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P9_TA(2021)0113

2019-2020 Reports on Kosovo**European Parliament resolution of 25 March 2021 on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Kosovo (2019/2172(INI))**

(2021/C 494/13)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one part, and Kosovo, of the other part, which entered into force on 1 April 2016,
- having regard to the European Reform Agenda (ERA) for Kosovo, launched in Pristina on 11 November 2016, as well as the launch of the ERA 2 in October 2020,
- having regard to the framework agreement with Kosovo on participation in Union programmes, in force since 1 August 2017,
- having regard to the Presidency conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council meeting of 19-20 June 2003,
- having regard to the Sofia Declaration of the EU-Western Balkans summit of 17 May 2018 and the Sofia Priority Agenda,
- having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999, to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion of 22 July 2010 on the accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo, and to UN General Assembly Resolution 64/298 of 9 September 2010, which acknowledged the content of the ICJ opinion, and welcomed the EU's readiness to facilitate dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo,
- having regard to the first agreement on principles governing the normalisation of relations between the governments of Serbia and Kosovo of 19 April 2013, to the agreements of 25 August 2015, and to the ongoing EU-facilitated dialogue for the normalisation of relations,
- having regard to Council Decision (CFSP) 2020/792 of 11 June 2020 amending Joint Action 2008/124/CFSP on the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo), which extended the mission's duration until 14 June 2021,
- having regard to the reports of the UN Secretary-General on the activities of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), including the most recent report of 31 March 2020, and the reports on the operations of the Kosovo Forces (KFOR) of 7 February 2018,
- having regard to the Berlin Process launched on 28 August 2014,
- having regard to the joint statement by the Co-Chairs of the EU-Kosovo Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) following the sixth meeting of the SAPC, held in Strasbourg on 14 February 2019,
- 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),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 5 June 2020 on enhancing cooperation with Western Balkans partners in the field of migration and security,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 29 May 2019 entitled '2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy' (COM(2019)0260), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled 'Kosovo 2019 Report' (SWD(2019)0216),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 6 October 2020 entitled '2020 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy' (COM(2020)0660), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled 'Kosovo 2020 Report' (SWD(2020)0356),

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- having regard to the Commission communication of 6 October 2020 entitled ‘Economic and Investment plan for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2020)0641), and the Commission staff working document entitled ‘Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans’ of 6 October 2020 (SWD(2020)0223),
 - having regard to the joint communication of 8 April 2020 of the Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy entitled ‘Communication on the Global EU response to COVID-19’ (JOIN(2020)0011), and the Commission communication of 29 April 2020 entitled ‘Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery’ (COM(2020)0315),
 - having regard to the Commission assessment of 21 April 2020 on the Kosovo 2020-2022 Economic Reform Programme (SWD(2020)0065), and to the joint conclusions of the Economic and Financial Dialogue between the EU and the Western Balkans and Turkey adopted by the Council on 19 May 2020,
 - having regard to the final report of the EU Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) on the early legislative elections held on 6 October 2019 in Kosovo,
 - having regard to the Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 May 2016 amending Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement (Kosovo) (COM(2016)0277), and to the European Parliament legislative resolution of 28 March 2019 adopting its position at first reading⁽¹⁾, taking over the Commission proposal,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on the country,
 - 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⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the Zagreb Declaration adopted at the EU-Western Balkans Summit that took place via video conference on 6 May 2020,
 - having regard to the joint declaration of the European Parliament — Western Balkans Speakers’ Summit, convened by the President of the European Parliament with the leadership of the Western Balkan parliaments on 28 January 2020,
 - having regard to the EU-Western Balkans Summit held on 10 November 2020 in the framework of the Berlin Process,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0031/2021),
- A. whereas Kosovo 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, and whereas the quality of and dedication to the necessary reforms determine the timetable and progression of accession;
- B. whereas Kosovo needs to focus on fundamental reforms to address structural shortcomings in the areas of rule of law, fundamental rights, the functioning of democratic institutions, and public administration reform, as well as economic development and competitiveness;
- C. whereas Kosovo continues to struggle with political instability, in particular since the early legislative elections of 6 October 2019; whereas the end of the Kurti government exposed several structural issues, including undue interference of external actors in the work of the Government and the Assembly of Kosovo, the independence of the Constitutional Court, and the lack of clarity on the legality of the vote on the government;

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2019)0319.

⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0168.

