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

13th Meeting

28 October 2021
Brussels and remote

**DECLARATION and RECOMMENDATIONS**

The European Union-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) held its thirteenth meeting on 28 October 2021, in Brussels and remotely, co-chaired by Ms Tanja FAJON on behalf of the European Parliament Delegation and Mr Vladimir ORLIĆ on behalf of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia Delegation.

It exchanged views with:

* Ms Jadranka JOKSIMOVIĆ, Minister for European Integration, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Serbia,
* Mr Gašper DOVŽAN, State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, on behalf of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU,
* Ms Catherine WENDT, Head of Unit for Montenegro and Serbia, DG NEAR, on behalf of the European Commission,
* Ms Elsa FENET, Head of Division ‘South‑East Europe & Western Balkans’, 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
* Developments under negotiating Cluster 1 - Fundamentals, with a focus on Chapters 23 and 24, Judiciary, Fundamental Rights, Justice, Freedom and Security
* Economic development

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 (EC) 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 perspective, reminding that a credible enlargement perspective requires sustainable efforts and irreversible reforms in all areas, in particular in rule of law, which remains at the heart of enlargement and stabilisation and association processes; *welcomes* the fact that the EU membership continues to be the strategic goal of Serbia; *welcomes* the fact that all parliamentary parties support Serbia’s integration with the EU.
2. *Invites* the European Commission and the Council of the EU, provided that the necessary conditions have been met, to take the necessary steps towards implementing the revised enlargement methodology, in particular those related to thematic negotiating clusters, and to use the new methodology as an opportunity to speed up the enlargement process towards the Western Balkans on the basis of the implementation of EU‑related commitments and to define, together with Serbia, further course of Serbia’s negotiations; *acknowledges* that sustainable reforms are essential for opening of clusters and chapters and for achieving pro-European changes in Serbia; *notes* that Serbia has continued enhancing alignment and implementation of its legislation in accordance with the EU acquis and that it needs to continue doing so; *calls for* the opening of all the clusters for which there is a technical preparedness.
3. *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 the Serbian and the EU citizens; in this regard *underlines* the importance of promoting European values and raising awareness of citizens about concrete results achieved, support granted through EU funding and visible benefits of the European integration process through an active communication strategy.
4. *Welcomes* the Inter-Party Dialogue (IPD) organised by the National Assembly and facilitated by the European Parliament; *welcomes* a huge contribution of co-facilitators and the set of measures they proposed after the IPD, *calls* on the authorities to fully implement these measures and on all political actors in Serbia to take part in the implementation; *calls* for further implementation of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and *welcomes* the continued contribution of the Government Working Group in this regard; *welcomes* the participation of all political parties involved in the IPD for the purpose of improving the quality of the political dialogue in Serbia and the electoral environment; *welcomes* the IPD co-facilitators’ invitation to all political actors in Serbia to take part in the elections and their message that the boycott of institutions and elections is not the way to achieve progress in Serbian democracy and on Serbia’s EU path;
5. *Welcomes* changes introduced to the work of the National Assembly as important steps taken immediately after publication of the recommendations in the 2020 EC Country Report; *welcomes* introducing measures for improving the work of the National Assembly resulting in significant reduction of urgent procedures, and in reduction of the number of amendments and of joint discussions on various items on the agenda; *encourages* all political parties to further strengthen the political dialogue; *welcomes* the fact that the 2020 EC Country Report was discussed at the National Assembly’s session; *welcomes* the adoption of the Code of Conduct of MPs; *welcomes* a significant representation of national minorities in the Parliament; *compliments* the strong representation of women in the Parliament and the Government, hoping it will lead to a substantial promotion of human rights and political freedoms of women and vulnerable groups; *welcomes* the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality and amendments to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, Serbia’s increased efforts in cooperation with the EU towards inclusion of the Roma community, as well as the beginning of work of the Roma Coordination Body chaired by the Prime Minister.
6. *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* its call for respect of past Dialogue commitments and full implementation of all agreements reached within the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue; *welcomes* Belgrade’s commitment to the Dialogue; *notes* that achieving comprehensive normalisation of relations remains crucial for the stability and prosperity of the whole region and for determining the speed of Serbia’s accession negotiations;
