

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

14th Meeting
23-24 November 2022
Strasbourg

DECLARATION and RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Union-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) held its fourteenth meeting on 23-24 November 2022, in Strasbourg, co-chaired by Ms Alessandra MORETTI on behalf of the European Parliament Delegation and Ms Marinika TEPIĆ on behalf of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia Delegation.

It exchanged views with:

- Ms Tanja MIŠČEVIĆ, Minister for EU Integration, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Serbia,
- Mr Jaroslav KURFÜRST, Deputy Minister for Europe, on behalf of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU,
- Mr Michael MILLER, Head of Unit for Montenegro and Serbia, DG NEAR, on behalf of the European Commission,
- Mr Clive RUMBOLD, Senior expert, 'South-East Europe & Western Balkans' Division, on behalf of the European External Action Service.

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

- State of play of the accession negotiations and EU-Serbia relations
- Cluster 1 - Fundamentals, with a focus on Chapters 23 and 24, including fundamental rights, freedom of expression and assembly and the implementation of the constitutional amendments
- State of play of Cluster 4 with a focus on chapter 27 on environment and climate change
- Cluster 3 - Competitiveness and inclusive growth, with a focus on economic development
- EU-Serbia cooperation in CFSP/CSDP and alignment with the CFSP
- EU-facilitated 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 Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, on the one hand, and the Republic of Serbia on the other hand, addressed the following Declaration and Recommendations to the Stabilisation and Association Council and to the institutions of Serbia and of the European Union:

1. *Welcomes* the progress made so far by Serbia in accession negotiations; *appeals to* the European Parliament and the European Commission to remain ardent advocates for and maintain the momentum of the enlargement process, as one of the key priorities; *expresses* support for Serbia's European integration path, reminding that a credible

enlargement perspective requires political will throughout the entire Government, sustainable efforts and irreversible reforms in all areas, in particular the rule of law, which remains at the heart of enlargement and stabilisation and association processes and which is also key for a conducive business and investment environment; *stresses* that progress on rule of law reforms and the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue will determine the pace of accession; *welcomes* the fact that EU membership continues to be the strategic goal of Serbia.

2. *Expresses concern* over the relatively low level of public support for EU membership in Serbia; *reiterates* that the EU is by far the region's closest partner, main investor and principal donor; *recalls* that the unprecedented scale and range of this support must be fully recognised and conveyed by the partners in their public debate and communication; *calls on* Serbia and EU Member States to pursue a more active and effective policy of communication about the benefits of EU enlargement targeting both Serbian and EU citizens across all social groups; in this regard, *underlines* the responsibility of the Serbian authorities and EU institutions in promoting European values and raising awareness of citizens about concrete results achieved, support granted through EU funding and visible and tangible benefits of the European integration process.
3. *Welcomes* the adoption of measures aimed at improving the electoral conditions and media environment ahead of the April 2022 elections as a result of the Inter-Party Dialogue facilitated by the European Parliament; *takes note* of the conclusions of the final report of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) international election observation mission; *calls for* full implementation of all ODIHR recommendations well ahead of the next elections; *stresses* the importance of the consistent and meaningful involvement of civil society organisations with expertise in the process of monitoring the work of electoral authorities.
4. *Stresses* the importance of genuine cross-party debate and political dialogue in the newly constituted parliament as an essential element of democracy and a key factor for broad political consensus on EU-accession related reforms; *welcomes* the previous legislature's constructive role in the second phase of the Inter-Party Dialogue organized by the National Assembly and facilitated by the European Parliament; *encourages* the newly constituted parliament and political forces to continue engaging in future EP-facilitated dialogue initiatives that could support the functioning of the parliament; *welcomes* the adoption of the Code of conduct in line with the GRECO recommendations and *calls for* its effective application; *stresses* the importance of further enhancing the legislative and oversight function of the parliament, including the role of the opposition; *underlines* the importance of ensuring and enforcing respectful behaviour and exchanges in the context of parliamentary debates.
5. *Welcomes* the changes to the Constitution following the referendum in January 2022, which aim to strengthen the independence of the justice system and enhance the transparency and effectiveness of the Serbia's rule of law institutions; *recalls* that these reforms play a pivotal role in enhancing Serbia's EU accession process; *stresses* that the reform process to strengthen the independence of the judiciary should continue, in particular through legislative amendments to allow the effective and timely implementation of these constitutional amendments, in line with European best practices and fully implementing the Venice Commission recommendations and in a transparent and inclusive manner; in this regard, *welcomes* Serbia's proactive approach related to holding regular consultations with the Venice Commission, as well as recently acquired opinions by the Venice Commission on working texts of the Law on

Organisation of Courts, Law on Judges and the Law on the High Judicial Council; *reiterates* the importance that all Venice Commission recommendations are implemented.

