Thursday 16 January 2014

P7_TA(2014)0039

2013 progress report on Serbia

European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2014 on the 2013 progress report on Serbia (2013/2880(RSP))

(2016/C 482/17)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to the Presidency conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council of 19 and 20 June 2003 concerning the prospect of the Western Balkan countries joining the European Union,

— having regard to Council Decision 2008/213/EC of 18 February 2008 on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the European Partnership with Serbia including Kosovo as defined by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999 and repealing Decision 2006/56/EC ([1]),

— having regard to the Commission opinion of 12 October 2011 on Serbia's application for membership of the European Union (SEC(2011)1208) and to the Commission communication of 12 October 2011 entitled 'Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012' (COM(2011)0666),

— having regard to the General Affairs Council conclusions of 11 December 2012 on Enlargement and Stabilisation and association process,

— having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Communities and their Member States and the Republic of Serbia that entered into force on 1 September 2013; having regard to the first meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, responsible for engaging the European Parliament and the National Assembly of Serbia in continuous dialogue, which took place in November 2013,

— having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999), to the ICJ Advisory Opinion of 22 July 2010 on the question of the accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo, and to the UN General Assembly Resolution of 9 September 2010, which acknowledged the content of the opinion and welcomed the readiness of the EU to facilitate the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina ([2]),

— having regard to the joint statement of the 7th EU-Serbia Interparliamentary Meeting of 18-19 March 2013,

— having regard to the Energy Community Treaty which entered into force on 1 July 2006 and to which Serbia is a signatory, and the Energy Community's Decision D/2012/04/MC/EnC of 18 October 2012 on the implementation of the Renewable Energy (RES) Directive 2009/28/EC and amending Article 20 of the Energy Community Treaty, which sets binding targets,

— having regard to the EU-Serbia readmission agreement of 8 November 2007 ([3]) and to Council Regulation (EC) No 1244/2009 of 30 November 2009 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 ([4]),

— having regards to its resolution of 22 October 2013 on budgetary management of European Union pre-accession funds in the areas of judicial systems and the fight against corruption in the candidate and potential candidate countries ([5]), and the observations on Serbia contained therein,

([1]) OJ L 80, 19.3.2008, p. 46.
([2]) A/RES/64/298.
([3]) OJ L 334, 19.12.2007, p. 46.
([4]) OJ L 336, 18.12.2009, p. 1.
([5]) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0434.

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— having regard to the European Council conclusions of 28 June 2013,

— having regard to the constitution of Serbia's accession negotiation team,

— having regard to the Commission's 2013 progress report on Serbia of 16 October 2013 (SWD(2013)0412),

— having regard to its previous resolutions,

— having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas the European Council of 28 June 2013 decided to open accession negotiations with Serbia, and to hold the first intergovernmental conference in January 2014 at the very latest, reconfirming Serbia's European perspective in line with the EU's commitments to the whole Western Balkans region;

B. whereas Serbia has taken important steps towards the normalisation of relations with Kosovo resulting in the First Agreement on the Principles of Normalisation of 19 April 2013, and has made efforts to sufficiently fulfil the political criteria and conditions of the Stabilisation and Association Process; whereas the accession negotiations constitute a strong monitoring tool for implementation of reforms;

C. whereas, on 25 September 2013, the Commission and Serbia launched the process of screening of the acquis, starting with Chapter 23 — judiciary and fundamental rights;

D. whereas Serbia, like every country aspiring to EU membership, must be judged on its own merits in terms of fulfilling, implementing and complying with the same set of criteria;

E. whereas the EU has placed the rule of law at the core of its enlargement policy;

F. whereas the implementation of the legal framework on the protection of minorities needs to be fully ensured, notably in the areas of education, use of language, and access to media and religious services in minority languages;