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- D. whereas there has been a lack of coordination between trans-Atlantic actors recently, and the incoming US administration will provide a new opportunity for better cooperation;
- E. whereas Kosovo remains the only country in the Western Balkans whose citizens need a visa to travel to the Schengen Area although all benchmarks for visa liberalisation have been fulfilled since 2018;
- F. whereas Kosovo's shadow economy is hindering the overall development of a viable economy in the country;
- G. whereas Kosovo must increase its efforts in fighting corruption and organised crime, and must build strong, coherent and independent institutions to resolve these issues;
- H. whereas former President Hashim Thaçi resigned on 5 November 2020 to face charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers in the Hague; whereas on 30 November 2020 the indictment against Thaçi was confirmed; whereas Vjosa Osmani, Speaker of the National Assembly of Kosovo, is acting President of Kosovo;
- I. whereas Kosovo has made progress in adapting its legal framework to the EU *acquis* but needs to increase its efforts and resources in order to effectively implement new laws and rules in a more committed and serious manner across policy fields;
- J. whereas, according to the Government of Kosovo, 117 countries have recognised Kosovo's independence, including 22 of the 27 EU Member States;
- K. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented burden for Kosovo's health, economy, and social protection systems, and has clearly demonstrated that the EU and the Western Balkans must continue tackling common challenges together;
- L. whereas the EU has mobilised financial support of more than EUR 3,3 billion for Western Balkan countries to address the immediate health crisis and mitigate the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region;
- M. whereas the EU is the biggest assistance and aid provider to Kosovo mitigating the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; whereas Kosovo has received EUR 5 million for immediate support to the health sector, EUR 63 million of support for its social and economic recovery, EUR 60 million in assistance funds and EUR 100 million of macro-financial assistance;
- N. whereas the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans will facilitate the long-term recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting economic development and reforms in the region;
- O. whereas Kosovo benefited from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II), with a total indicative allocation of EUR 602,1 million for 2014-2020, and whereas Kosovo needs to further improve its absorption capacity in this regard;
- P. whereas the EU's engagement with the Western Balkans surpasses that of any other partner, and demonstrates a mutual strategic commitment;

Commitment to enlargement

1. Welcomes Kosovo's continued and strong commitment to advancing on its European path and to accelerate reforms, as well as the strong support for European integration among Kosovo's population and its European identity;
2. Regrets the limited progress in implementing the ERA 1, while acknowledging the commitment of the government to a broad reform process as provided for by ERA 2; calls on the Kosovo authorities to take ownership of the process, demonstrate greater political will and improve administrative capacity in order to enhance implementation of the EU-related reforms;
3. Expresses concern about the dissolution of the Ministry of EU Integration, and calls on the Government of Kosovo to fully and properly integrate the former structures of the Ministry as provided for by the newly approved Regulation on the Organisational Structure of the Prime Minister's Office, as well as to ensure that the new structure is granted the level of competence and responsibilities appropriate to ensuring proper coordination and steering of the integration process;

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4. Welcomes the peaceful and orderly conduct of the early legislative elections held on 6 October 2019 and 14 February 2021, but expresses concern over the lack of competition, freedom of choice and expression in the Kosovo Serb community, as well as problems related to the out-of-Kosovo votes; stresses the importance of addressing all the shortcomings identified and recommendations made by the EUEOM; expects all political forces to honour the democratic culture and will of Kosovar citizens when forming a new government and electing a new President;
5. Regrets that Kosovo continues to struggle with political instability following the elections and, in this regard, calls on all political forces in Kosovo to reform the political system through constitutional changes in order to improve legal certainty and the process for the formation of new governments;
6. Welcomes the Commission's confirmation in its 2020 Kosovo report of its assessment of Kosovo's ability to benefit from the visa liberalisation regime, and calls on the Council to urgently proceed with the adoption of a visa-free regime for the citizens of Kosovo; recalls, in this regard, that Kosovo continues to fulfil all the benchmarks of the visa liberalisation roadmap, as consistently confirmed by the Commission since July 2018;
7. Regrets that during 2020 the Council still did not manage to adopt visa liberalisation for Kosovo; takes the view that visa liberalisation will improve stability and bring Kosovo closer to the EU by facilitating travel and business; notes that the isolation of Kosovo citizens is having an impact on the implementation of EU programmes, and that the lack of a Council decision is withholding urgently needed opportunities from the citizens of Kosovo, weakening the EU's credibility, and could have an impact on the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue;
8. Calls on the EU Member States to show continued commitment to enlargement, and to pursue a more effective communication policy towards EU citizens on enlargement; calls on the Commission and the EU Office in Kosovo to step up their efforts in promoting the role, requirements and benefits of a closer partnership between the EU and Kosovo;
9. Welcomes the decision of the Kosovo Government to lift tariffs on imports from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which allowed for the resumption of the EU-facilitated dialogue;
10. Notes the signature of economic normalisation agreements by Kosovo and Serbia on 4 September 2020 in Washington; regrets, however, provisions in the text that require Kosovo to stop seeking membership in international organisations; welcomes the renewed engagement of the United States, and underlines the need for the EU and the United States to strengthen their partnership and coordination in the Western Balkans; underlines that transatlantic cooperation is an important factor for stability in the region, and stresses the EU's leading role as mediator in the process of normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia;
11. Regrets the opening of the Embassy of Kosovo to Israel in Jerusalem, which goes against the position of the European Union on the two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine dispute;
12. Acknowledges the important contribution of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) and the participating States in maintaining a safe and secure environment, and freedom of movement for all citizens in Kosovo, as well as in facilitating the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans;
13. 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 and intensified ministerial contacts; calls for the active engagement and appropriate inclusion of the Western Balkans countries in the Conference on the Future of Europe;

