P9_TA(2021)0317

2019-2020 Reports on Bosnia and Herzegovina


The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), of the other part, and to the Protocol of its Adaptation to take account of the accession of the Republic of Croatia to the European Union,

– having regard to the first meeting of the EU-BiH Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) held on 5 and 6 November 2015, to the third meeting of the EU-BiH Stabilisation and Association Council held on 13 July 2018 and to the fourth meeting of the EU-BiH Stabilisation and Association Committee held on 7 November 2019,

– having regard to BiH’s application for membership of the European Union of 15 February 2016,

– having regard to the regional cooperation initiatives in Southeast Europe and pan-European initiatives, such as the South-East Europe Cooperation Process, Brdo-Brijuni Process, the Central European Initiative, the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, the Energy Community Treaty, Erasmus+, the EU Strategies for the Danube Region and for the Adriatic-Ionian Region, the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), the Regional Commission tasked with establishing the facts about all victims of war crimes and other human rights violations committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (RECOM), the Regional Network for Accession (RENA), the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), the Transport Community Treaty, the Western Balkans Fund and the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and Common Regional Market,

– 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),

application for membership of the EU’ (COM(2019)0261) and the Analytical Report (SWD(2019)0222),


– having regard to the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its 33rd session on 20 October 2005,

– having regard to its resolution of 17 December 2020 on the European Citizens’ Initiative ‘Minority SafePack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe’

– having regard to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, adopted on 25 February 1991,

– having regard to Council conclusions of 25 January 2021 on Climate and Energy Diplomacy – Delivering on the external dimension of the European Green Deal; and of 20 January 2020 on Climate Diplomacy, and to the European Council conclusions of 10-11 December 2020 on climate,

– having regard to the working document of the European External Action Service of 6 November 2020 entitled ‘Climate Change and Defence Roadmap’,

– having regard to the Council conclusions on enhancing cooperation with Western Balkans partners in the field of migration and security of 5 June 2020,

– having regard to the Council conclusions of 14 October 2019 and 12 October 2020 on BiH and Operation EUFOR Althea,

– having regard to the Commission communication of 6 October 2020 entitled ‘Economic and Investment plan for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2020)0641),

– having regard to the Berlin Process, launched on 28 August 2014 and its EU-Western Balkans summit, held in Sofia on 10 November 2020,

– having regard to the Joint Declaration of the European Parliament – Western Balkans Speakers’ Summit of 28 January 2020,

– having regard to the Zagreb Declaration, adopted during the EU-Western Balkans Zagreb Summit of 6 May 2020,

– having regard to its recommendation of 19 June 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans, following the 2020 summit,

1 Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0370.
having regard to the Sofia Declaration adopted during the EU-Western Balkans summit of 17 May 2018, and to the Sofia Priority Agenda annexed thereto,

having regard to the Expert Report on Rule of Law issues in BiH of 5 December 2019,

having regard to the Opinion on the Constitutional Situation in BiH and the Powers of the High Representative adopted by the Venice Commission at its 62nd plenary session held in Venice on 11 and 12 March 2005, and to subsequent Venice Commission recommendations regarding constitutional matters in BiH,

having regard to the European Charter of Local Self-Government,

having regard to the final report of 25 January 2019 by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on the 7 October 2018 general elections in BiH,

having regard to the Declaration of 5 July 2009 of Western Balkans partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process, known as the Poznan Declaration, and to the Commission communication entitled A Union of Equality: EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation’(SWD(2020)0530),

having regard to the OSCE publication of 26 October 2020 entitled ‘Two Schools under One Roof: The Most Visible Example of Discrimination in Education in BiH’,

having regard to the resolution on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by BiH adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 12 June 2019,

having regard to the document entitled ‘Joint socio-economic reforms for the period 2019-2022’ which was adopted by the entity governments on 10 October 2019, and to the Council of Ministers’ document of 30 January 2020 entitled ‘Socio-economic reforms in BiH for the period 2020-2022’,

having regard to the 58th and previous reports to the UN Security Council by the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on BiH,

having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 2549 (2020) of 5 November 2020 renewing the mandate of operation Althea,

having regard to its resolution of 9 July 2015 on the Srebrenica Commemoration\(^1\), its resolution of 15 January 2009 on Srebrenica\(^2\) and its resolution of 7 July 2005 on the the Balkans 10 years after Srebrenica\(^3\),

having regard to its resolution of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism\(^4\),

