

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

4th Meeting

7-8 October 2015

Strasbourg

**DECLARATION and RECOMMENDATIONS**

The EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) held its fourth meeting on 7-8 October 2015 in Strasbourg, under the co-chairmanship of Mr Igor ŠOLTES for the European Parliament Delegation and Mr Vladimir ORLIĆ for the National Assembly of Republic of Serbia Delegation.

It exchanged views with:

- Mr Nicolas SCHMIT, Minister of Labour, Employment and the Social and Solidarity Economy, on behalf of the Luxembourgish Presidency-in-Office of the Council of EU,
- Mr Jean-Eric PAQUET, Director for Western Balkans, DG for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, on behalf of the European Commission,
- Ms Ksenija MILENKOVIĆ, Director (acting) of the European Integration Office, 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;
- Refugee crisis facing EU and Serbia;
- Dialogue on normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Prishtina;
- Situation in employment including reforms of the labour law and reductions in the public sector;
- Protection of human rights and liberties, including freedom of media.

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 fact that Serbia has taken major steps to be able to open first negotiation chapters and encouraged authorities to proceed on the path of reform in order to strengthen growth and employment; called for implementation of the adopted action plans and measures and consequently called upon the EU Member States to agree on opening first negotiation chapters before the end of the year, taking into account recent developments and fulfillment of the recommendations of the European Commission;
2. Highly welcomed further steps taken in order to normalise relations between Prishtina and Belgrade and the results achieved at the last round of the EU-facilitated Dialogue; called both sides of the Dialogue to fully implement reached agreements and asked the European Commission and the European External Actions Service to continue their role as mediators in the Dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtina;
3. Welcomed the outcome of the Vienna conference of the EU and Western Balkan leaders organised as part of the "Berlin Process" in an effort to reinvigorate the enlargement process, the establishment of future TEN-T corridor lines through Serbia and other Western Balkan states as effective means of strengthening regional cooperation and stability, expressed support for Balkans Civil Society Forum which met parallel to the government summit to share a series of recommendations addressing inter alia regional cooperation, youth employment, media freedoms, and the necessary increased engagement of civil society and called for adequate follow-up on its implementation prior to the conference in Paris in 2016;
4. Encouraged Serbia to continue playing positive role in the regional cooperation; welcomed the good political dialogue between Serbia and BiH, which among the others included the Serbian Prime Minister's presence during the Srebrenica commemoration and visit to Belgrade of all three members of the BiH Presidency; expressed its strong support to the RECOM initiative and called for positive steps in the region to implement this initiative in the practice;
5. Welcomed the EU's readiness to step up humanitarian and financial assistance to Serbia in order to help with continuous, immense refugee pressures, as well as the launch of the Civil Protection Mechanism and called for further support in this regard; urged the EU Member States to address the current refugee crisis in coordinated manner with full involvement of the enlargement countries affected by the extraordinary flow of migrants; welcomed Serbia's quick humanitarian response and substantial actions taken to provide the best possible shelters for thousands of refugees in its territory;
6. Reiterated the importance of freedom of expression and free media and strongly supported impartiality, professionalism and journalists' ethics; noted with concern claims about self-censorship of media outlets and noted a disproportion between the views supportive and critical towards the authorities; called for improvement of the culture of journalism and strengthening of self-regulatory system and consistent work of the Republic Regulatory Agency in order to prevent the tabloidization of media and noted importance of data protection and access to information in this context; called for thorough investigation of all attacks against journalists that occurred in the past and continuous provision of security of the journalists; expressed conviction that full implementation of the set of media laws, transparency concerning media ownership, clear guidelines for advertising campaigns and media time procurement, and further privatisation of media will add a significant value to the overall state of the play; emphasized that freedom of media should be evaluated through possibility for citizens to receive impartial and objective information, including the ones that are critical of government and where alternative sources of information are available to all;

7. Called for further execution of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Judicial Reform Strategy for the period 2013-2018, as well as to start working on constitutional amendments to improve the position of the judiciary, if recommended by the independent experts of the TAIEX program, and on legal changes to address the quality and consistency of judicial practice and judicial education; noted the backlog of the court cases and strongly supported faster processing the court cases according to the Supreme Court of Cassation's reduction programme in this regard;
8. Welcomed the economic reforms, which improved the budgetary situation of Serbia and called upon the Commission to continue supporting the government in its plans to conduct further reforms; expressed support for the Serbian authorities in their efforts to cut the employment in the public sector;
9. Commended the work of the Office of Ombudsman including its cooperation with the National Assembly and contribution to improving the legal framework, accountability and transparency of state authorities; emphasized the importance of full respect for independence of Ombudsman; underlined that Ombudsman's office plays an essential role in maintaining an efficient system of checks and balances of the government and state institutions and as such must be provided with all necessary support to carry out its duties;
10. Noted the significant difference in views regarding the sanctions towards Russia as well as regarding the military exercises with this country and invited Serbia to gradually align with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and encouraged higher percentage of its alignment, as well as participation in the EU civilian and military missions;
11. Welcomed the fact that the Belgrade Pride took peacefully place for the second year in a row with full respect of human rights and freedoms, and existing laws; welcomed as well a fact that Pride of the Roma community was organised without problems for the first time; commended the government's work on the National Strategy for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination from 2013 and the 2014 Action Plan for implementation and called on Serbian authorities for further execution thereof; encouraged the Serbian authorities to address hate crimes against LGBTI persons head on;
12. Welcomed that the European Commission accepted the final draft of the Action plan on Chapter 23 and 24; recalled upon the importance of the specialised action plan on national minorities, the efficiency of the drafting process and its implementation; noted the importance of preserving the attained level of minority rights, especially in the field of education and official use of languages; noted the importance of maintaining local media in minority languages in the ongoing process of their privatization;
13. Called for the strengthening of the role of the National Assembly as the highest representative body of the citizens; in particular underlined the necessity to strengthen its oversight function; encouraged the Parliament to further develop informative debates and to continue to facilitate regular consultations with the wider public and the civil society, as an indispensable prerequisite for the successful process of Serbia's accession to the EU.