Democracy and rule of law

14. Welcomes the progress in adapting the legal framework on the rule of law, including the Law on the disciplinary liability of judges and prosecutors and the Law on mediation, as well as the roll-out of an electronic case management system and central criminal record registry; regrets, however, the weak level of implementation;
15. Calls on the Kosovo authorities to step up their efforts in enforcing the laws to the benefit of their citizens, as well as to ensure better coordination of various rule of law programmes supported by various donors, including the development of an overall review and subsequent strategy for the entire rule of law sector;

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16. Stresses the need to intensify the fight against corruption, and expresses its serious concern about the abolition of the special anti-corruption task force within the Kosovo Police (KP); underlines that strong political will is needed to effectively fight corruption, and calls on the Kosovo authorities to show determination in combating corruption at all levels;
17. Urges the government to create and maintain strong and dedicated entities that will tackle organised crime and corruption, and calls for an end to any changes in law enforcement and anti-corruption institutions based on party political interests;
18. Calls on Kosovo to improve the implementation of its regulatory measures relating to the freezing, confiscation and recovery of assets, and regarding final convictions in cases of high-level corruption, organised and financial crime, money laundering and terrorist financing, including suspension measures for public officials indicted for such offences, and to ensure there is no interference in the operational activities of law enforcement bodies and the prosecutor's office;
19. Is concerned that despite an adequate normative framework, Kosovo's justice system continues to be undermined by accountability shortcomings, transparency issues, and political interference; regrets the lack of tangible results in the fight against organised crime, and expects more progress to be made in improving its track record on the investigation and prosecution of high-level corruption and cases of organised crime, including cases of trafficking in human beings and drugs, and cybercrime;
20. Welcomes the adoption by the Kosovo Judicial Council of measures helping to limit external interference and undue influence in judicial proceedings; welcomes also the increase in the number of final court judgments published; believes that further measures are required to ensure greater independence and de-politicisation of the judiciary, and to stop undue interference in high-profile cases;
21. Calls on Kosovo to ensure that financial and audit reports of political party financing are consistently available, and sanctions are applied when they are required; notes also the need to improve the financial oversight and accountability of publicly-owned enterprises; welcomes in this respect the proposal for the new Law on Financing of Political Parties, and encourages the Kosovo Assembly to adopt a legal framework regulating political party financing in line with the Venice Commission recommendations;
22. Reiterates that selections and appointments for high-level decision-making positions in the civil service and publicly-owned enterprises remain of great concern, and notes that appointments for such positions need to be made on the basis of a merit-based, fair and competitive process; acknowledges the efforts of the Government of Kosovo through signing the memoranda of understanding with the United Kingdom to oversee this process; repeats its call for progress and clear political commitment to public administration reform which can be achieved by advancing the implementation of relevant legislation;
23. Welcomes the improvement in the organisation of the Kosovo Assembly's work and the management of plenary sessions based on its rules of procedure; regrets however the frequent lack of quorum, and ongoing hold-ups in parliamentary work, which have been particularly damaging in the process of adopting the pandemic-related relief package;
24. Regrets that the Kosovo Assembly was unable to pass a second economic recovery package at the first attempt, underlines the importance of political stability, and calls on the Assembly and the government to work together in a spirit of constructiveness, and to adhere to parliamentary best practice;
25. Commends Kosovo's efforts in fighting radicalisation, terrorism and violent extremism, including in stemming the outflow of foreign fighters; underlines that additional efforts are needed in addressing the financing of terrorism, as well as the rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign fighters;
26. Calls for active regional cooperation and greater coordination and exchange of information between the security services of the Republic of Kosovo and the EU and its Member States in countering potential terrorist activities; urges Kosovo to address online radicalisation and external extremist influences, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to assist Kosovo in this important endeavour;
27. Is concerned by third countries' efforts to support radicalisation, especially of young people, often by financing or providing significant resources such as to education institutions in Kosovo, which could be breeding grounds for radicalisation, and that the current COVID-related situation could have detrimental effects on the de-radicalisation efforts, given the worsening economic situation;