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\(^1\) OJ C 265, 11.8.2017, p. 142.
\(^2\) OJ C 46 E, 24.2.2010, p. 111.
\(^3\) OJ 157 E, 6.07.2006, p. 468.
\(^4\) OJ C 137 E, 27.5.2010, p. 25.
having regard to its resolution of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe¹,

having regard to the resolution of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe of 12 November 2020 establishing the enlarged partial agreement on the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe,

having regard to the Council Conclusions on EU priorities for cooperation with the Council of Europe 2020-2022,

having regard to its resolution of 17 December 2015 on the 20th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement²,

having regard to its resolution of 13 November 2018 on minimum standards for minorities in the EU³,

having regard to its resolution of 11 September 2013 on endangered European languages and linguistic diversity in the European Union⁴,

having regard the joint statement of 21 December 2020 by High Representative Josep Borrell and Commissioner Oliver Várhelyi on the holding of local elections in Mostar,

having regard to the decision of the UN Security Council on the creation of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (‘Mechanism’), which performs a number of essential functions previously carried out by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (‘ICTY’), its reports, achievements and recommendations,

having regard to the Report of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia of 1 July 2017,

having regard to the Progress Report of the Prosecutor of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals of 19 May 2020,

having regard to its previous resolutions on the country,

having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0185/2021),

A. whereas the Stabilisation and Association Process and BiH’s EU membership application represent the country’s strategic choice towards European integration, which must translate into tangible results on the ground and increased efforts to move to the second stage of the SAA by all sides;

B. whereas Parliament is a strong supporter of BiH’s European integration;

¹ OJ C 171, 6.5.2021, p. 25.
⁴ OJ C 93, 9.3.2016, p. 52.
C. whereas its progress in European and Euro-Atlantic integration contributes to the country’s security, stability and economic prosperity;

D. whereas the implementation of meaningful reforms that improve the lives of people in BiH and facilitate EU accession require the engagement of all BiH political leaders, authorities, institutions and office holders;

E. whereas a clear domestic distribution of responsibilities and enhanced and meaningful cooperation in good faith between different levels of government is essential;

F. whereas BiH’s progress on the path to EU accession depends on its implementation of the 14 key priorities in the Commission’s opinion on BiH’s EU membership application;

G. whereas the country continues to face numerous challenges related to the rule of law, democratic institutions, human rights and fundamental freedoms, governance, accountability, the fight against corruption and organised crime, freedom of expression and media freedom, and a functioning market economy, and the credibility of the enlargement process is based on unequivocal results in these key areas;

H. whereas the country’s first pride event was held on 9 September 2019 in the capital Sarajevo;

I. whereas culture and cultural heritage help strengthen one’s identity and promote social cohesion, stability and understanding in society; whereas cultural heritage is a value in its own right;

J. whereas the persistent challenges in the reconciliation process should be addressed more vigorously;

K. whereas BiH being a migrant transit route, reception capacities remain insufficient to adequately address a grave humanitarian situation in full respect for human rights standards and fundamental rights of people in need of international protection, to ensure integrated border management and to control irregular migratory flows in light of a difficult socio-economic situation and despite significant EU financial support;

L. whereas the EU is BiH’s biggest trading partner and by far the most significant provider of financial assistance, which makes a profound difference in the country;

M. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated BiH’s socio-economic situation; whereas the EU has mobilised EUR 80.5 million to assist BiH in tackling COVID-19 and its post-pandemic recovery, and up to EUR 250 million for macro-financial assistance; whereas the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans will facilitate and serve as an important basis for the country’s long-term recovery from the consequences of the pandemic;

1. Reiterates its strong support for the European integration of BiH and calls on the European Council to continue backing its European perspective, including by sending a positive political message by granting of candidate status;

2. Welcomes BiH’s commitment to advancing on its EU path, and highlights the strong support for European integration among its population;
3. Recalls that Parliament strongly advocates the merit-based approach, coupling fulfilment of the criteria set with a consistent and credible conditionalities;

4. Welcomes the steps taken by BiH to address some key aspects of the Commission’s opinion, and its continued implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, including progress made on the joint parliamentary committee as well as the adoption of legislative amendments allowing the local elections in Mostar to take place in December 2020;

5. Recalls that the path towards the EU depends on sustainable peace, lasting stability, social cohesion and genuine reconciliation warranting the democratic and multicultural character of BiH; urges the country to expedite effective prosecution of war crimes under the revised National War Crimes Processing Strategy, and calls for impartial and effective investigations into these crimes; condemns any kind of historical revisionism, non-implementation of the ICTY and International Court of Justice (ICJ) judgements, anti-constitutional, secessionist, nationalistic and inflammatory rhetoric and related acts, denial or glorification of war crimes committed during the 1990s war, including the Srebrenica genocide; urges long overdue action to tackle the issue of the tens of thousands of women who were raped or otherwise sexually assaulted during the wars of the 1990s;

6. Reconfirms strongly its support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of BiH; condemns statements and proposals aiming to undermine BiH’s statehood and constitutional values, and reiterates the need for all BiH authorities, institutions, office holders and political leaders to bring the constitution into line with the European Convention on Human Rights;

