EUROPEAN UNION - SERBIA
STABILISATION and ASSOCIATION
PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE (SAPC)

11th Meeting

30-31 October 2019
Belgrade

**DECLARATION and RECOMMENDATIONS**

The European Union-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) held its eleventh meeting in Belgrade on 30-31 October 2019, under the co-chairmanship of Ms Tanja FAJON for the European Parliament Delegation and Mr Vladimir ORLIĆ for the National Assembly of Republic of Serbia Delegation.

It exchanged views with:

* **H.E. Mr Kimmo LÄHDEVIRTA**, Ambassador of Finland to the Republic of Serbia, on behalf of the Finnish Presidency‑in‑Office of the Council,
* **Ms Mateja NORČIČ ŠTAMCAR**, Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to the Republic of Serbia, on behalf of the European Union,
* **Ms Jadranka JOKSIMOVIĆ**, Minister of European Integration, on behalf of the Government of Serbia.

The members of the Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee addressed the following subjects:

* State of play of the accession negotiations and EU-Serbia relations;
* Assessment of progress in negotiating Chapters 23 and 24;
* Electoral framework and processes: state of play and future steps;
* EU-facilitated Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina;
* EU institutional renewal and the enlargement perspective;

The Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, in accordance with Rule 7 of its Rules of Procedure and Article 125 of the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Agreement, addressed the following Declaration and Recommendations to the Stabilisation and Association Council and to the institutions of Serbia and of the European Union:

1. Welcomed the continued progress of Serbia made in the accession negotiations, bringing the total number of chapters opened to 17, two of which had been provisionally closed; called on the newly elected European Parliament and the newly composed European Commission to remain vocal proponents and keep up the momentum of the enlargement process, as one of the key priorities and called for more positive messages from the European Council in this regard; expressed support for Serbia’s 2025 European perspective and recalled that a credible enlargement perspective required sustained efforts and irreversible reforms;
2. Noted that EU integration remained Serbia’s strategic goal and encouraged Serbian authorities to continue their efforts to promote European values and to strengthen the citizens’ awareness of the concrete results and visible benefits of European integration process through active communication strategy; noted that the EU is by far the biggest contributor to Serbia; underlined the importance of increasing the visibility and informing the public in the EU and Serbia about the resulted benefits;
3. Welcomed the acceptance of the proposal to establish a European Parliament facilitated inter‑party dialogue in the Narodna Skupština; welcomed the participation of all political parties that engaged in the dialogue and called on those political parties that still had not accepted the invitation to take a proactive approach and engage in the dialogue with a view to improving the quality of political dialogue within Serbia’s National Assembly and the electoral environment ahead of the 2020 elections; commended the adoption of the Summary of Conclusions of the First Inter-party Dialogue in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, held on 9-10 October 2019, on improving the conditions for holding Parliamentary Elections; emphasised the importance of the second phase of the EP’s mediation long-term activities for strengthening the culture of parliamentary dialogue, improving the political atmosphere, practices and procedures inside the National Assembly;
4. Regretted the boycott of the parliamentary sessions by part of the opposition; underlined that the parliament was the institution for resolving political differences; called on the opposition parties to refrain from boycotting the work of the National Assembly as well as the 2020 elections since participating in elections and in the work of the National Assembly are the cornerstone of any democratic society;
5. Emphasised the importance of accepting the EP’s mediation in strengthening the culture of parliamentary dialogue in the National Assembly; welcomed important steps that had been taken just after EC Progress Report recommendations; welcomed that a set of measures was put in place in order to improve the work of the National Assembly, with the result of a significant reduction in urgent procedures, as well as the reduction in amendments and the grouping of unrelated items; commended that annual reports of independent bodies were discussed in plenary sessions; stressed the need for an effective follow‑up on recommendations by independent oversight bodies; encouraged all political parties to further enhance political dialogue and ensure the proper functioning of the National Assembly;
6. Noted that some progress had been made in accordance with the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations from previous elections; stressed the need to fully implement all remaining recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission final report addressing its priority recommendations in the first place; welcomed the establishment of a dedicated intergovernmental working group for cooperation with OSCE and ODIHR on the implementation of election recommendations and the fact that the Government adopted conclusions of the mentioned working group;
7. Recalled that further progress on rule of law and fundamental rights chapters, as well as the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina under chapter 35, remained essential for the pace of accession negotiations; called on the Council and the Commission to support opening of additional technically prepared chapters;
8. Noted that the legal and institutional framework for upholding human rights was broadly in place and called for its more effective implementation, in particular regarding national minorities in the areas of education, official use of minority languages and adequate representation of minorities in the public administration and judiciary; noted the progress made in the area of education and the positive result achieved in the process of preparing and printing textbooks in minority languages; emphasised the importance of empowering women and youth in the labour market; welcomed successful organisation of the Belgrade Pride Parade on 15September 2019;
9. Reiterated the importance of freedom of expression and media and called for further progress in this area; noted the progress achieved in preparing a first draft of the media strategy in a transparent and an inclusive manner and called for its finalisation and adoption; stressed the importance of prevention and effective follow-up through investigation and adjudication of cases, as regards threats, intimidation, harassment, hate speech and physical violence against journalists and in this regard noted recent first steps taken under the Agreement on Cooperation and Measures for Improvement of Security of Journalists between the Prosecution, Ministry of Interior and media associations; called on to ensure effective oversight by the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) over media service providers in election campaign and publishing reports in a proactive and timely manner; welcomed the plan to form in the forthcoming period the Supervisory Board of the National Assembly for the control of print and electronic media during the election campaign;
10. Noted the involvement of several civil society organisations (CSOs) on improving the legal electoral framework and the practice of conducting elections and electoral campaigns; welcomed their contribution during the EP facilitated inter-party dialogue and their future involvement in the process; underlined that the parliament’s role was highly important in this process and that continuous cooperation with CSOs additionally strengthen its role; condemned any verbal or physical attacks, pressure on and negative campaign against CSOs; welcomed the measures taken towards transparency and the consultation process, including public hearings, regular meetings and consultations with the National Convention on the European Union (NCEU), as an important part of the negotiation procedure; and commended the cooperation among relevant parliamentary committees, as well as between the European Integration Committee and the NCEU;
11. Recalled the need for further strengthening the independence and accountability of the judiciary, including through the ongoing constitutional reform; encouraged Serbia to work towards further strengthening its track record as regards the fight against corruption and organised crime; commended that Serbia was removed from the FATF list;
12. Commended Serbia’s further progress towards establishing a functioning market economy; encouraged Serbia to continue efforts to boost competitiveness and improve business environment, to tackle youth unemployment and brain-drain; commended the implemented economic reforms and encouraged Serbia to continue with the structural reforms presented in the Economic Reform Programme 2019‑2021 (ERP); stressed that the cooperation between the EU and Serbia in order to promote economic growth, through innovation, connectivity, new technologies is essential;
13. Regretted the current impasse in high level talks within the framework of the EU‑facilitated Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina due to the imposition of 100% tariffs on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina by Pristina in November 2018; called on Pristina to revoke without further delay these measures, which are in violation of the spirit of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) and the letter of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA); reiterated the need for constructive engagement in the Dialogue in order to achieve a comprehensive and legally binding agreement on normalisation of relations; reiterated its call for the full implementation of all agreements reached in the EU‑facilitated Dialogue and in particular urged to establish the Association/Community of Serb‑majority Municipalities and implement the agreement on energy; welcomed the continued commitment by Belgrade in the Dialogue with Pristina;
14. Reiterated its call on Serbia to progressively align with the EU’s foreign and security policy, in line with the requirements of its Negotiating Framework and the Stabilisation and Association Agreement; commended Serbia’s active participation in EU CSDP missions and operations and in the roster of the EU Battle Groups, as well as its efforts to identify opportunities for cooperation with the European Defence Agency; encouraged Serbia to progressively align with the EU common visa policy;
15. Recalled that regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations were essential part of the enlargement and Stabilisation and Association processes; stressed the need for the region to overcome legacies of the past and to foster mutual trust and to create a climate conducive to solving open bilateral issues and cooperate more intensively; recalled the statement from the Sofia Declaration that the EU was determined to strengthen and intensify its engagement at all levels to support the region's political, economic and social transformation, its stability and security including through increased assistance;
16. Welcomed the fact that the Finnish presidency considered enlargement policy as a strategic investment in peace, stability and development in Europe; invited the upcoming Croatian Presidency to bring new impetus to the enlargement process at the EU‑Western Balkans Summit, to be held in May 2020; emphasised that committing to core European values was essential for all partners aspiring to gain EU membership; underscored the importance of the approach by which the evaluation of the progress of each country was carried out on the basis of individual merit without any risk for the membership candidates to be slowed down by one another in the process; stressed the unambiguous support to Serbia in the European integration process.