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28. Welcomes the conclusion of a Working Arrangement between the Kosovo Police and Europol, which will constitute the basis for enhanced cooperation in fighting terrorism and extremism as well as transnational organised crime, and calls for its implementation as soon as possible;
29. Points out that according to recent estimates there are about 250 000 illegal weapons in the possession of Kosovo citizens; expresses its deep concern about this alarming situation that has a negative impact on public security; calls on the Kosovo authorities to step up their efforts to tackle this problem and launch an effective programme for the confiscation or voluntary surrender of these weapons to the police;
30. Commends Kosovo on its continuous and constructive cooperation on migration and the continued reduction in the number of asylum requests and readmissions of Kosovo citizens, as well as on the good cooperation of Kosovar authorities on readmission;
31. Takes positive note of the adoption of the Regulation on Integration of Foreigners, and calls for its full implementation; stresses that further actions are needed to ensure sufficient administrative and enforcement capacity to tackle migration challenges, including the smuggling of migrants;
32. Reiterates its full support for the work of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC) and the Specialist Prosecutor's Office, which are an important demonstration of Kosovo's commitment to the rule of law, and whose work is also in the interest of Kosovo; stresses the importance of the Specialist Chambers being able to continue their work independently, without any outside interference; welcomes the prolongation of the mandate of the KSC and its work in The Hague;
33. Welcomes the prolongation of the mandate of the EULEX mission, and asks Kosovo to fully cooperate with EULEX and with the Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office in good faith; regrets the attempts to undermine the mandate of EULEX; reiterates its call on EULEX to increase its effectiveness and uphold the highest standards of transparency and a zero-tolerance approach to corruption;
34. Welcomes the adoption of the law on Accessing Public Documents; recommends further efforts in increasing the transparency and better monitoring of public spending, including by improving the public procurement system;
35. Welcomes the steps taken in building cybersecurity capacity, most notably by adopting its first National Cybersecurity Strategy; considers it crucial to maintain this momentum to enable the full enforcement of legislative initiatives in this area and to tackle the shortage of skilled professionals in ICT and cybersecurity;

Respect of fundamental freedoms and human rights

36. Notes that Kosovo's legal and institutional framework broadly guarantees the protection of human, minority and fundamental rights; underlines that challenges remain in its implementation, in particular as regards language rights, including multilingual broadcasting, a lack of which impacts the minority communities' access to information, and which has been particularly harmful during the COVID-19 pandemic;
37. Calls on Kosovo to provide equal and non-discriminatory state education in minority languages, and to ensure access to official documents in all official languages across Kosovo, as well as equal opportunities, adequate representation in political life, and access to public administration and judiciary;
38. Calls for greater protection and inclusion of persons belonging to minorities, including Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, Serbs, Bosniak, Turkish and Gorani, as well as persons with disabilities and displaced persons, by providing them with adequate healthcare and social protection, in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the light of its socio-economic consequences;
39. Urges greater efforts to fight discrimination and antigypsyism; is particularly concerned by the social discrimination against Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, their exclusion from political and social decision-making, and continued lack of resources and access to employment opportunities, justice, public services, housing, healthcare, sewage systems, and running water;
40. Notes with regret that the petition of nearly 500 people, who have historically self-identified as Bulgarian, which was registered at the Assembly of Kosovo in May 2018, has still not been considered by the Assembly; underlines the necessity for a 'Bulgarian' category to be added in the second national census in Kosovo, scheduled to be held in 2021;

