



D-ME_PV(2022)0519

MINUTES

of the meeting of 19 May 2022, 14.00-15.30

in association with the Committee on Foreign Affairs
Room SPAAK 3C50

The meeting opened at 14.00 on Thursday, 19 May 2022, with Vladimír BILČÍK (Chair) presiding.

1. Adoption of draft agenda

The Agenda was adopted without any changes.

2. Adoption of the draft minutes of the meeting of the EU-Montenegro Delegation of 18 November 2021

The draft minutes were adopted as in the draft

3. Chair's announcements

D-ME Chair Mr Vladimír BILČÍK welcomed PM Dritan ABAZOVIC, pointing out how the new government had a historic opportunity to speed up the country's EU accession process, which had been in a stalemate for the past year and a half. The task ahead was not easy, because the adoption of key decisions to enable Montenegro to move forward on its EU accession path, required a qualified majority in Parliament. In addition, considering that the government would have a limited mandate of one year, no more time should be lost.

Mr BILČÍK said that today's meeting was very timely given the recent adoption of the draft resolution on the 2021 Commission report on Montenegro by AFET. He further mentioned the EPP's recent visit to Montenegro and their meetings with PM Abazović and President Dukanović, who met with EP President Roberta Metsola during his latest visit to Brussels on 11 May, as well as the upcoming AFET mission to Montenegro on May 25-26.

Mr BILČÍK concluded by asking PM Abazović how he assessed the domestic political situation in Montenegro, with a focus on the newly formed minority government and its challenges, ways to unblock EU reforms, the implementation of sanctions against Russia, the impact of the war in Ukraine on Montenegro's economy, the plans to sign a Fundamental agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church and to join the Open Balkan initiative, and the constitution of the Montenegrin Delegation to the EU-Montenegro SAPC Delegation.

In her opening statement, AFET Vice-Chair Ms Željana ZOVKO welcomed PM Abazović and Ambassador Petar Marković, Head of the Mission of Montenegro to the European Union, recalling the upcoming AFET visit to Albania and Montenegro. She expressed appreciation for the new government's commitment to reforms towards EU accession, its pro-NATO course, and its alignment with EU sanctions adopted in light of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. She stressed that Montenegro continued to be seen as the 'frontrunner' in the enlargement process, considering that all 33 screened chapters had been opened. Nevertheless, MS ZOVKO highlighted the importance of progress in the areas of rule of law, the judiciary, media freedom and the fight against corruption, which were crucial for advancing in the accession negotiations.

4. Exchange of views on the formation of the new minority government in Montenegro and the way ahead in the presence of Mr Dritan ABAZOVIĆ, Prime Minister of Montenegro, Mr Michael MILLER, Head of Unit for Montenegro and Serbia in the DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations of European Commission, and Ms Elsa FENET, Head of the Division 'South-East Europe & Western Balkans' in the European External Action Service

PM ABAZOVIĆ stated that the main challenge for the new government was to move faster on European integration and to send positive signals to the EU and to the entire region. He stressed the importance of being together after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, describing the new government as pro-European. For this reason, Montenegro followed and would continue to follow the EU's foreign policy. Regarding the fight against organized crime and corruption, PM ABAZOVIĆ mentioned the arrests of the President of the Supreme Court and the President of the Commercial Court, which could be considered as important results in terms of strengthening the rule of law, obtained during the last 20 days. He further stated that political consensus would be needed on pending key judicial appointments, including the election of the Chief Prosecutor, members of the Constitutional Court, and the Judiciary Council. Nevertheless, the government was bringing the political parties together to dialogue and it would achieve these goals by the end of the spring parliamentary session.

PM ABAZOVIĆ asked for help to accelerate the integration process, specifying that the Western Balkans must not be perceived as the black hole of Europe: opening the doors to Montenegro would also mean sending positive signals to the region. Should the Western Balkans remain outside Europe, then it would not be impossible to have "another Ukraine". The new government would have a friendly neighbouring policy and support every initiative that could build trust in the region. In this regard, Mr ABAZOVIĆ hoped to see reciprocity. He further asked for help in the promotion of more Western investments in the transport and energy

sectors in Montenegro, where every company that wanted to conduct fair business would be welcome. The Prime Minister concluded by confirming Montenegro's alignment with the sanctions against Russia, even if the implementation might be problematic, and mentioning the Ukrainian refugees whom Montenegro welcomed.