Reconciliation

7. Welcomes the efforts by local and international organisations, including the International Commission on Missing Persons, to account for over 30 000 persons who went missing during the 1990s conflicts in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, and more than 8 000 Srebrenica genocide victims; recalls that over 7 200 people are still missing, and urges regional and national authorities and international stakeholders to intensify cooperation and data sharing on issues related to missing persons, redress to civilian victims of war, including survivors of sexual violence, and to ensure the safe and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced people through access to healthcare, education and social protection; acknowledges that some progress, albeit insufficient, has been made in the implementation of Annex VII to the Dayton Peace Agreement on Refugees and Displaced Persons; reiterates its call for the eradication of all forms of discrimination against returnees; calls for the adoption of a law banning the denial of genocide, the Holocaust, crimes against humanity and war crimes;

8. Calls on all authorities across the region to set up the Regional Commission tasked with establishing the facts about all victims of war crimes and other human rights violations committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia from 1 January 1991 until 31 December 2001 (RECOM), building upon the significant work carried out by the Coalition for RECOM;
9. Highlights the importance of the work of the RYCO promoting the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between young people in the region through youth exchange programmes, and welcomes the active participation of BiH;

10. Reiterates that the work on the reconciliation process must focus on the country’s youth and start at an early age, embedding reconciliation into the education process, therefore urges the authorities at all levels to ensure inclusive and non-discriminatory education for all children, regardless of their ethnic, cultural or personal background, in line with resolution of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers on the implementation of the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities by BiH of 2019; underlines the possibility of making use of the best practices in integration and inclusiveness adopted by multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Member States;

11. Stresses the need to urgently put an end to the segregation in education, embodied notably by the ongoing discriminatory practice of ‘two schools under one roof’, which institutionalises ethnic divisions, perpetuates stereotypes and prejudices, and fosters mistrust by preventing contact between students from different backgrounds; underscores that this practice is not only completely at odds with the very notion of reconciliation, but also constitutes a long-term threat to the stability and prosperity of the country;

12. Underlines that differences in history teaching and textbooks pose a considerable threat to a shared sense of citizenship and social cohesion, and encourages a meaningful harmonisation of the three existing curricula by mainstreaming critical thinking skills and eliminating counterfactual content that promotes division;

13. Calls on the Commission to develop a programme to support sustainable reform of BiH’s education system; stresses that quality education gives young people a vision and perspective of a positive future, contributing to tackling the brain drain and youth unemployment; calls for increased engagement in and promotion of European educational, cultural and research programmes, such as Horizon Europe, Creative Europe and Erasmus+;

14. Invites decision-makers to enable BiH’s participation in the OECD’s next programme for international student assessment (PISA) survey, and to implement the proposals stemming from the results of the 2018 PISA survey;

15. Calls on BiH to remedy unequal access to remote schooling, resulting in many children being deprived of their right to education during the pandemic;

**Functioning of democratic institutions**

16. Urges all BiH authorities, institutions, office holders and political leaders to significantly accelerate work and cooperation in order to fully comply with the 14 key priorities in the Commission’s opinion on BiH’s EU membership application; calls on the authorities to mobilise political will in order to facilitate the enhanced cooperation needed to address the COVID-19 crisis and to prioritise the work in the areas of democratic functioning, the rule of law, fundamental rights and public administration reform;
17. Underlines the need to considerably strengthen cooperation and data exchange between state, entity and cantonal jurisdictions across all policy areas; notes the urgent need to strengthen the country’s capacity and expertise on the wide range of issues relative to the fulfilment of its obligations arising from European integration;

18. Underlines that effective establishment, independent functioning and accountability of democratic institutions are essential feature of a viable democracy and a prerequisite for moving forward with the EU integration process, including obtaining candidate status; warns that divisive and secessionist ethno-nationalistic and anti-constitutional rhetoric, and attempts to obstruct the functioning of institutions undermine country-wide co-ordination and decision-making on key policies and reforms, as well as unity and lasting stability;

19. Highlights the adoption of the amendments to the BiH Election Law that allowed Mostar citizens to vote in the 2020 local elections for the first time since 2008, and welcomes the formation of the new local authorities; calls on the city council and the mayor to fulfil their democratic mandates; underlines that the political agreement should not by any means undermine the Union’s long-held aim of eliminating segregation and ensuring reunification of the city; stresses that any EU mediation or co-facilitation of agreements must be dealt with within the framework of democratically elected institutions in an inclusive process, including opposition parties and civil society representatives, should move the country closer to international standards and benefit all citizens without deepening ethnic divisions;

20. Welcomes the Parliamentary Assembly’s vote of 22 July 2020 on the Rules of Procedure governing the meetings of Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC), paving the way for their formal adoption by the 2nd EU-BiH SAPC as soon as possible and for constructive parliamentary cooperation;

