

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

10th Meeting

27 March 2019

Strasbourg

DECLARATION and RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Union-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) held its tenth meeting in Strasbourg on 27 March 2019, under the co-chairmanship of Mr Eduard KUKAN for the European Parliament Delegation and Mr Vladimir ORLIĆ for the National Assembly of Republic of Serbia Delegation.

It exchanged views with:

- **Mr Jugoslav MILAČIĆ**, Adviser to the Minister for European Integration and Member of the Negotiation team, on behalf of the Government of Serbia,
- **Mr George CIAMBA**, Minister delegate for European Affairs, on behalf of the Romanian Presidency-in-Office of the Council,
- **Mr Christos MAKRIDIS**, Acting Head of Unit for Serbia, Directorate General for European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations, on behalf of the European Commission;
- **Mr Clive RUMBOLD**, Deputy Head of Division 'Western Balkans' in the European External Action Service, on behalf of the European External Action Service,

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

- State of play of the accession negotiations and EU-Serbia relations;
- Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina;

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 16, two of which had been provisionally closed; expressed support for Serbia's 2025 European perspective and recalled that a credible enlargement perspective required sustained efforts and irreversible reforms; welcomed the continuous citizens' support for Serbia's accession to the European Union; called the European Commission and the Government of the Republic of Serbia to continue their coordinated efforts to strengthen the citizens' awareness of the practical results and visible benefits of European integration through active communication; stressed the importance of the enlargement process as one of the key priorities and called for the European Union to uphold its commitment in this regard;
2. Recalled that the country's consistent progress under rule of law chapters 23 and 24 and in the process of normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina under chapter 35 remained essential for the overall pace of the negotiating process, in line with the Negotiating Framework, and called for tangible and sustained progress in this regard; in light of the aforementioned progress called on the Council and the Commission to support opening of additional technically prepared chapters and underlined the need for informed, transparent, timely and constructive public debates on the EU, its institutions and the benefits and implications of membership including accession related policy reforms;
3. 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 continuing commitment by Belgrade in the Dialogue on normalisation of relations with Pristina;
4. Emphasised the importance of the parliamentary dimension in the EU accession process, as well as the mutual cooperation between national parliaments' working bodies and the European Parliament; reiterated its concern that frequent use of urgent procedures and other parliamentary practices could undermine parliamentary effectiveness, quality and transparency of the law-making process, while not always allowing for sufficient stakeholder and wider public consultation; underlined that the parliament's oversight function was highly important in this process and that continuous cooperation with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) could additionally strengthen its role; 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; noted that the relevant Committees considered annual reports of independent state institutions and regulatory bodies for the year 2017 in order to submit their proposals for conclusions to the plenary of the National Assembly and encouraged discussion of such reports as well as the most recent annual reports of the European Commission in committees on a regular basis;

5. Noted the boycott of the parliamentary sessions by part of the opposition, and their protests; condemned the forcible entry into the public media service, and underlined that the parliament was the institution for resolving political differences; called on all parliamentary political parties to engage in a constructive cross-party political dialogue as it represents the basis of a functional parliament;
6. Noted that some progress had been made in accordance with OSCE/ODIHR recommendations from previous elections; stressed the need to fully implement remaining recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission final report addressing its priority recommendations in the first place;
7. Reiterated the importance of freedom of expression and media and called for progress in this area; stressed the importance of prevention of any possible 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 and called for further effective action; called for decisive improvement of the situation regarding freedom of expression and noted claims about self-censorship of the media; called for the full implementation of media laws; welcomed the delivery of a first draft of the new media strategy prepared in an inclusive manner; called for the improvement of the culture of journalism and consistent work of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media; underlined the importance of complete transparency in media ownership and funding of the media; stressed the importance of communicating benefits of the EU integration process to Serbia's citizens;
8. Noted that the legal and institutional framework regarding national minorities in Serbia was in place and called for its more effective implementation, in particular in the areas of education, official use of minority languages and adequate representation of minorities in the public administration and judiciary; welcomed that after the elections of the National Minority Councils, which had taken place on 4 November 2018, National Councils of the National Minorities had been established and emphasised the fact that the persons belonging to national minority communities had actively taken part in the elections, as evidenced by data on the increased number of registered voters and significantly higher turnout compared to 2014; commended Serbia for maintaining such mechanisms and structures;