Mr Michael MILLER (DG NEAR) focused on four key messages. He welcomed the new government, stressing the importance of building political consensus and cross-party cooperation on EU-related reforms. He further defined as a priority the progress on rule of law, especially in the areas of freedom of expression, the fight against corruption and organized crime and judicial reforms, which would unblock accession negotiations. The third key message on which MR MILLER insisted was the importance of building resilience and diversifying the economy by implementing the economic and investment plan, for which the EU had worked hand in hand with Montenegro to set out an ambitious, green and digital agenda. Concerning the EU's solidarity with Montenegro in the context of Russia's unprovoked and brutal invasion of Ukraine and its impact on Western Balkans, MR MILLER stated the importance of implementing the sanctions and fighting disinformation. He declared that Montenegro could count on technical assistance to increase resilience, as well as help for food security to alleviate the impact of the war. He also expressed his appreciation for Montenegro's readiness to welcome Ukrainian refugees and for the friendly regional policy of the new government.

Ms FENET (EEAS) stated that the Western Balkans remained high on the agenda and that the political level of engagement from the EU was equally high. At this the delicate moment of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, foreign policy had never played such a key role, and progress was essential for EU integration. MS FENET welcomed Montenegro's full alignment with the EU, stressing the importance of implementation as well as the position taken in multilateral bodies such as the UNGA. Regarding regional cooperation, she stated that Montenegro played a crucial role in creating a positive environment in the common regional market but also in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, because "progress for one was progress for all."

Debate with MEPs:

Mr Thomas WAITZ (Greens/EFA, AT) referred to the work the EU was doing in the Western Balkans, taking as an example Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, which nevertheless, according to him, was moving backwards instead of forward. In this context, he defined Montenegro as the country that had the potential to work in the region, especially with the new government, which was a unique opportunity that the EU also had to take advantage of, in order to give the whole region hope and motivation and to rebuild the support of the population.

Mr Andor DELI (NI, HU) underlined that all previous enlargements had made Europe stronger and that without the Western Balkans Europe could not be strong enough. He asked how enlargement fatigue could be overcome and how Montenegro assessed Charles Michel's declaration at the ECOSOC meeting, where he declared that progressive accession could be the way forward. Mr DELI also asked about expectations regarding the Open Balkan initiative and about the role that Montenegro could play in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, particularly after Kosovo's application for membership of the Council of Europe.

Ms Corina CREȚU (S&D, RO) welcomed the new government's engagement and enthusiasm and stressed the importance of resolving problems in the areas of rule of law and corruption. Wishing good luck to Montenegro, she emphasised the need for a new enlargement strategy.

Ms Hildegard BENTELE (EPP, DE) asked how stable the new government was and how Montenegro was preventing China's and Russia's foreign influence in the Western Balkans. She also enquired about Montenegro's willingness to have a good cooperation with its only EU neighbour, Croatia.

PM ABAZOVIĆ declared that if the EU wanted to be composed of 28 Member States again, Montenegro would be the perfect country. He stated that, despite the internal political fights, parties were pro-EU, and so were previously sceptic people who changed their minds after the invasion of Ukraine. Regarding Mr Charles Michel's statement he said that they had a meeting where he could see that Michel understood Montenegro's position. On the Open Balkan initiative, Mr. ABAZOVIĆ stated that the real problem was building trust, which must be done through communication: even if Montenegro would not be part of the initiative, it was ready to talk and come to an agreement on possible ways of cooperation. On Kosovo's application for membership in the Council of Europe, he declared that Montenegro respected every country that had the same will as Montenegro. He confirmed that this could create problems with Serbia, but stressed that Montenegro had its own foreign policy.

Concerning the stability of the government, Mr ABAZOVIĆ recalled that now it had the support of 46 MPs, which meant that it was missing just three votes for a qualified majority, something that had never happened before. Montenegro was strongly committed to have a good relationship with the Parliament. On China's and Russia's influence, he said that Montenegro's strategy was based on a diplomatic offensive, which meant speaking openly to the EU and other individual. Regarding regional cooperation, PM ABAZOVIĆ declared that Montenegro was trying to fix the problems with Serbia and hoped that Bosnia and Herzegovina would find internal solutions to render the political process effective. On a final note he said Montenegro was expecting a lot of support from Croatia.

