectuals, NGOs, journalists and prominent individuals, including from members of the ruling parties, whose responsibility to act with respect towards all representatives of the media is of utmost importance; urges the Serbian authorities to take immediate measures to guarantee freedom of expression and media independence and to ensure proper investigations into these cases;
- 11bis Deplores recent attacks on the leader of the United opposition of Serbia Marinika Tepic Cobanu, based on her ethnic origin, that occurred on government-sponsored TV channel; stresses that similar ethnicity-based attacks on figures originating from Romania or other EU Member States cannot be tolerated and represent a serious drawback in diplomatic relations between Serbia and the Union;
12. Notes with concern that the work of CSOs and NGOs takes place in an environment that is not open to criticism; calls on the Serbian authorities to counter the shrinking space for civil society and independent media and ensure that they can work free from all restrictions, including intimidation or criminalisation of these organisations; urges the authorities to foster an atmosphere which is conducive to the work of all civil society organisations as soon as possible;
13. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to strengthen their cooperation with and support for civil society, NGOs and independent media on the ground; reiterates its support for the work of democratic European political foundations in strengthening Serbia's democratic processes and fostering a new generation of political leaders;

14. Calls on the Serbian government to work on effective and verifiable, fundamental reforms and to address structural reforms and shortcomings in the areas of rule of law, fundamental rights, media freedom, the fight against corruption and the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration;
15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and to the President, Government and Parliament of the Republic of Serbia.