21. Recalls that upon joining the Council of Europe in 2002, BiH undertook the obligation to address shortcomings in its constitutional framework, including through harmonisation of laws on cantonal and federal level, as well as to make progress on reforms that would transform BiH into a fully functional and inclusive state which fully ensures the rights of all citizens; stresses that institutional reforms depend on the will and commitment of the authorities, institutions, office holders and political leaders in the country to make genuine and long overdue progress on constitutional change, which is part of the 14 key priorities, preferably ahead of the 2022 general elections; urges the international community to facilitate the conditions and actively support an inclusive dialogue on constitutional change, including within BiH institutions and among elected representatives in BiH, under the facilitation of the EU, in particular Parliament, with the active participation of civil society and citizens; insists that such dialogue must run in parallel to the implementation of other reforms;

22. Urges the Commission to put more emphasis on constitutional reform in its next annual report;

23. Calls on the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to step up their facilitation activities in BiH, in order to strengthen political dialogue and reconciliation and to provide a framework for dealing with the legacies from the past and for overcoming the divisions in the society; calls for a coordinated involvement of EU actors and institutions in BiH and a reinforced transatlantic approach;
**Rule of law**

24. Regrets the lack of progress on judicial reforms, including the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Commission opinion’s 14 priorities and the Priebe report; reiterates the urgent need to improve the professionalism and accountability of the judiciary to ensure its independence from undue influence as well as to resolve the mounting backlog of cases pending trial; stresses that these reforms are essential for the country to obtain candidate status and that they depend solely on the necessary political will;

25. Urges to swiftly enact the reform of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council (HJPC) and the Courts of BiH in line with the EU standards, pursuant to the Commission’s recommendations and the opinion of the Venice Commission, strengthening independence of the BiH judiciary through appointment, appraisal, and integrity and disciplinary measures, including through verification of asset declarations;

26. Underlines the need to enable a unified interpretation of the law across the country; urges BiH to establish a legal body ensuring consistent and harmonised interpretation of the law, and recalls the necessity to ensure independent judicial review by setting up an second instance appellate court;

27. Welcomes the memorandum of understanding on setting up a joint coordination body of associations of judges and prosecutors as a tool to enhance independence, transparency and accountability of the judiciary, and calls upon all the relevant associations to join;

28. Urges BiH to establish a national joint contact point for cooperation with Europol, enhancing the exchange of criminal intelligence, and to sign a cooperation agreement with Eurojust allowing for an efficient exchange of judicial information and the sharing of evidence;

29. Calls on BiH decision-makers to urgently ensure the proper functioning of judicial institutions, including the process of appointment of judges at the Federation Constitutional Court;

30. Welcomes the BiH authorities’ efforts to prevent radicalisation, the financing of terrorism and its citizens’ involvement in foreign conflict zones;

31. Calls for immediate steps to tackle widespread corruption and impunity in the public sphere in order to rebuild citizens’ trust in the institutions; notes in this regard the importance of putting in place effective and consistent dissuasion, prevention, detection, pro-active investigation and sanction mechanisms, in line with international standards and Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) recommendations;

32. Calls on BiH to adopt a new state-level anticorruption strategy and action plan, and ensure its adequate funding, and the effective functioning, independence and coordination of corruption prevention bodies at all levels in order to enable unhindered investigations in order to safeguard accountability;

33. Reiterates the need to eradicate political and administrative links to organised crime through clear anti-corruption safeguards and checks, and increased political and administrative transparency and effective prosecution of high-profile corruption cases, with a particular focus on addressing economic, financial, public procurement crime,
COVID-related corruption cases and political party and campaign financing; urges the competent bodies to initiate investigation of the illicit enrichment of public officials;

34. Calls on BiH to complete its legal framework on the prevention of conflicts of interest and protection of whistle-blowers;

35. Underlines the need to ensure consistent country-wide professional civil service standards, and calls for the implementation of merit-based standards and transparency in public appointments and promotions as a priority, promoting a culture of integrity; welcomes the adoption of the Public Administration Reform Strategic Framework, enabling mobilisation of related EU funds; recalls the need to streamline and harmonise public administration across the country, ensuring transparent, proportionate, merit-based appointments and selection procedures;

**Fundamental rights**

36. Expresses concern over the fundamental rights situation, and calls for more effective and comprehensive country-wide human rights and anti-discrimination strategies, as well as measures against inter-faith and inter-ethnic intolerance; stresses the need to duly prevent discrimination and prosecute the proliferation of online and offline hate speech, hate crimes and violence against ethnic and religious minorities, women, the LGBTIQ+ community as well as migrants and asylum seekers, and to promote social, educational and occupational inclusion of minorities and vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities and the Roma, in line with the 2019 Poznan Declaration on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process;

37. Welcomes efforts aiming at promoting freedom of religion, mutual respect and interfaith dialogue, including through the Inter-Religious Council of BiH; urges the competent authorities to promptly investigate and prosecute all crimes committed on religious grounds;