Ms ZOVKO reassured PM ABAZOVIĆ on Croatia's support, especially because the new government included minorities.

Mr MILLER recalled that Montenegro had achieved a lot and, promised that the European Commission would use all the tools at its disposal to support the acceleration process. He also underlined the importance of the implementation of the sanctions against Russia.

Ms FENET stated that Montenegro had to continue to deliver on foreign policy and strengthen the rule of law.

Ms Lena DÜPONT (EPP, DE) asked about the strategy to strengthen the rule of law and build institutions correctly.

Mr Andor DELI (NI, HU) asked whether it was possible to have flexibility over IPA funds in the Western Balkans.

Mr BILČÍK referred to domestic and economic stability and asked whether the European Commission was looking into the situation.

Mr MILLER specified that Member States did not accept shortcuts on the rule of law. He confirmed the need for flexibility in the use of budget support, recalling that Montenegro had suffered a lot because of the pandemic. Nevertheless, he was confident that its economy would

grow this year, adding as a last point that previously the political will had been lacking in Montenegro.

6. Any other business

No further issues were raised.

7. Date and place of the next meeting

MR BILČÍK informed participants that the 21st EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) meeting had been scheduled to take place on 8-9 June in Strasbourg. However, given the recent formation of the new government in Montenegro the SAPC meeting would have to be postponed.

The meeting closed at 15.30.

**ПРИСЪСТВЕН ЛИСТ/LISTA DE ASISTENCIA/PREZENČNÍ LISTINA/DELTAGERLISTE/
ANWESENHEITSLISTE/KOHALOLIJATE NIMEKIRI/KATAΣΤΑΣΗ ΠΑΡΟΝΤΩΝ/RECORD OF ATTENDANCE/
LISTE DE PRÉSENCE/POPIS NAZOČNIH/ELENCO DI PRESENZA/APMEKLĒJUMU REĢISTRS/DALYVIŲ SĄRAŠAS/
JELENLĒTI ĪV/REĢISTRU TA' ATTENDENZA/PRESENTIELIJST/LISTA OBECNOŠCI/LISTA DE PRESENÇAS/
LISTĂ DE PREZENȚĂ/PREZENČNÁ LISTINA/SEZNAM NAVZOČIH/LÄSNÄOLOLISTA/NÄRVAROLISTA**

Бюро/Mesa/Předsednictvo/Formandskabet/Vorstand/Juhatus/Προεδρείο/Bureau/Predsjedništvo/Ufficio di presidenza/Prezidijs/ Biuras/Elnökség/Prezydium/Birou/Predsednictvo/Predsedstvo/Puheenjohtajisto/Presidiet (*)
Vladimír Bilčík (C); Valter Flego (VC)
Членове/Diputados/Poslanci/Medlemmer/Mitglieder/Parlamendiliikmed/Βουλευτές/Members/Députés/Zastupnici/Deputati/Deputăți/ Nariai/Képviselők/Membri/Leden/Posłowie/Deputados/Deputați/Jäsenet/Ledamöter
Lena Düpont, Hildegard Bentele, Thomas Waitz
Заместници/Suplentes/Náhradníci/Stedfortrædere/Stellvertreter/Asendusliikmed/Αναπληρωτές/Substitutes/Suppléants/Zamjenici/ Supplenti/Aizstājēji/Pavaduojantysnariai/Póttagok/Sostituti/Plaatsvervangers/Zastępcy/Membros suplentes/Supleanți/Náhradníci/ Namestniki/Varajäsenet/Suppleanter
Tomoslav Sokol, Corina Cretu, Andor Deli