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41. Notes the failure to ensure the financial and editorial freedom of the public broadcaster; reiterates the need to guarantee media transparency, including media ownership, as well as the independence of the media, ensuring it is free from any political influence; calls for a swift appointment of the Head of the Information and Privacy Agenda;
42. Stresses the need to step up the fight against threats and attacks against journalists, and to end impunity for these crimes; recognises that despite these challenges, freedom of expression is enshrined in Kosovo's Constitution, and that there is a pluralistic and lively media environment;
43. 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;
44. Regrets the increasing number of SLAPP (Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation) cases, which are used to threaten and sue journalists and individuals in order to silence them and make public debate impossible;
45. Welcomes the adoption of the Law on Protection of Whistleblowers, and encourages adoption of all the necessary additional legislation for its effective and efficient implementation; calls in this respect for the swift appointment of the Commissioner for the Information and Privacy Agency;
46. Is concerned about disinformation campaigns to delegitimise Kosovo's statehood; calls for the strengthening of European cooperation with Kosovo on addressing disinformation and hybrid threats that seek to undermine the European perspective of the region, and to fight regional disinformation campaigns, including by more strategically underscoring the EU's relevance to citizens in the region;
47. Reminds of the strong link between weaknesses in media freedom and opportunities for local and foreign actors to manipulate facts and spread disinformation; calls on the Commission and the EEAS to cooperate closely on those links and overlapping challenges, as well as to foster the creation of a Balkan-focused centre of excellence on disinformation;
48. Hails the unanimous decision by the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo on 25 September 2020 to give direct effect to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention); expects the Kosovo Government to move swiftly to implement the content of the Convention and provide the necessary resources and infrastructure to that effect;
49. Welcomes the adoption of the Kosovo programme for gender equality, as well as the work of the Women's Caucus in the Kosovo Assembly; calls on the Kosovo authorities to increase efforts to promote gender equality and strengthen the economic position of women, including by prioritising gender mainstreaming and increased cooperation with civil society, including women's organisations, as well as by creating an environment conducive to the better representation of women in decision-making positions, and by making sure school textbooks do not perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination; calls in this respect for the participation of women in the negotiation team responsible for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue; demands equally that the EU side supports this endeavour and these efforts by adhering to the above mentioned recommendations itself;
50. Is concerned about the inactivity rate of women, including due to ongoing gender discrimination in the labour market, and calls on the Kosovo authorities to improve the participation of women in the labour market; urges Kosovo to adapt the new Labour Law to also regulate leave in order to avoid gender-based discrimination in rights related to maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave;
51. Reiterates its concern about the scale of domestic and gender-based violence; welcomes the revisions of the Criminal Code in this respect, as well as improvements observed in the EULEX report in certain aspects of the Kosovo police's handling of sexual violence cases; notes, however, that the lack of prosecutions and serious punishment, the impunity of perpetrators, insufficient systems for tracking and case databases, the lack of adequate resources and services for victims (shelters, medical examination centres, trauma support, counselling), outstanding training and institutionalised treatment protocols for the entire justice system are still of concern;

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52. Stresses the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on women and minorities by deepening inequality, exacerbating existing problems, including increased domestic violence, and calls on the Kosovar Government and authorities to take these issues into account in their responses to the pandemic;

53. Hails the adoption of the Law on Child Protection as a significant step in the protection of children's rights in Kosovo; highlights the importance of the fight against violence against children; stresses that adequate financial and human resources are needed to ensure its effective implementation; points to the particular need to tackle the persistent problem of child and forced marriages, especially in Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, by introducing a legal age for marriage and ensuring adequate actions by and reporting to law enforcement and justice institutions;

54. Welcomes the progress on the protection of LGBTI rights at the legislative and policy level; notes, however, the need for full implementation of the current anti-discrimination framework, and calls for the proper investigation of cases of hate crime against LGBTI persons; calls on the government to include same-sex partnerships in the draft Civil Code, as guaranteed by the country's Constitution;

55. Commends the continued efforts of Kosovo authorities to enhance the ability of civil society to contribute meaningfully to policy development; calls for the further improvement of the cooperation between government and civil society, and for increased participation of civil society in policymaking; reiterates the need for an enhanced accountability and transparency in public funding for civil society;

56. Is concerned by the lack of coordination of international donors, cited by several organisations active in the country; urges the Kosovar Government to take action to avoid doubling efforts and unnecessary overlaps, and to manage its relations with international donors more effectively;