9. Acknowledged that the Venice Commission Secretariat had considered that the proposal, which had been submitted to the National Assembly in November 2018, followed the recommendations of the Venice Commission June 2018 Opinion; recalled the need for strengthening the independence and accountability of the judiciary in line with this proposal through the finalisation of the ongoing constitutional reform; acknowledged the efforts taken to increase the merit-based aspects in the elections of judges and prosecutors, as well as the measures undertaken to further reduce the backlog of cases and the harmonisation of case law; welcomed the adoption of the Law on Free Legal Aid and Law on protection of personal data;
10. Acknowledged that Serbia had started to implement the Law on Organisation and Jurisdiction of Government Authorities in Suppression of Organised Crime, Terrorism and Corruption; called upon Serbia to develop a more robust track record of final convictions, including into high level corruption cases; encouraged Serbia to further intensify its efforts in the fight against corruption and organised crime and to fully implement the recommendations from the GRECO evaluation reports, acknowledging that a Law on Lobbying had been adopted; noted the ongoing process of revising the Law on Corruption Prevention and Serbia's efforts in following-up on the assessment by a GRECO affiliated expert as regards the draft in light of the GRECO recommendations; the adopted law needs to comply with all GRECO recommendations and European best practices and aim at strengthening the Agency to play its key role in an independent manner; stressed the continued importance of the completion of the implementation of the action plan agreed with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF);
11. Noted that Serbia had made further good progress towards establishing a functioning market economy; welcomed the positive developments in the Serbian economy in terms of higher economic growth, reduced unemployment, stable prices and good budgetary performance; encouraged further efforts to maintain the growth momentum, improve the investment climate, complete key structural reforms and sustain good fiscal results; encouraged Serbia to continue with the structural reforms presented in the Economic Reform Programme 2019-2021 (ERP);
12. Encouraged Serbia, with the EU's support and assistance, to establish ambitious 2030 targets for decarbonisation, renewable energy and energy efficiency in order to bring about the necessary energy transition in line with the 2015 Paris Agreement and with Energy Community obligations based on the EU Clean Energy for All Europeans Package; reiterated its call on Serbia to develop its energy policy in order to decrease its dependence on existing gas imports;
13. Fully recognised the importance of an empowered, resilient and diverse civil society as a crucial component of any democratic system, recognised and treated as such;
14. Reiterated its call on Serbia to progressively align its foreign and security policy with that of the EU, in line with the requirements of its Negotiating Framework and that of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and expressed the expectation that the level of alignment with the EU CFSP would rise; 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;

15. Recalled that regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations were essential parts 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;
16. Expressed further support for increased regional cooperation under the Berlin Process, including on reconciliation; stressed, however, that the Berlin Process cannot become a surrogate of the enlargement process; called for the further development of the Regional Economic Area (REA), which already at this stage had a positive impact on regional trade flows; welcomed the unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkans reaffirmed at the Sofia Summit on 17 May 2018, as well as the adoption of the Sofia Declaration; 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, including through increased assistance; welcomed the adoption of the joint declarations in the framework of the Western Balkans Summit held on 10 July 2018 in London; welcomed the signing of the Joint Declaration on Clean Energy by energy and environment ministers in Podgorica on 21 February; welcomed the fact the Serbia would be hosting the Western Balkans Digital Summit on 4-5 April 2019 and praised Serbia's readiness to sign the Regional Roaming Agreement that would further lower roaming costs in the region and pave the way for a roadmap to facilitate roaming costs between the Western Balkans and the EU; welcomed that the next Summit on the Western Balkans within the Berlin Process, to be held in Poznań, Poland, on 5 July 2019, identified four key topics: connectivity agenda, economic and business cooperation, civil society cooperation and cultural cooperation, as well as security cooperation in the region;
17. Commended the EU financial assistance to Serbia IPA II 2014-2020 for the implementation of the programmes and projects, which would contribute to the implementation of political, economic, judicial and institutional reforms as a prerequisite for Serbia's progress in its EU accession process;
18. Emphasised the importance of the approach by which the evaluation of the progress of each country is carried out on the basis of individual merit; emphasised the unambiguous support to Serbia in the European integration process, and that the enlargement should be decided on the basis of individual results, without any risk for the membership candidates to be slowed down by one another in the process.