209 (7)
Zeljana Zovko (AFET VC); Mick Wallace (AFET)
216 (3)
56 (8) (Точка от дневния ред/Punto del orden del día/Bod pořadu jednání (OJ)/Punkt på dagsordenen/Tagesordnungspunkt/ Päevakorra punkt/Σημείο της ημερήσιας διάταξης/Agenda item/Point OJ/Τοčka dnevnog reda/Punto all'ordine del giorno/Darba kārtības punkts/Darbotvarkēs punktas/Napirendi pont/Punt Agenda/Agendapunt/Punkt porządku dziennego/Ponto OD/Punct de pe ordinea de zi/Bod programu schůdce/Τοčka UL/Esityslistan kohta/Punkt på föredragningslistan)

Наблюдатели/Observadores/Pozorovatelé/Observatører/Beobachter/Vaatlejad/Παρατηρητές/Observers/Observateurs/Promatrači/Osservatori/Nověrotáji/Stebětójai/Megfigyelők/Osservatori/Waarnemers/Obserwatorzy/Observadores/Observatori/Pozorovatelia/Opazovalci/Tarkkailijat/Observatörer

По покана на председателя/Por invitación del presidente/Na pozvání předsedy/Efter indbydelse fra formanden/Auf Einladung des Vorsitzenden/Εσίμεηε kutsel/Με πρόσκληση του Προέδρου/At the invitation of the Chair/Sur l'invitation du président/ Na poziv predsjednika/Su invito del presidente/Pēc priekšsēdētāja uzaicinājuma/Pirmininkui pakvietus/Az elnök meghívására/ Fuq stedina tač-'Chairman'/Op uitnodiging van de voorzitter/Na zaproszenie Przewodniczącego/A convite do Presidente/La invitația președintelui/ Na pozvanie predsedu/Na povabilo predsednika/Puheenjohtajan kutsusta/På ordförandens inbjudan
Dritan Abazovic, Prime Minister of Montenegro

Съвет/Consejo/Rada/Rådet/Rat/Nöukogu/Συμβούλιο/Council/Conseil/Vijeće/Consiglio/Padome/Taryba/Tanács/Kunsill/Raad/Conselho/Consiliu/Svet/Neuvosto/Rådet (*)
Комисия/Comisión/Komise/Kommissionen/Kommission/Komisjon/Επιτροπή/Commission/Komisija/Commissione/Bizottság/Kummissjoni/Commissie/Komisja/Comissão/Comisie/Komisja/Komissio/Kommissionen (*)
Michael Miller
Европейска служба за външна дейност/Servicio Europeo de Acción Exterior/Evropská služba pro vnější činnost/EU-Udenrigstjenesten/Europäischer Auswärtiger Dienst/Euroopa välisteenistus/Ευρωπαϊκή Υπηρεσία Εξωτερικής Δράσης/European External Action service/Service européen pour l'action extérieure/Europiska služba za vanjsko djelovanje/Servizio europeo per l'azione esterna/Eiropas Ārējās darbības dienests/Europos išorės veiksmų tarnyba/Európai Külügyi Szolgálat/Servizz Ewropew għall-Azzjoni Esterna/Europese dienst voor extern optreden/Europejska Służba Działañ Zewnętrznych/Serviço Europeu para a Acção Externa/Serviciul european pentru acțiune externă/Európska služba pre vonkajšiu činnost/Evropska služba za zunanje delovanje/Euroopan ulkosuhdehallinto/Europeiska avdelningen för yttre åtgärd (*)
Elsa Fenet Roberto Segundo
Други институции и органи/Otras instituciones y organismos/Ostatní orgány a instituce/Andre institutioner og organer/Andere Organe und Einrichtungen/Muud institutsioonid ja organid/Λοιπά θεσμικά όργανα και οργανισμοί/Other institutions and bodies/Autres institutions et organes/Druge institucije i tijela/Altre istituzioni e altri organi/Citas iestādes un struktūras/Kitos institucijos ir įstaigos/Más intézmények és szervek/Istituzzjonijiet u korpi ohra/Andere instellingen en organen/Inne instytucje i organy/Outras instituições e outros órgãos/Alte instituții și organe/Iné inštitúcie a orgány/Muut toimeilimet ja elimet/Andra institutioner och organ
Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Montenegro
Jovana Marovic - Deputy Prime Minister Ana Rasovic