G. whereas the Commission has underlined the need to strengthen economic governance in all Western Balkan countries;

1. Looks forward to the formal beginning of accession talks with Serbia which will take place at the first EU-Serbia intergovernmental conference (IGC) on 21 January 2014; considers that the IGC is a historic step for Serbia's European integration process and demonstrates the EU's commitment to the enlargement process; calls on the Serbian authorities to intensify EU-related reforms in the country in the follow-up to the conference, in order to meet Serbian citizens' expectations of a smooth EU accession process and enhance economic recovery by making the perspective of EU membership tangible;

2. Welcomes the commitment shown by the Serbian Government to the European integration process and encourages Serbia to continue with the systemic and socio-economic reforms that will allow it to take on and implement effectively the obligations of future membership; underlines that implementation of reforms remains a key indicator of a successful integration process and, therefore, urges the authorities to step up reform efforts in the areas of the judiciary, the fight against corruption, the public sector, civilian control of defence and security sectors, energy policy with regard, in particular, to energy saving and renewables, media freedom, protection of all minorities and vulnerable groups, as well as their fundamental rights, structural changes to the economy, social dialogue, improvement of the business environment and sustainable management of natural resources;

3. Welcomes the coming into force of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement on 1 September 2013 and the convening of the first Stabilisation and Association Council, which was held on 21 October 2013; stresses that the entry into force of the SAA represents an important step for Serbia's European integration process and provides the general framework for Serbia and the EU to intensify their cooperation regarding political criteria and approximation of the acquis, and to prepare for Serbia's future participation in the Single Market; encourages all involved parties to work together responsibly;

4. Welcomes the First Agreement on the Principles of Normalisation reached in the high-level dialogue between the Prime Ministers of Serbia and Kosovo on 19 April 2013, which opened the way for further steps in the European integration process of Serbia and Kosovo; welcomes the steps taken by both sides so far in the implementation of the agreement and encourages the authorities to continue implementing all agreements reached so far in good faith and in a timely manner; welcomes the agreements on telecommunications and energy reached in dialogue on 8 September 2013; calls, in particular, on both Serbia and Kosovo to actively and constructively cooperate with EULEX as regards the implementation of the agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in order to deal with the growing number of requests concerning properties in Kosovo; calls on both sides to maintain this constructive approach while agreeing on the controversial and sensitive details that still need to be elaborated and agreed on; urges both sides to continue to address the issue of missing persons and welcomes, in this respect, the first results reached in the framework of the Red Cross-chaired Working Group on the Missing Persons; acknowledges the efforts made towards reducing the underground trade between Serbia and Kosovo; notes that further continuous efforts by Serbian and Kosovar leaders will be needed to integrate the Serbian minority in Kosovan society and bring the ethnic Albanian and Serbian communities closer together;

5. Welcomes the first-ever country-wide local elections in Kosovo on 3 November 2013 and in particular the visible voter turnout in Serbian-dominated municipalities to the south of the Ibar river as well as the overall orderly conduct of the local elections in Kosovo, as assessed in the preliminary statement of the EU-EOM as a crucial step towards the formation of the Community of Serbian Municipalities, which is part of the normalisation process; welcomes the efforts which Belgrade and Pristina have invested to ensure that the elections are peaceful and in keeping with democratic norms; strongly condemns the violence and persistent intimidation which occurred in the north Mitrovica and Zvečan municipalities and urges the Serbian authorities to do their utmost to facilitate efforts to bring the perpetrators of violence to justice; notes, in this connection, the Serbian leaders' pledge that those responsible for the outbreak of violence will be held accountable for their actions; notes that further vigilant efforts are needed to break the organised crime network and its ties to local political elites and to re-establish the rule of law in the north of Kosovo; welcomes the stance taken by Serbian political leaders who have actively encouraged ethnic Serbians in Kosovo to participate in the elections, but notes at the same time that Belgrade should not stifle political pluralism in the Serbian community in Kosovo by campaigning on behalf of any particular party or electoral list;