7. *Reiterates* the key importance of freedom of media and *calls for* further progress in this area; *welcomes* the adoption of the Media Strategy and its accompanying Action Plan; *notes* the first steps taken pursuant to the Agreement on Cooperation and Measures for Raising the Level of Safety of Journalists concluded by the Republic Public Prosecutor’s Office, Ministry of Interior and journalists’ associations.
8. *Recalls* the need to continue with the reforms ensuring enhancement of judiciary’s independence and accountability, as well as separation of powers, by finalising the ongoing process of constitutional reform as a matter of priority and taking all relevant opinions of the Venice Commission fully into account.
9. *Welcomes* the highly resilient economic growth rate in Serbia and Serbia’s financial stability, including the fact that real GDP growth has positioned Serbia among the European economies with the most favourable growthduring the pandemic; *stresses* that the business environment has improved and *encourages* further steps in this regard; *underlines* the close link between the business environment and the rule of law; *takes note of* the reduced unemployment rate in 2020; *emphasizes* the importance of empowering women, youth and vulnerable groups in the labour marketand *calls for* new private investments; *compliments* Serbia for establishing a new dual and vocational education system to tackle the youth unemployment issue and *underlines* the importance of further extension of this system in cooperation with other stakeholders; *commends* Serbia’s continuously high levels of trade with the EU and the fact that Serbia continues to attract foreign direct investments (FDI), which has resulted in creation of new jobs for Serbian citizens; *recalls* that the EU is the largest provider of financial assistance to Serbia; *underlines* the necessity of EU-Serbia cooperation for the purpose of stimulating the economic growth through investments, innovation, connectivity and new technologies; *calls for* increasing the recognition of these facts and the visibility of EU-funded projects to raise Serbian citizens’ trust in the European Union and its institutions.
10. *Recalls* that in the period up to accession Serbia is required to gradually 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); *welcomes* theconclusion of the Agreement on border management cooperation between Serbia and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) that will allow Frontex to assist Serbia in border management and to carry out joint operations; *underlines* that Serbia has had an active, cooperative and constructive role in EU’s external borders management.
11. *Notes* the signing of three Memorandums of Cooperation at the Regional Cooperation Forum held on 29 July 2021 in Skopje within the “Open Balkans” initiative aimed at facilitating citizens’ lives and increasing their living standard; in general, *welcomes* the commitments of the leaders of Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia to regional co‑operation, an essential element of the European perspective of the Western Balkans; *recalls* in this context that a process involving the entire Western Balkans region is essential; *encourages* the entire region to participate in setting up a Common Regional Market in accordance with its political commitment at the Sofia Summit; *recalls* that the adoption of technical standards and implementation of soft measures such as harmonisation and simplification of border crossing procedures, railway reforms, information systems, road safety and maintenance plans, third parties’ access and building up capacities of social partners, are equally important for both the economy and for the improvement of public services; *underlines* importance of regional cooperation in the context of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and *emphasises* that the regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations are related to Serbia’s goal to have a successful European perspective; *commends* entering into force of the Regional Roaming Agreement, which will additionally reduce the roaming charges in the region and enable drawing up a plan for reducing the roaming charges between the Western Balkans and the EU.
12. *Compliments* the financial assistance provided to Serbia by the EU from its IPA funds for implementation of programmes and projects, which will contribute to carrying out political, economic, judicial and institutional reforms as a prerequisite for Serbia’s progress in the EU accession process; *considers* it crucial that IPA III further support enhancement of fundamental values and good governance; *calls for* the authorities in Serbia to make the best possible use of the reallocation of the resources from the European IPA funds to help mitigate social and economic consequences of the COVID‑19 pandemic, underlining the importance of paying particular attention to vulnerable groups; *underlines* the significance of the merit-based approach by which progress of each candidate is assessed on individual basis, without any risks that candidate countries might slow each other down in this process; *notes* that the commitment to fundamental European values is particularly important for all EU aspiring partners.