6. *Reiterates* the key importance of freedom of media and *calls for* progress in this area; *stresses* the need to effectively implement the Media Strategy as a matter of priority; *encourages* Serbia to continue to implement the Media Strategy and its accompanying Action Plan; *stresses* the importance of preventing any possible threats, intimidation, harassment, hate speech and physical violence against journalists; *underlines* the importance of tackling disinformation and information manipulation.
7. *Calls for* effective enforcement of the anti-discrimination strategy and the new law on gender equality and the amendment to the law prohibiting discrimination; *stresses* the need for further efforts to promote gender equality and the rights of women and girls in all areas; *welcomes* that the Europride march took place without major incidents; *welcomes* the support given by the Government to the organizers to hold the first Europride in Southeast Europe; *regrets* however the developments concerning the organisation of the Europride and the uncertainties about the holding of the march; *calls for* respect for the basic right of freedom of assembly and *condemns* violence by smaller groups of extremists and hooligans during peaceful protests; *notes with concern* that investigation, prosecution and penalties for hate speech, threats and attacks against members of the LGBTIQ community are often inadequate; *welcomes* a significant representation of national minorities in the Parliament; *welcomes* that some members of the Government come from the ranks of national minorities, and numerous women Government members; *calls on* the Serbian authorities to continue with efforts to ensure the non-discriminatory treatment of ethnic, religious and sexual minorities and other vulnerable groups.
8. *Calls for* full alignment with the EU's visa policy and list of visa required third countries, in particular with those third countries, which present irregular migration or security risks to the EU. In this regard, *welcomes* the steps already taken by Serbia.
9. *Recalls* that a strong and independent civil society is an essential component of any democracy; *calls on* the Serbian authorities to continue in an enhanced manner to adequately and meaningfully include civil society in policy- and decision-making; *notes* the inclusion of several civil society organisations (CSO) in the first phase of the EP-facilitated Inter-Party Dialogue and *welcomes* their contribution; *notes* the cooperation between relevant parliamentary committees and CSOs; *stresses* the importance of fostering an enabling climate for all CSOs.
10. *Takes positive note of* Serbia's support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity at a time of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, including its refusal to recognise the results of the illegal "referenda" on joining Russia held in parts of four temporarily occupied regions of Ukraine; *declares* these illegal so-called referenda and the subsequent attempted illegal annexation of these regions have no validity under international law and do not form the basis for any alteration of the status of these regions of Ukraine; *takes note* that Serbia has not aligned with any EU restrictive measures against Russia at this moment; *recalls* that in the period up to accession Serbia is required to progressively align its policies with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), pursuant to requirements arising from its EU candidate country status, its Negotiating Framework and Stabilisation and Association Agreement; *compliments* Serbia's active participation in missions and operations within the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

11. *Welcomes* the EU's facilitation in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue at the highest political level to achieve comprehensive normalisation of relations between the Parties; *reiterates* that all open issues must be addressed through the EU-facilitated Dialogue; *condemns* all unilateral and uncoordinated actions that endanger stability and jeopardize the process; *reiterates* the need to fully implement all agreements reached within the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue with no further delay; *welcomes* the agreement to abolish entry/exit documents; *notes* that achieving comprehensive normalisation of relations remains one of the most important factors for the stability and prosperity of the whole region and for determining the speed of Serbia's accession negotiations.
12. *Welcomes* the opening of negotiations under Cluster 4 - Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity in the EU accession negotiations with Serbia; *notes* the limited progress made last year on further aligning with the EU acquis on environment and climate change; *recalls* the need for strong political will and additional resources in the areas of environment and climate protection; *encourages* Serbia to take further steps to improve air quality, the protection of water and biodiversity, as well as the management of regional waste; *encourages* Serbia to comply with Energy Community law and Serbia's Green Agenda commitments on reaching the EU target of climate neutrality and to finalise and implement an ambitious National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP); *welcomes* the announced intention of Serbia to diversify its energy supply and overall energy mix, including gas and electricity interconnectors, biomass and thermal energy heating plants, as well as to increase investments and modernise energy infrastructure in order to implement the necessary transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy; *notes* EU support in this regard and calls for rapid follow up.
13. *Welcomes* the progress Serbia has achieved towards developing a functional market economy, its economic recovery from the Covid-19 related relatively mild contraction, which together with a reduction of fiscal support measures helped achieve a significant improvement of its budget balance in 2021; *welcomes* that in 2021 salaries and pensions continued to grow and foreign investments increased beyond pre-pandemic levels; *notes* that the Serbian economy is currently under pressure mainly due to external factors that have accentuated unaddressed structural challenges; *notes* that work to address structural challenges, in particular regarding state-owned enterprises, should be continued with increased determination; *welcomes* EC's assessment that Serbia is technically prepared for opening Cluster 3 - Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth.
14. *Welcomes* the decision of the European Council to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova and to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania; *welcomes* the EC's recommendation to the Council that Bosnia and Herzegovina be granted candidate status; *welcomes* the EU's call for the acceleration of the accession process as expressed in the Conclusions of 23 and 24 June 2022 of the European Council; *supports* the European Political Community as an initiative to promote greater political, security and energy integration on the European continent and the closest neighbourhood, but which cannot be an alternative to EU membership; *expresses* support for region-wide initiatives that aim to deepen cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans, and in particular to foster inclusive regional cooperation, stability and prosperity of the European continent; *welcomes* the agreements, recently concluded as part of the Berlin process, on Freedom of Movement with Identity Cards, on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, and on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists and Architects, which advance work towards the realisation of the Western Balkans Common Regional Market; *calls for* a swift implementation of these agreements by the signatories; *recognises* the 'Open Balkan' initiative as a useful step towards developing

regional economic integration, as long as it remains in line with the framework of the Common Regional Market, to comply with EU standards and to be fully open and inclusive.