6. Emphasises the need for greater transparency in communicating the outcomes of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and involving the parliaments and civil societies concerned in the implementation process; stresses, in this regard, the need for the Serbian and Kosovo negotiators to build public trust and reach out to citizens, women and men; calls on the Serbian authorities in Belgrade, Mitrovica and south of the Ibar river to do more to increase community interaction between Kosovo Serbs and Albanians, in particular by encouraging schools and community centres to teach the Albanian language; emphasises that Kosovo Albanians must also be strongly encouraged to interact more with the Serbian communities around them and to learn the Serbian language, as a vital element of the integration of the Serbian community in Kosovan society, future dialogue and bi-communal governance;

7. Regrets the ongoing difficulties faced by EU citizens seeking to enter Serbia from Kosovo, and leaving Serbia for a third country afterwards, on account of Serbia's non-recognition of Kosovo's external borders and its assertion that a first entry into Kosovo constitutes an illegal entry into Serbia; regrets also the Serbian border police's annulment stamps super-imposed on Kosovan stamps in foreign passports; encourages Serbia to re-think such policies as a strong confidence-building measure, a necessary step towards normalising relations with Kosovo, and as a concrete means of promoting further EU integration in accordance with the spirit of free movement;

8. Calls on the authorities of Serbia and of neighbouring countries to continue to show good will and to cooperate fully with and support the Special Investigative Task Force established following the December 2010 report of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, and encourages a further speeding up of its work;

9. Appreciates the constructive approach of the Serbian Government to relations with neighbouring countries, since this has enabled substantial progress to be made in achieving both regional cooperation and closer relations with the EU; reiterates the crucial importance of regional cooperation with regard to energy issues, tackling organised crime and developing transport networks, as well as of reconciliation and the gradual resolution of the bilateral issues with neighbouring countries, first and foremost for making progress in overcoming the legacy of recent conflict and subsequently for the success of Serbia's EU integration; encourages the authorities to work closely with the countries of the former Yugoslavia with a view to resolving all outstanding legal succession problems and to fully implement all bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries in due course; calls on Serbia to intensify efforts to resolve all outstanding issues

with Croatia, in particular the issues of missing persons, border demarcation and the processing of war crimes, thus enabling of the removal of obstacles in the way of the lifting of mutual suits on genocide before the International Court of Justice; calls on the Belgrade authorities to actively support and facilitate constitutional changes in BiH aimed at bringing electoral legislation into line with the ECHR ruling on the Sejdić-Finci case and strengthening and streamlining BiH state-level institutions so that the country can move forward on its path towards EU accession;

10. Acknowledges recent progress in locating mass graves and identifying missing persons from the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and urges the Serbian authorities to conduct a more thorough investigation into the archives and officials of the former Yugoslav People's Army;

11. Calls on Serbia to ensure strong parliamentary oversight of the accession negotiation process; reiterates the importance of involving its parliament at an early stage in the incorporation into law of the commitments made and to engage civil society through a constructive consultative mechanism during the entire accession process since it has a major role to play as a critical observer of the continued implementation of European reforms, while ensuring that dialogue and good neighbourly relations with Serbia's neighbours take firm root within society; welcomes the cooperation with Croatia and Montenegro through the efforts made to share good practices based on recent experience, with a view to helping Serbia move speedily and smoothly in the accession process;

12. Welcomes the adoption of the Strategy and the Action Plan on the reform of the judiciary 2013-2018, built around the key principles of independence, impartiality, competence, quality of the judiciary and freedom from political interference; urges the authorities to intensify this reform in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission, especially with regard to the role of the parliament in judicial appointments and the independence of the prosecution, and with a view to the screening process of Chapter 23, which commenced on 25 September 2013; stresses the importance of strengthening the independence of High Judicial and State Prosecutorial Councils and reducing the backlog of cases, as a necessary condition for the successful sequencing of the entire reform process; calls on the authorities to provide all the necessary resources for the Judicial Academy, which should be instrumental in guaranteeing merit-based recruitments; emphasises the need for continuous training of judges and prosecutors to deal with complex financial cases and economic crimes; urges the authorities responsible to ensure a transparent and merit-based process of appointment of judges and prosecutors as well as a solid track-record of disciplinary proceedings against the judicial personnel; insists further on the need to ensure timely justice together with the unification of jurisprudence, the publication of, and easy access to, all judicial decisions immediately after adoption and the random allocation of cases in all courts; is concerned about the legal uncertainty arising from the number of judges carrying out their duties in acting capacity; reiterates the fact that a strong and independent judiciary is key to Serbia's capacity to meet EU membership criteria;