38. Insists that genuine reconciliation is impossible if there is continuing segregation and discrimination, including in access to online and offline education, employment and social rights, and calls for measures to alleviate large-scale discrimination against specific groups; urges the competent authorities to ensure inclusive and non-discriminatory education for all children;

39. Notes progress in the field of child protection, including the implementation of Laws on Protection and Treatment of Children and Juveniles in Criminal Proceedings and the establishment of a system of foster care; recalls the need for an action plan on child protection and further measures to ensure the implementation of children’s right to health, education, protection, justice and equal opportunities through inclusive education and prevention of violence against children;

40. Stresses the need to improve measures targeting gender-based and domestic violence, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring country-wide measures to guarantee protection, victim support, legal aid, and safe accommodation; urges the authorities to harmonise and implement legislation on gender equality, and to ensure adequate support for women’s rights defenders and civil society organisations; recalls the need to focus funding on gender equality in all EU external financing
instruments, and to improve access to funding for local and small civil society organisations;

41. Encourages BiH to step up its work to protect people with disabilities, and develop and adopt a strategy on deinstitutionalisation, ensuring a dignified life for people with disabilities; condemns the fact that the law allows persons with disabilities to be deprived of their legal capacity, in a clear violation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, of which the country is signatory; denounces discrimination in disability support, such as the prioritisation of persons with war-related disabilities;

42. Stresses the need to ensure the participation of citizens in the democratic life of the country through adequate and inclusive involvement of civil society organisations in the EU integration process; calls on authorities to ensure an enabling environment for civil society by upholding European standards on protecting and promoting freedom of association and freedom of assembly, and deprecates any selective restrictions; underlines that every citizen has a right to exercise their freedom of expression in their mother tongue; calls on the authorities to develop a strategic framework of cooperation with civil society, and to ensure meaningful consultation as part of inclusive policy dialogues;

43. Commends the first-ever Sarajevo Pride, held on 9 September 2019, and expects that the latest pandemic-related restrictions do not prevent it from resuming in the near future; recalls the need to improve the situation of LGBTIQ+ people, prosecute violence and hate crimes against them, as well as to promote their social inclusion and adopt a relevant action plan;

44. Welcomes the signature by BiH of the Council of Europe’s Convention 108+, and urges the authorities to take legal steps ensuring EU-compliant personal data protection standards;

45. Commends the decision of the Constitutional Court of 4 October 2019 to repeal Article 11 of the Constitution of the Republika Srpska entity, thus abolishing capital punishment across BiH; regrets, however, that this decision, which meets part of one of the key priorities, had to be imposed by a court instead of being the result of a political process;

46. Deplores the fact that BiH remains in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights by not complying with anti-discrimination rulings of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the Sejdić-Finci, Zorić, Pilav and Šlaku cases on ensuring the democratic equality of citizens in the country’s election process, which is a prerequisite for opening accession negotiations; calls for the implementation of the rulings of the ECtHR and the Constitutional Court of BiH without further delay; notes the continuing shortcomings in the election process, and reiterates the need to urgently address discriminatory ethnicity and residency-based restrictions to the right to stand for election through the required constitutional changes;

47. Calls on the authorities, institutions, office holders and political leaders to resume inclusive negotiations on electoral reform, and regrets their reluctance to implement these rulings by eliminating all forms of inequality and discrimination in the electoral process; emphasises that agreement was possible on the Mostar elections, showing political will to reach a compromise, and stresses that any agreement on election-related
issues must not be misused for purposes other than the ones laid out by the ECtHR; underlines the need to implement these changes preferably before the 2022 general elections, ensuring an adequately diverse political representation at all levels of governance and making sure that elections are conducted in line with European standards by implementing OSCE ODIHR and relevant Venice Commission recommendations;

48. Calls for thorough investigations into alleged electoral irregularities, including voter registration fraud, identity theft, barriers to independent electoral observation and undue political pressure on voters and the BiH Central Election Commission (CEC) during the 2020 municipal elections, including the elections in Mostar; calls for measures to ensure the proper functioning of the CEC;

49. Regrets continued political and financial pressure on and instrumentalisation of the media, which increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, undermining freedom of expression and media pluralism; expresses its concern at the hostile environment for independent media, and urges the authorities to effectively investigate and prosecute verbal and physical threats and attacks against all journalists and media personnel; urges BiH to put in place a mechanism for gathering and exchanging information on violations of freedom of expression and media throughout the country, under the relevant Memorandum of Understanding signed with the OSCE;

50. Reiterates its call to enact effective legislative measures ensuring transparency of editorial and media ownership structure, along with the rules on subsidies and advertising; insists that effective measures should be taken to counter online and offline hate speech;

51. Recalls the need to ensure sustainable funding, independence, objectivity and financial transparency of the state-wide public broadcasting service (BHRT), entity-level public broadcasters and the Communications Regulatory Agency;