57. Commends the work of the outgoing Ombudsperson in promoting a culture of human rights, and welcomes the increased number of his recommendations being implemented by Kosovo authorities, effectively contributing, inter alia, to the prevention of torture and other cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment;

Reconciliation and good neighbourly relations

58. Welcomes Kosovo's efforts in maintaining constructive neighbourly relations throughout the region, and in proactively aligning with the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP); welcomes Kosovo's commitment to regional initiatives and calls for the implementation of obligations within various regional frameworks that advance the common regional market;

59. Stresses that normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo is a priority and a precondition for the EU accession of both countries, and would also be essential for securing stability and prosperity in the wider region; acknowledges the increased engagement of both sides in the EU-facilitated dialogue, and calls for active and constructive engagement in the EU-facilitated dialogue led by the EU Special Representative, seeking a comprehensive, sustainable and legally binding agreement in accordance with international law;

60. Reiterates its call to move forward with the full implementation, in good faith and in a timely manner, of all the agreements already reached including the establishing of the Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities without further delay; calls on the EEAS to set up a mechanism to monitor and verify the implementation of all the agreements so far reached and to report periodically to the European Parliament about the state of play; reiterates, in this regard, its full support for the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, Miroslav Lajčák;

61. Urges the Serbian and Kosovar Governments to refrain from any action that could undermine trust between the parties, and put the constructive continuation of the dialogue at risk; reiterates the importance of the multi-ethnic nature of both Kosovo and Serbia, and that ethnically homogeneous states should not be the objective in the region;

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62. Calls on Kosovo to tackle ongoing internal problems regarding its approach to the dialogue, to create a dedicated team for the negotiations, as well as a joint negotiating platform and a dialogue between the ruling coalition and opposition parties; stresses that the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue must be conducted openly and transparently, and that the officials in charge of it should regularly consult the Kosovo Assembly about its developments; invites the government to communicate better the results of the dialogue to the citizens of Kosovo;

63. Notes that five EU Member States have not yet recognised Kosovo, and reiterates its call for them to do so, and to reaffirm credible European commitment to the enlargement process; stresses that the independence of Kosovo is irreversible, and that recognition would be beneficial to the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, would enhance and consolidate the stability of the region, and facilitate the EU integration of both states;

64. Welcomes the recent recognition of the independence of Kosovo by Israel within the framework of the agreements signed in Washington, but condemns Serbia's non-recognition campaign against Kosovo, which has led to several countries withdrawing their recognition;

65. Commends the good regional cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia in the fight against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, including cooperation between the mayors of North and South Mitrovica, and communication between ministers of health;

66. Regrets that the Mitrovica Bridge has not yet been opened to all traffic, in spite of the completion of renovation work; calls on the Serbian and Kosovar authorities to promote people-to-people contacts between local communities in order to strengthen dialogue, including at a non-governmental level; calls on the Commission, EEAS and the Council to support the Prime Minister and his team in the internal reconciliation dialogue with Kosovo Serbs which will provide concrete security guarantees and opportunities for socio-economic integration;

67. Notes that visa-free travel between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo is a necessary pre-condition for expanding regional cooperation;

68. Welcomes the Commission's efforts to invest more strategically in the Western Balkans through a dedicated Economic and Investment Plan (EIP); recognises the importance of the EIP in supporting sustainable connectivity, human capital, competitiveness and inclusive growth, as well as reinforcing regional and cross-border cooperation; stresses that any investment must be in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement and EU decarbonisation targets;

69. Reiterates its support for the initiative to establish the Regional Commission for the establishment of facts about war crimes and other gross human rights violations on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (RECOM); highlights the importance of the work carried out by the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), and welcomes Kosovo's active participation; reiterates the need to reach out to young people from the northern municipalities, and to integrate them in the socio-economic structures of the country;

70. Calls for greater efforts in dealing with the requests of family members of missing persons, the opening of all wartime archives, and for information to be revealed about people who are still listed as missing from the 1998-99 Kosovo war; urges the implementation of the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council's strategy on war crimes that is still severely hampered by political issues, a lack of resources and lack of international and regional cooperation;

71. Underlines the importance of information on grave sites and of the investigation and adjudication of all war crimes in order to provide justice for victims; calls on Serbia to investigate the remains of three bodies so far exhumed during searches in a mass grave in Kizevak village of Raska municipality near the Kosovo border discovered in November 2020, that are believed to be Kosovo Albanians;

