

Beat: Politics

## Foreign affairs MEPs assess reform efforts

### Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Brussels, 31.01.2017, 21:49 Time

**USPA NEWS** - Albania needs to implement EU-related reforms credibly, and ensure that its June parliamentary elections are free and fair, if it is to start EU accession negotiations, said Foreign Affairs Committee MEPs today.

In a separate resolution, they also urged Bosnia and Herzegovina to overcome its ethnic and political divisions and remain united throughout the EU membership application evaluation process, to prove that it is a functioning state.

#### Albania

MEPs welcome Albania's progress on EU-related reforms and further efforts to reform the judicial sector, which is a key demand of Albania's citizens and a factor in restoring trust in public institutions. While excluding criminal offenders from public office and re-evaluating judges, prosecutors and legal advisors are promising steps forward, MEPs remain concerned about selective justice, corruption, the overall length of judicial proceedings and political interference in investigations and court cases.

Rapporteur Knut Fleckenstein (S&D, DE) said: "Last summer, the Albanian parliament adopted "" by consensus "" crucial constitutional amendments paving the way for a very ambitious and comprehensive reform of the judiciary, a milestone in Albania's EU-related reform process. My resolution recommends opening EU accession negotiations with Albania when the implementation of this crucial reform starts. It is important for Albania to maintain today's reform momentum and we must be ready to support it as much as possible in this process"<sup>[1]</sup>.

MEPs note that credible implementation of these reforms and holding free and fair elections in June 2017 could prove to be a key to advancing the EU accession process and starting negotiations.

#### Bosnia and Herzegovina

Rapporteur Cristian Dan Preda (EPP, RO) said: "Our resolution welcomes the steps Bosnia and Herzegovina has recently taken on the EU path, and in particular, the EU membership application presented in February 2016. We are looking forward to the Commission's opinion on the merits of this application and we want to encourage the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to take this process very seriously and commit to it"<sup>[2]</sup>.

He also stressed that the country "needs to focus on reforms and avoid divisive topics that could delay Bosnia and Herzegovina's advancement on the EU path"<sup>[3]</sup>.

MEPs view Republika Srpska government's efforts to establish parallel channels of communication with the Commission as unacceptable. They stress that "BiH will not be a successful candidate for EU membership until appropriate institutional conditions have been established"<sup>[4]</sup>. MEPs voice concern about the fragmentation and politicization of public administration, which they say hampers reform and makes public service cumbersome. "A professional, effective and merit-based public administration is the backbone of the integration process for any country that aspires to become an EU member"<sup>[5]</sup>, they add.

#### Next steps

The resolution on Albania was approved by 52 votes to 6, with 4 abstentions, while the resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina was adopted by 45 votes to 11 with 3 abstentions. The full House will vote on the two resolutions in Strasbourg in February.

REF. : 20170131IPR60322

European Parliament. 31 February 2017

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**Article online:**

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-10615/foreign-affairs-meps-assess-reform-efforts.html>

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V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDSStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Daren Frankish - EU Parliament

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