52. Recalls that high quality multilingual content in all official languages of BiH is an essential component of genuine media pluralism that would contribute to protecting cultural diversity in the country; encourages the establishment of a multinational and multilingual public broadcaster that would unite people and promote peace and reconciliation among Southeast European states, following the example of ARTE;

53. Recalls the importance of ensuring media freedom and promoting quality journalism, fact-checking and media literacy in order to tackle propaganda, disinformation and fake news, and encourages the introduction of media, information and digital literacy in education curricula; insists that the EU must enhance its communication strategy in order to proactively and effectively counter misinformation campaigns and foreign interference; notes that by distorting facts and exploiting ethnic and religious differences, certain foreign actors aim to undermine reforms, foment divisions jeopardising the country’s unity, as well as to diminish the credibility of the EU and its actions in the region, especially in relation to the overall enlargement process and financial assistance during the coronavirus pandemic, thereby endangering BiH’s stability and European integration of; calls on the EU to offer further financial and other assistance to the relevant BiH institutions in order to improve the country’s ability to counter these threats;
54. Calls for the EU integration process to be properly communicated to the public, including as a project for reconciliation and the development of a political culture based on compromise and mutual understanding;

55. Calls on the EEAS and Commission to improve coordination and address disinformation and hybrid threats that seek to undermine the European perspective of the region by more strategically underscoring the EU’s relevance to citizens in the region;

56. Is concerned about the increased migratory pressure on the country and the inadequate reception conditions that have led to a grave humanitarian situation; calls on BiH’s authorities to work on meaningful, sustainable, immediate and long-term solutions to the situation, through a coordinated, strategic and country-wide response, effective inter-institutional coordination, and improved border management and reception capacities, to provide access to humanitarian assistance and decent basic living conditions, including special safeguards for unaccompanied minors, access to adequate accommodation and child protection; calls for equitable responsibility-sharing across the whole territory of BiH avoiding politicisation and ensuring adequate support for local communities hosting temporary reception centres; urges BiH to conclude an agreement with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) with a view to strengthening capacity for processing asylum claims and improving cooperation with the EU, including on resettlement as a safe and legal pathway for persons seeking international protection;

57. Calls on BiH and the EU to further strengthen cooperation on the international protection of those in need, to work on solidarity-based solutions and prevent reported violations of international law and fundamental rights, such as reported pushbacks at BiH borders; calls on the Commission to put in place an independent monitoring and investigation mechanism; supports the work of the European Parliament Frontex Scrutiny Working Group; calls on the Commission, EU agencies and international organisations to engage actively with Bosnian authorities in order to develop a functioning and sustainable migration and asylum system; calls on the Commission, EU agencies and international organisations to provide further operational, technical, logistical and financial assistance to BiH for ensuring appropriate reception capacities and conditions across the country, preferably at migrants’ entry points to the country, access to an effective asylum procedure, to boost capacity for processing incoming migrants and asylum claims, and, where applicable, conduct return procedures in line with international and European standards; calls for an assessment of the relevant funding so as to ensure that transparent, conditional and credible EU assistance for migration needs serves its purpose and reaches the intended beneficiaries;

58. Urges BiH to step up its efforts against cross-border crime, especially human, firearms and drug trafficking by enhancing strategic cooperation with neighbouring countries and relevant EU agencies (Europol, Eurojust, Frontex); calls on the country to ensure the swift signature and ratification of the status agreement with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) reached on 5 February 2019, which would facilitate better protection of borders in full respect for fundamental rights, while helping fight cross-border crime, including people-smuggling by criminal organisations, and preventing irregular migration;
59. Calls for a co-ordinated, strategic and transparent country-wide response to the ongoing health emergency and non-discriminatory mitigation and post-pandemic recovery measures, addressing the specific needs of women, minorities and vulnerable groups, including migrants and refugees;

60. Calls for more proactive information and data-sharing on the pandemic, and for urgent and specific measures to address the plight of women in all spheres of life, including domestic violence, which has increased during the pandemic;

61. Recalls COVID-related EU support to address the acute situation in the country, including new loan guarantees of EUR 12 million to support SMEs; encourages BiH to make full use of the Union’s mechanisms, including adherence to the Joint Procurement Agreement for medical equipment; underlines the importance of European solidarity; calls on the Commission and the Member States to allocate a sufficient number of COVID-19 vaccines to the Western Balkan countries and to support their vaccination preparedness and implementation; welcomes in this respect the exemption from export authorisations and the package enabling BiH and other Western Balkans partners to finally benefit from EU Advance Purchase Agreements;

62. Stresses the need for the Bosnian authorities to ensure the right balance between fundamental rights and freedoms and the restrictions necessary for the pandemic; in particular regarding freedom of assembly and freedom of expression; considers that short-term measures addressing the pandemic-related slowdown in trade, services, transport, manufacturing and tourism should not undermine implementation of long-term reforms;