72. Commends Kosovo for the peaceful co-existence of religious communities, and highlights the importance of the continued protection of the cultural heritage and property rights of all religious communities; encourages the Kosovo authorities to use cultural heritage as a means of bringing different communities together and to more effectively promote the multi-ethnic cultural and religious heritage of the country;

73. Is concerned by the growing trend towards monolingualism and the lack of understanding of different languages of Kosovo communities, particularly among young people; stresses therefore the need to learn each other's languages, introduce platforms to interact, adapt the education system, and tackle the underrepresentation of non-majority communities in the civil service;

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74. Underlines that the long-term stability and prosperity of Kosovo remains dependent on the development of relations between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs, and that all political forces are responsible for upholding and supporting a political culture based on tolerance, inclusion and mutual understanding and respect;

Economy

75. Notes that strong political support, effective implementation and close monitoring are required to fight Kosovo's large informal economy, which constitutes a serious barrier to the development of its private sector, and affects the capacity of the state to provide good quality public services;

76. Calls on Kosovo's authorities and the Commission to further support SMEs in order to develop a viable economy for Kosovo;

77. Stresses the need for urgent implementation of active labour market policies, including upskilling, vocational education and on-the-job training, in order to increase the employment of vulnerable groups; underlines that the training and education system should be reformed to cope with labour and market needs, and calls for the inclusion of persons belonging to minority groups in the design and implementation of employment measures; reiterates the importance of creating further opportunities for youth and women;

78. Expresses serious concern about the massive emigration of highly skilled workers from Kosovo, and calls for the introduction of comprehensive socio-economic measures to address demographic decline; calls on the Commission and the Western Balkans countries to develop a regional strategy to address persistent youth unemployment by tackling the skills mismatch between the education system and the labour market, improving the quality of teaching, and ensuring adequate funding for active labour market measures and vocational training schemes, along with adequate childcare and pre-school education facilities;

79. Calls for considerable improvement in education and the quality of education; urges Kosovo to work towards making further progress in school reform, providing necessary learning materials and the right physical conditions for all students, in particular addressing problems of access to education during the current pandemic;

80. Welcomes Kosovo's decision to participate in the mini-Schengen initiative as a mean to improve good neighbourly relations and provide new opportunities for Kosovo citizens and businesses;

81. Welcomes the fact that Kosovo will also benefit from the EU Digital Single Market, and emphasises the need for investing in digitalisation as a way of improving services for citizens, minimising the digital divide and ensuring equal access to the internet, including for the most vulnerable groups and rural areas; notes the great potential of digitalisation for the development of Kosovo's economy;

82. Welcomes the entry into force of the new Regional Roaming Agreement signed in April 2019 as a clear example of how regional cooperation can bring concrete benefits for the citizens and the businesses of the region;

83. Notes that the pandemic is putting the health system under stress; urges Kosovo to strengthen the health sector in order to provide adequate and accessible primary health services for all citizens, in particular through needs-based social benefits for the groups most affected by the COVID-19 crisis; notes that a high number of health professionals have left Kosovo, which is further worsening the lack of healthcare professionals, and has a detrimental impact on the healthcare system;

84. Notes that structural weaknesses have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular due to the delay in adopting the law on economic recovery, and urges the Kosovo authorities to implement effective structural reforms to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and accelerate the post-crisis economic recovery, including by addressing the lack of public health insurance, as well as the issue of division of competences between the President and the Prime Minister in handling the pandemic, as demonstrated when declaring a state of emergency to enable a country-wide lockdown;

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85. Reiterates that the EU has swiftly mobilised immediate support for the Western Balkans to tackle the health emergency resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the socio-economic recovery of the region; notes the adoption of over EUR 138 million in assistance for Kosovo through the IPA 2019 and IPA 2020 programmes, out of which EUR 50 million has been reallocated to tackle the social and economic fallout of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis in the short and medium term;

86. Underlines the importance of European solidarity, and calls on the Commission to further support Kosovo and the other Western Balkan states in their efforts to curb the pandemic; calls on the Commission and the Council to include Kosovo in the joint EU procurement of vaccinations, and allocate a sufficient amount of COVID-19 vaccines to the citizens of all Western Balkan countries;

87. Calls for improved revenue collection and better supervision of publicly-owned enterprises; commends initial progress in reducing tax debt; stresses that further efforts are needed to raise tax revenue by reducing the informal economy and improving the efficiency of tax revenue collection, which could secure more funding for priority areas, including education and health;