13. Suggests amending the Law on Restitution in order to remove all procedural obstacles and legal impediments concerning restitution in kind; and calls on the Serbian Government to implement the Law on Rehabilitation in a full and non-discriminatory manner; notes that its implementation should be conducted in accordance with the basic principles of criminal law, such as respect for the presumption of innocence;

14. Welcomes the adoption of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy and the Action Plan for 2013-2018 and underlines that continuous work is needed for their meaningful implementation, as part of EU conditionality, without which accession will not succeed; stresses the importance of adequate funding for the proper implementation of the strategy; emphasises that political will is crucial for establishing a solid track record of investigation and conviction in high-profile corruption cases, including the 24 privatisation cases singled out by the Anti-Corruption Council; welcomes, in this connection, the first results and final convictions in the fight against corruption; underlines at the same time the need to build institutional capacity, to reinforce the rule of law and to strengthen inter-agency cooperation, particularly in the judiciary and prosecutorial organs, to deal with complex cases of systemic corruption and financial investigations; considers that the legal competence and resources of the Anti-Corruption Agency should be strengthened; underlines that the funding of all political parties needs to be transparent and in line with EU standards; calls on the authorities to adopt the Law on Whistleblowers and ensure its immediate and smooth implementation as a necessary part of the Anti-Corruption Strategy;

15. Notes that corruption and organised crime are widespread in the region and also represent an obstacle to Serbia's democratic, social and economic development; considers that a regional strategy and enhanced cooperation between all the countries in the region are essential to tackle these issues more effectively;

16. Recognises women as important agents for change in Serbian society; notes the improvement of women's representation in the parliament following the 2012 election; encourages the Serbian authorities to make further efforts to guarantee equal representation; underlines the fact that women still face discrimination on the labour market and in other sectors of society and that they are not yet fully represented in the political life of the country, including in governmental positions; underlines the fact that the effective implementation of the existing legislation on non-discrimination and gender equality and the further strengthening of administrative capacity are still major challenges, urges the Serbian authorities to increase their efforts to address these issues;

17. Calls on the authorities to ensure the credibility and professionalism of the Witness Protection Programme and to provide it with adequate resources so that the judiciary can effectively continue its proceedings on war crimes and organised crime; draws attention to the fact that a number of former police officers voluntarily opted out of the WPP due to its considerable shortcomings;

18. Strongly reiterates its concerns about the decision of the Constitutional Court to repeal the guaranteed 22 competences of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, leaving a worrying number of unresolved issues which need to be addressed; calls, in this connection, for respect to be shown for the principles of the rule of law and subsidiarity; reminds the parties again that, under the terms of the Constitution, the law on the financing of the Autonomous Province should have been adopted by the end of 2008; encourages the government, therefore, to submit the matter to the parliament without any further delay, as it is vital to the functioning of democracy and the rule of law in Serbia;

19. Underlines the importance of constructive social dialogue for economic development in Serbia; urges the government to promote capacity building for genuinely independent unions and employers' organisations and to create a framework and political space for social dialogue and collective agreements;