63. Recalls that rule of law deficiencies, together with fragmented and malfunctioning product and labour markets, undermine the functioning of the market economy, economic growth and foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows;

**Socio-economic reforms**

64. Calls on BiH to step up socio-economic and active labour market measures, including vocational education and training, reducing long-term unemployment, including that of women and youth, in order to address demographic decline and the most acute brain drain in the region, notably in the health and IT sector, by investing more in the education sector, including in vocational education and training, by addressing a mismatch between education and labour market needs, and fighting against discrimination in employment; welcomes in this regard the Youth Guarantee flagship initiative as part of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, aiming to ensure high quality job opportunities, continued education and traineeships for young people;

65. Calls on the authorities to strengthen measures to guarantee social cohesion, poverty and inequality reduction, access to health care and social protection, to harmonise legislation on maternity and paternity leave across entities and cantons, prevent gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, and to foster socio-economic dialogue among social partners;

66. Urges the authorities to prioritise measures aimed at boosting economic diversification, digitalisation and tackling the informal economy, while developing effective and
transparent mechanisms for energy market, transport infrastructure, sustainable tourism and support for SMEs;

67. Underlines the urgency of creating a single country-wide economic space, including by simplifying, centralising and harmonising procedures for business registration, licensing, permits and insolvency; highlights the great potential of digitalisation for the development of BiH’s economy;

68. Recalls the need to fully implement measures envisaged in the 2020-2022 BiH Economic Reform Programme and the Policy Guidance based on the Economic and Financial Dialogue;

69. Renews its calls for the adoption of a country-wide strategy on public finance management and for increased budget transparency in BiH, enabling EU-funded budget support; recalls the need to make progress on the sustainability of public debt and budget-consolidation efforts; regrets the inter-entity disputes affecting the functioning of the single indirect tax system; recalls the need for a coherent and transparent restructuring and depoliticisation of public companies across the country, leading to improved governance and transparency; underlines the need to establish a publicly available register of state-owned enterprises;

70. Calls for the effective functioning and enforcement of decisions by the Competition Council and the State Aid Council to be ensured, and for implementation of the strategy on enforcing intellectual property rights; underlines that the independence of the Central Bank and its reserves is key for macroeconomic stability; recalls the need to ensure timely, comprehensive, high-quality country-wide statistics;

71. Urges BiH to actively promote regional economic integration in the Western Balkans, and supports the proposal to reduce roaming charges in region; notes the extension of EU trade preferences for the Western Balkans until 31 December 2025, thereby contributing to the sustained economic development of Western Balkans countries;

72. Urges the country to fully enact the law on customs policy, implement the trade aspects of the Regional Economic Area (REA) and complete the steps required to conclude its accession to the WTO;

Connectivity, energy and environment

73. Welcomes the Commission’s efforts to invest more strategically in the Western Balkans through a dedicated Economic and Investment Plan (EIP), and recognises its importance for reinforcing regional and cross-border cooperation; stresses that EIP investments must be in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the EU climate targets, and provide for ex ante environmental impact assessments; recognises the EIP’s potential to contribute to facilitating social development and long-term recovery following the pandemic, and stresses the need to ensure that EU funds contain both incentives and conditionalities, and effectively contribute to strengthening democracy, good governance, the rule of law and fundamental rights for all people in BiH;

74. Recalls that predictable pre-accession funding is conditional upon effective coordination methods and implementation of the country-wide strategies and reforms; underlines the need to improve absorption capacity for pre-accession assistance; stresses that funding
allocation should be carried out in a transparent, effective, accountable, depoliticised and non-discriminatory manner; urges the authorities of BiH at all levels and other beneficiaries of Union funding to enhance the transparency and visibility of the Union’s action, and to communicate adequately on the added value of Union’s support;

75. Recommends focusing on sustainable and inclusive growth-enhancing public investment, energy and infrastructure projects increasing connectivity, transport multimodality and road safety, in full compliance with the rules on state aid, public procurement and socio-ecological impact, including the implementation of Directives on the Environmental impact assessment (EIA) and Strategic environmental assessment (SEA);

76. Urges BiH’s authorities to improve alignment with EU standards and policy objectives on climate protection and energy, facilitating the green and digital transition; calls for the prioritisation of measures reducing ecological degradation and environmental risks to health;

77. Welcomes the adoption of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which must incentivise the transition to a circular economy and the adoption of the measures needed to preserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas;

78. Urges the authorities to develop a national energy strategy which guarantees full alignment and implementation of the Paris Agreement and relevant EU climate and biodiversity objectives; stresses the need to put in place a carbon pricing mechanism as a means for effective decarbonisation in line with the European Green Deal and the political commitments made in the Sofia Declaration of 2020;

79. Calls on BiH to step up its efforts on nature conservation, as it is one of the countries in Europe with the greatest biodiversity in plant and animal species; urges BiH’s authorities to consult local communities, civil society and independent experts on socio-ecologically sensitive projects;

