EU enlargement: Parliament takes stock of developments in the Western Balkans

On Wednesday, Parliament outlined its assessment of the political situation in three accession countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: ending political deadlock and advancing on reforms

MEPs reconfirm their support for Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Euro-Atlantic orientation. However, they strongly denounce all hate rhetoric and disruptive action, including the withdrawal from and obstruction of state institutions, notably by the leadership of the Republika Srpska entity. They urge all political actors to return unconditionally to these state institutions and advance the work on EU-related reforms, notably the rule of law.

The text, adopted with 479 votes in favour, 81 against and 75 abstentions, stresses the importance of holding general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2022 as scheduled, as well as implementing the results. Calling for the elimination of all forms of inequality, discrimination and bias in the electoral process, MEPs regret the lack of political will to overcome the impasse in the negotiations on constitutional and electoral reforms, and the failure to implement them ahead of this year’s elections. The report urges all political actors in the country to abide by and implement the commitments in the political agreement reached in Brussels on 12 June 2022, and welcomes the European Council’s call on political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to finalise electoral and constitutional reform.

In light of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, MEPs also call on Bosnia and Herzegovina to implement the EU sanctions the country has aligned with and warn of Russia’s continuing interest in destabilising Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“After a year of political deadlock and escalatory secessionist movements, the political agreement reached in Brussels on 12 June 2022 and the most recent Council Conclusions declaring readiness to grant candidate country status to BiH are strong signs of the EU’s commitment to the European and Euro-Atlantic future of the country. Our report further reaffirms Parliament’s support for the European aspiration of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while addressing the main challenges the country still faces. These are namely the destabilising activities and the blocking of state institutions by the leadership of Republika Srpska, which must be sanctioned, and the impasse in electoral and constitutional reforms”, said rapporteur
Paulo Rangel (EPP, Portugal).

Kosovo: MEPs call for urgent adoption of an EU visa-free regime

MEPs commend the country’s increased political stability and strong commitment to its European path and reiterate their call on EU member states to proceed urgently with adopting a visa-free regime for the citizens of Kosovo. Any further delays would undermine the EU’s credibility and reputation as a reliable partner.

The report, adopted by 469 votes in favour, 96 against and 72 abstentions, reconfirms Parliament’s unequivocal support for the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and reiterates the importance of achieving a comprehensive, legally binding normalisation agreement, which is crucial for Serbia and Kosovo to advance on their respective European paths and which will contribute to regional stability and prosperity.

Welcoming Kosovo’s alignment with the EU on sanctions against Russia and its strong solidarity with Ukraine, MEPs also stress that the independence of Kosovo is irreversible and call on the EU countries that have not yet recognised the country to do so immediately.

“Today’s vote shows Parliament’s strong commitment towards Kosovo’s EU integration and provides guidance as to how EU standards can be implemented. Kosovo has continuously proven its commitment to advance on EU-related reforms and has positioned itself as a very reliable partner, deeply anchored in the European and transatlantic alliance. Unfortunately, the EU has failed to deliver on our own promise to provide long-overdue visa-free travel to the citizens of Kosovo. I really hope that this will be the last report that mentions this failure. As for the Council, and in this context I wish to address directly France and the Netherlands - the time to adopt the decision on visa liberalisation is now”, said rapporteur Viola von Cramon-Taubadel (The Greens/EFA, Germany).

Serbia: bringing the country back on track towards EU integration

Parliament welcomes the fact that EU membership continues to be Serbia’s strategic goal, while regretting the lack of progress and even backsliding on issues that are fundamental for EU accession. Praising the return to a more pluralistic parliament following the elections in Serbia on 3 April 2022, Members call for progress on the rule of law, fundamental rights, freedom of expression, strengthening media pluralism and normalisation of relations with Kosovo.

The report, adopted by 523 votes in favour, 78 against and 34 abstentions, strongly regrets that Serbia has not aligned with EU sanctions following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and calls on the newly elected authorities to urgently align with the EU’s decisions against Russia. Members express concern about the spread of disinformation and call on the Serbian authorities and the European Commission to fight disinformation, Russian propaganda and other hybrid threats in the Western Balkans.
“After the April 2022 elections and Russia’s war of aggression, there is a real sense that our partners in Serbia must move forward decisively on their European path. Our report reflects factually on the complex political reality in Serbia and encourages all pro-European forces in the country to focus fully on progress in rule of law reforms, the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and alignment with EU international positions. We note that much more can be done in order for Serbia to move towards the EU. I stand ready to engage with the new leadership in Belgrade to work on a European future for Serbia”, said rapporteur Vladimír Bilčík (EPP, Slovakia).

Further information
Committee on Foreign Affairs
The adopted text will be available here (06.07.2022)

Watch a video recording of the debate (05.07.2022)
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