20. Stresses the importance of promoting and protecting at all levels human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the principle of no -discrimination on any grounds; welcomes the adoption of the Anti-Discrimination Strategy and underlines the fact that its implementation is key; welcomes the progress achieved so far, but continues to be concerned about the level of discrimination in the country and calls for respect for all minorities, as regards nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and in terms of securing socio-economic and cultural rights; points to the fact that special focus should be placed on the categories most exposed to discrimination and discriminatory practices, such as the Roma, women, persons with disabilities and children; calls on the proper implementation of Serbia's Roma strategy; calls for better protection of women's rights and gender equality policies and stresses the need for full implementation of the UN Security Council resolution 1325 and the inclusion of gender perspective in all relevant government policies; strongly condemns the authorities' decision to ban the planned September 2013 Belgrade Pride Parade as in the previous two years, and calls for political support to be given to human rights for LGBTI persons at the highest political level; insists that the right to public assembly must be ensured for all citizens and minorities, including the LGBTI minority; calls on the Serbian authorities to develop a proactive approach to more effective inclusion of the LGBTI population; urges the government to step up efforts throughout the year to combat in a comprehensive manner the violent groups that have sought to disrupt and attack peaceful demonstrations by the LGBTI community, in order to prevent these groups from undermining the rule of law and the exercise of human rights in Serbia; calls also on the Serbian authorities to address the problem of the traumatic aftermath of the 1990s violence as part of a long-term strategy to prevent the recurrence of hooliganism and lawlessness;

21. Stresses the central role of active and independent civil society organisations (CSOs) in strengthening and consolidating democratic political processes in the country; recognises the important work carried out by CSOs and women's organisations with regard to promoting LGBT rights, ending violence against women, increasing female participation in politics, efforts towards peace building and civil society's role as a watchdog; underlines the importance of dialogue with CSOs and stresses the crucial role of civil society actors in contributing to enhanced regional cooperation on social and political issues; welcomes the government's improved cooperation with NGOs, but calls for their broader consultation in policy making, including the formulation of policies and legislation and the monitoring of the authorities' activities;

22. Calls for stronger political commitment in the reform of public administration and efforts to establish a merit-based system, particularly in ensuring the completion of the legislative framework and its full alignment with international standards; considers it regrettable that the Law on Public Servants does not apply to local authorities;

23. Underlines the fact that Serbia has ratified the major labour rights conventions of the ILO and the revised European Social Charter; draws attention to the fact that labour and trade union rights still remain limited despite constitutional guarantees, and calls on Serbia to further enhance these rights; is concerned that the social dialogue is still weak and consultation of the social partners irregular; calls for further steps to be taken to strengthen the Economic and Social Council so as to ensure that it can take an active part in strengthening the social dialogue and play a more active consultative role in law making;

24. Emphasises the need to ensure freedom of the media, and welcomes in this connection the decriminalisation of defamation; points to the need to maintain a strong and independent public broadcasting service and ensure its stable and sustainable financing, as well as to secure complete transparency in media ownership; encourages the swift implementation of the media strategy and related draft legislation, including the early provision of widespread internet access; is deeply concerned about continued threats against journalists and reiterates its call on the authorities to bring pending investigations of the murdered journalists to an end; considers that further steps should be taken in order to provide journalists with a safe environment to carry out their work effectively and without self-censorship; draws particular attention to the danger of misusing public funds on advertisements to wield political influence over media outlets;

25. Calls on the Serbian Government to work increasingly with European institutions in order to ensure better access to European funds made available to civil society organisations, with a view to supporting their work as essential actors in Serbia's European integration process;

26. Stresses the need to step up efforts to combat trafficking in human beings and encourages the formalisation of the roles and responsibilities of officials and service providers in identifying victims and referring them to the appropriate services;

27. Reiterates its call on the authorities to continue their efforts to eliminate the legacy of the former Communist secret services, as a step towards the democratisation of Serbia; calls on Serbia to intensify the process of succession and implementation of obligations relating to the division of property, and the agreement on the division of the common archive of the former Yugoslavia; reiterates, in this connection, that full access to all archival materials, especially those of the former Yugoslav Secret Services (UDBA), is of vital significance; reiterates its call to the authorities to facilitate access to those archives that concern the former republics of Yugoslavia and to return them to their respective governments if they so request;