80. Calls for enhanced, harmonised and consistent countrywide efforts to improve air quality in alignment with the EU acquis on reduction of air pollution and to reduce harmful cross-border emissions; takes note of the fact that BiH emissions of nitrogen oxides in large combustion plants are now compliant with EU legislation, and urges swift action to remedy breaches of emission ceilings for dust and sulphur dioxide;

81. Underlines the need to increase sustainability of the energy generation sector by boosting energy efficiency and diversification through sustainable use of renewables; recalls that overreliance on coal delays an overdue transition to renewable energy; urges the authorities to take steps to phase out inefficient and polluting coal-powered plants; recalls the need to put in place a ‘just transition’ mechanism;

82. Welcomes the transposition of the electricity connection code regulations as well as the transposition and implementation of Regulation (EU) No 1227/2011 (the REMIT
Regulation)\(^1\) in the national electricity regulatory framework, and invites the authorities to also apply the same integrity regime in the gas sector;

83. Urges the country to adopt a state-wide law on the electricity and natural gas regulator, transmission and electricity market and implement national measures of energy efficiency and renewable energy generation, ensuring compliance with the obligations of the Third Energy Package and the Treaty Establishing the Energy Community; urges authorities of the Western Balkan countries to contribute to the regional connectivity by working towards completing the regional energy Market and stresses that BiH’s failure to comply with the related energy community *acquis* in the electricity and gas sectors jeopardises the prospects of regional energy sector integration;

84. Underlines that planning and construction of eco-sensitive projects, such as hydropower development, must comply with international and EU norms on impact assessments and environmental protection; stresses the need to prevent and effectively prosecute environmental crimes, increase inspection oversight and combat illegal construction;

85. Calls for steps enabling sustainable waste management processes as part of a waste management information system, putting in place adequate recycling facilities and preventing illegal waste dumping;

86. Recalls the need to improve preparedness for climate change phenomena, in particular flooding and drought; recalls that BiH has yet to establish an integrated civil emergency response information system;

**Foreign policy and security**

87. Urges BiH to continue progressively improving common foreign and security policy (CFSP) alignment, having reached an average of 70 %, as it constitutes an essential component of EU membership; strongly urges BiH to align itself with all Council decisions introducing restrictive EU measures;

88. Calls for the strengthening of good neighbourly relations and increased efforts to resolve all outstanding bilateral issues, such as border demarcation with Croatia and Serbia and normalisation of relations with Kosovo;

89. Welcomes BiH’s contribution to EU common security and defence policy (CSDP) training missions, its participation in NATO’s Membership Action Plan (MAP) and the country’s contribution to the NATO’s Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan; welcomes, further, the signature of a EU-BiH joint roadmap for action on the G7 partnership initiative for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security;

90. Firmly believes that better communication of the EU’s commitment towards the region is paramount to tackling malign foreign influences;

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91. Underlines the need for the EU and the United States to strengthen their partnership and coordination in the Western Balkans in order to help move ahead with key reforms, improve governance and reconciliation;

92. Welcomes the continued presence of EUFOR Operation Althea in the country and the extension of EUFOR’s mandate until November 2021; commends the work of operation EUFOR Althea that paved the way towards peace, stabilisation and the European integration of BiH; recalls that this mission still plays a pivotal role for the security and stability of the country and the region;

93. Commends EUFOR for remaining fully operational and continuing to support the country in spite of the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic; regrets the withdrawal of the UK from the Operation Althea; looks forward to the forthcoming strategic review of the operation, and stresses that it should retain its intelligence assets and readily available reserves;

94. Welcomes ongoing and continued efforts on the disposal of weapons, ammunition, explosives and demining, and recalls the importance of its proper funding; calls for further support from the EU and international organisations to ensure that demining can be stepped up, allowing BiH to be freed from these vestiges of its war-torn years;

95. Stresses the importance of enhancing efforts to fight against trafficking in small arms and light weapons in BiH and the region; commends, therefore, the adoption of the 2021-2024 BiH Strategy for Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons and its action plan, and the corresponding Franco-German initiative launched in 2018, and encourages BiH authorities to fully and resolutely commit to their implementation, with the support of the EU;

96. Calls for the creation of new opportunities for high level political and policy dialogue with the Western Balkans countries through regular EU-Western Balkans summits, in order to strengthen the political ownership of the enlargement process and to ensure better steering and high-level engagement, as also set out in the revised enlargement methodology;

97. Reaffirms its position that representatives of BiH and other Western Balkan countries should be appropriately included and actively engaged in the Conference on the Future of Europe, both at the governmental and at the civil society level, including youth;

98. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission / Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the Presidency of BiH, the Council of Ministers of BiH, the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Governments and Parliaments of the Federation of BiH, the Republika Srpska and Brčko District, and the Governments of the ten cantons.