Environment, energy and transport

88. Calls on the authorities to ensure alignment with EU standards and policy objectives on climate protection and environment, in line with the commitments made under the Paris Agreement and the strategic objective of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050 as part of the European Green Deal, and asks Kosovo to work on the implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which mirrors European Green Deal priorities;

89. Welcomes the outcome of the Western Balkans summit held on 10 November 2020 in Sofia in the framework of the Berlin process, and continues to support any common initiative to improve integration and good neighbourly relations in the region; welcomes the endorsement of the Declaration on the Green Agenda that aligns with the EU Green Deal, and the readiness expressed by leaders to take measures and align with relevant EU policies setting the goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050;

90. Is deeply concerned that the overwhelming majority of energy in Kosovo derives from coal, as well as at the plans to build a new coal power plant; urges Kosovo to increase the sustainability of its energy sector by diversifying its energy sources, removing without delay all non-compliant coal subsidies, decentralising energy production and moving towards renewables;

91. Notes that the country's legal framework needs to be aligned with the EU Directives on large combustion plants and industrial emissions; calls on Kosovo to conduct environmental impact assessments according to international standards, and adopt the measures necessary to preserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas;

92. Calls on the Kosovo authorities to fulfil their commitment to shutting down and decommissioning Kosovo A power plant; welcomes the willingness of the European Commission to assist the Kosovo Government in this process both financially and technically;

93. Recalls that prioritising and improving energy efficiency measures, including conversion of the existing coal- and petroleum products-based district heating into a high efficiency cogeneration and renewables-based system is a key factor in reaching climate targets; emphasises the importance of tackling energy poverty;

94. Expresses serious concern about the continuing high rate of premature deaths due to polluted air stemming from emissions exceeding the legally established ceilings for large combustion plants; urges the Kosovo authorities to tackle air pollution immediately and to develop a credible plan to phase out coal in a cost-effective way; acknowledges the recent revision of the Energy Sector Strategy to address this issue, and calls on Kosovo to implement its National Emission Reduction Plan;

95. Encourages the Kosovo authorities to give more priority to the enforcement of environmental legislation and biodiversity standards in line with EU *acquis*, as well as to promote environmental awareness and education among Kosovo citizens; encourages Kosovo to adopt the Law on Climate Change as soon as possible, and calls for the development and adoption of an integrated National Energy and Climate Plan without further delay;

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96. Calls on Kosovo to continue to increase waste collection coverage, particularly with the improvement of waste separation and recycling, to introduce circular economy measures to reduce waste and address the issue of illegal dumpsites, and to urgently find the means for disposing of hazardous waste;

97. Is concerned about the low amount of available water resources; calls on Kosovo authorities to respect special natural and protected zones when planning hydropower plants, and not to put in danger the sustainability of the water supply;

98. Calls for the full implementation of the Energy Community Treaty, including the implementation of the State aid *acquis* and full opening of the national electricity market, and moving towards regional market integration; encourages work on regional connectivity and completion of the Regional Energy Market;

99. Calls on Kosovo to implement credible and sustainable public transport and mobility policies for addressing long-standing infrastructure deficiencies, including regular public transport links to North Mitrovica and all major towns throughout the country;

100. Welcomes the adoption of the 2020 IPA Annual Action Programme for Kosovo of a total value of EUR 90 million, and insists that IPA funds are used inter alia to promote the green agenda by reinforcing environmental protection, contributing to mitigation, increasing resilience to climate change, and accelerating the shift towards a low-carbon economy; calls for increased transparency and closer parliamentary scrutiny of the funds allocated to Kosovo, and asks the Commission to better monitor the use of EU funds and report any misuse;

101. Calls on the Commission to focus IPA III funds on the ongoing democratic transition of Kosovo, in addition to infrastructure projects, especially in light of persistent problems with the investment climate, absorption capacity, and environmental standards in Kosovo;

102. Calls for the future IPA III to contain both incentives and conditionality; considers it essential for IPA III to support further strengthening of fundamental values and good governance, and for it to be discontinued in cases of systemic threats to the Union's interests and values; believes that the principle of the reversibility of the accession process under the renewed methodology should also be clearly reflected in pre-accession financing; reiterates that the scale of financial assistance should match the goal of Kosovo's European perspective;

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103. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the European Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and to the President, and the Government and Parliament of Kosovo.