28. Calls on the Serbian Government to enable research to be conducted into the former dictatorial regimes, to rehabilitate both politically and judicially and to compensate former victims and their families who suffered under those regimes as part of the efforts to strengthen social cohesion and ensure lasting peace and justice in the context of Serbia's European integration process;

29. Calls for the effective implementation of the legislation and bilateral and multilateral agreements on national and ethnic minorities ([1]) in an equal, non-discriminatory and proportional manner throughout the country; calls on the authorities to promote a climate of tolerance and equal treatment, without any discrimination against national and ethnic minorities, including access to education in the mother tongue, and use of languages in local and regional public administration; calls also for improvements in order to eliminate discrimination in existing laws and practices concerning property restitution for members belonging to national and ethnic minorities; underlines the importance of National Minority Councils, their role in the integration of national minorities such as in the implementation of the individual and collective rights of national minorities, and calls on the authorities to provide uninterrupted and adequate financial resources for their work; calls on the authorities to ensure a smooth electoral process for the 2014 election to the National Minority Councils, in line with the recommendations made by the independent bodies; expresses concern about the possible interruption of the broadcasting of programmes in minority languages because of the announced privatisation of the media;

([1]) Serbia recognises the following national and ethnic minorities: Albanians, Bosniacs, Bulgarians, Bunjevci, Croatians, Czechs, Germans, Gorani, Hungarians, Macedonians, Roma, Romanians, Rusini, Slovakians, Ukrainians, Vlachs and others.

30. Stresses the need to address more vigorously the situation of Roma women and men, who are still faced with difficult living conditions, forced evictions and discrimination in the labour market; calls on the Serbian authorities to provide access to housing and health care services; emphasises the need to fully harmonise anti-discrimination legislation with EU policies and to apply a holistic approach towards Roma inclusion; points also to the need for effective monitoring of inclusion measures in order to narrow the gap between legislation and its implementation;

31. Takes note of the work on amending the Criminal Code; notes, however, that legal uncertainty persists in the private sector following the adopted amendments; reiterates its concern about the provisions of the new Article 234 on abuse of responsible positions, which still leaves room for arbitrary interpretation, and calls for existing unjust prosecutions brought under Article 359 in the private sector to be dropped immediately, in order to restore the rule of law in the country and introduce legal certainty for the business community in Serbia;

32. Insists that state institutions must act in a transparent and accountable manner; commends the work of independent regulatory bodies such as the Ombudsman, the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance, and others, and acknowledges their contribution to improving the legal framework and accountability of state institutions; urges the authorities to systematically follow up on their recommendations and findings;

33. Highlights the benefits of the decentralisation process and encourages the strengthening of the competency of local authorities; regrets that the National Council for Decentralisation continues to be inactive; remains particularly concerned about the legal uncertainty of the status of Vojvodina and the delay in adopting the Law on Vojvodina's own resources;

34. Welcomes the steps taken by the authorities to improve the socio-economic situation in the Preševo Valley and Sandžak, but underlines that further efforts are needed as these regions remain significantly underdeveloped and still have a high unemployment rate; draws attention to the fact that ethnic Albanian and Bosniac minorities continue to be underrepresented in local administrations; asks the Council and the Commission to strongly support such development strategies;

35. Reiterates its support for the REKOM initiative and strongly encourages the countries of the former Yugoslavia to set up an intergovernmental commission tasked with establishing the facts about the victims and missing persons of the 1991-2001 wars;

36. Welcomes Serbia's cooperation with the ICTY, which has resulted in all war crimes suspects being handed over to the Hague Tribunal for trial, an important step towards European integration; encourages further cooperation with the Tribunal and other former Yugoslav republics in order to bring justice to the victims and their families;

37. Calls on the government to take up the recommendations contained in the OSCE/ODIHR final report on the parliamentary, local and early presidential elections of May 2012, especially with regard to the resolution of electoral disputes, the transparency of voter registration and political finance, as well as to consolidate and harmonise the legal framework for elections in Serbia, given that, according to international standards, any changes to electoral laws should be carried out well before any elections;

38. Reaffirms its staunch support for visa liberalisation for the Western Balkan countries as an important pillar of the European integration process for the whole region, but at the same time is very concerned about the rising numbers of false asylum seekers; calls, in this regard, on the Member States not to abuse the visa suspension mechanism adopted in September 2013, but rather to addressthis issue by adapting their respective legislative frameworks and to designate Serbia as a 'country of safe origin', as the key measure in the efforts to curb the numbers of false asylum applicants; calls, at the same time, for measures at national level, in particular socio-economic measures for more vulnerable groups, as well as for active measures to crack down on the organised crime networks involved in trafficking;

39. Encourages the Serbian authorities to strengthen tax collection and to conduct a responsible fiscal policy; stresses that wide-ranging structural reforms should support fiscal consolidation and encourages the government, therefore, to undertake overdue structural economic reforms, such as the Law on Planning and Construction, so as to improve the investment and business climate, further support the proliferation of small and medium-sized enterprises, combat the high level of unemployment and poverty, especially in regions predominantly populated with national minorities, and carry out a pension reform in order to introduce a sustainable pension system; insists on the urgent need to abolish administrative barriers to business and points to the importance of swift restructuring of public companies in order to reduce the losses

and the state's presence in the economy; calls, to this end, on the Serbian authorities to promote a fully functioning market economy, build a strong tax base and elaborate a poverty strategy as key elements in making Serbia's accession to the EU viable; urges the Serbian authorities to consult civil society and the business community and to include them in working groups on the drafting of new legislation; urges the Serbian authorities to restore business confidence through regulatory and legal reform; notes that the successful introduction and implementation of structural economic reforms will help to ease the high level of migration;

40. Welcomes the work done so far by the Agency for Restitution; encourages restitution in kind wherever it is deemed possible; welcomes the Ministry of the Economy's decision to compile a full list of public and state property and thereby put an end to its illegal acquisition by private interests; underlines that a thorough list of public and state property remains essential for success in the fight against systemic corruption as there is a wide gap between actual and officially recorded state and public property;

41. Calls on the authorities to make every effort to minimise the adverse effects of economic policies, such us the poverty, unemployment and social exclusion, but also to address and combat their root causes and promote development;

42. Regrets the lack of progress and continuing delays in the practical implementation of the renewable energy framework; notes that Serbia lags behind other applicant countries in the utilisation of renewable energy sources and expresses concern that Serbia's 2020 renewable energy targets will not be met; emphasises the need for transparency in government consultation processes and regrets the Serbian authorities' failure to take account of the views of international financial institutions in the adoption of the Power Purchasing Agreement (PPA);

43. Considers it regrettable that too little progress has been made in the areas of the environment and climate change and calls on the Serbian authorities to adopt a comprehensive climate strategy in line with EU targets as quickly as possible;

44. Stresses that Serbia, as well as the rest of the countries in the region, will in the coming years need to implement the EU's environmental standards and adopt targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as they have already adopted targets for renewable energy for 2020; notes that in the Energy Strategy of the Energy Community adopted in 2012, Serbia indicates plans to increase the production of electricity from coal in large combustion plants, and points out that this is in contradiction with the planned reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; calls, in this regard, on the Serbian authorities to adopt an energy policy in line with EU targets and, in particular, to benefit from the recent decision of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to finance a EUR 75 million project designed to provide credit lines to local banks in Western Balkans countries for on-lending to private and municipal borrowers for purposes of energy efficiency and renewable energy investments;

45. Urges the Serbian authorities to improve consumer protection policies, in particular with regard to general food safety principles and the establishment of a national reference laboratory; considers it regrettable that the law on genetically modified organisms has not yet been aligned with EU legislation;

46. Supports the Belgrade city authorities' campaign for Belgrade as European Capital of Culture 2020, and encourages related projects aimed at bringing Belgrade and Serbia culturally closer to the EU, in particular with regard to interethnic coexistence, multicultural understanding and interreligious dialogue;

47. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Government and Parliament of Serbia.