Други учасници/Otros participantes/Ostatní účastníci/Endvidere deltog/Andere Teilnehmer/Muud osalejad/Επίσης παρόντες/Other participants/Autres participants/Drugi sudionici/Altri partecipanti/Citi klātesošie/Kiti dalyviai/Más résztvevők/Partecipanti ohra/Andere aanwezigen/Inni uczestnicy/Outros participantes/Alți participanți/Ini účastníci/Drugi udeleženci/Muut osallistujat/Övriga deltagare

Секретариат на политическите групи/Secretaría de los Grupos políticos/Sekretariát politických skupin/Gruppernes sekretariat/Sekretariat der Fraktionen/Fraktsioonide sekretariaat/Γραμματεία των Πολιτικών Ομάδων/Secretariats of political groups/Secrétariat des groupes politiques/Tajništva klubova zastupnika/Segreteria gruppi politici/Politisko grupu sekretariāts/Frakciju sekretoriai/Képviseletcsoportok titkársága/Sekretariat gruppi politici/Fractiesecretariaten/Sekretariat Grup Politycznych/Secretariado dos grupos políticos/Secretariate grupuri politice/Sekretariát politických skupin/Sekretariat političnih skupin/Poliittisten ryhmien sihteeristö/De politiska gruppernas sekretariat	
PPE	Jorgen Siil
S&D	
Renew	Paul Ivan
ID	
Verts/ALE	
ECR	
GUE/NGL	
NI	

Кабинет на председателя/Gabinete del Presidente/Kancelář předsedy/Formandens Kabinet/Kabinett des Präsidenten/Presidendi kantslei/Γραφείο του Προέδρου/President's Office/Cabinet du Président/Ured predsednika/Gabinetto del Presidente/Priekšsēdētāja kabinets/Pirmininko kabinetas/Elnöki hivatal/Kabinett tal-President/Kabinet van de Voorzitter/Gabinet Przewodniczącego/Gabinete do Presidente/Cabinet Președinte/Kancelária predsedu/Urad predsednika/Puhemiehen kabinetti/Talmannens kansli	
Кабинет на генералния секретар/Gabinete del Secretario General/Kancelář generálního tajemníka/Generalsekretærens Kabinet/Kabinett des Generalsekretärs/Peasekretäri büroo/Γραφείο του Γενικού Γραμματέα/Secretary-General's Office/Cabinet du Secrétaire général/Ured glavnog tajnika/Gabinetto del Segretario generale/Generalsekretära kabinets/Generalinio sekretoriaus kabinetas/Főtitkári hivatal/Kabinett tas-Segretarju Ġenerali/Kabinet van de secretaris-generaal/Gabinet Sekretarza Generalnego/Gabinete do Secretário-Geral/Cabinet Secretar General/Kancelária generálneho tajomníka/Urad generalnega sekretarja/Pääsihteerin kabinetti/Generalsekreterarens kansli	

Генерална дирекция/Dirección General/Generální ředitelství/Generaldirektorat/Generaldirektion/Peardirektoraat/Γενική Διεύθυνση/Directorate-General/Direction générale/Glavna uprava/Direzione generale/Ģenerāldirektorāts/Generalinis direktoratas/Főigazgatóság/Direttorat Ġenerali/Direktoraten-generaal/Dyrekcja Generalna/Direcção-Geral/Direcții Generale/Generálne riaditeľstvo/Generalni direktorat/Pääosasto/Generaldirektorat	
DG PRES DG IPOL DG EXPO DG EPRS DG COMM DG PERS DG INLO DG TRAD DG LINC DG FINS DG ITEC DG SAFE	
Правна служба/Servicio Jurídico/Právní služba/Juridisk Tjeneste/Juristischer Dienst/Öigusteenistus/Νομική Υπηρεσία/Legal Service/Service juridique/Pravna služba/Servizio giuridico/Juridiskais dienests/Teisės tarnyba/Jogi szolgálat/Servizz legali/Juridische Dienst/Wydział prawny/Serviço Jurídico/Serviciu Juridic/Právny servis/Oikeudellinen yksikkö/Rättstjänsten	
Секретариат на комисията/Secretaría de la comisión/Sekretariat výboru/Udvalgssekretariatet/Ausschusssekretariat/Komisjoni sekretariaat/Γραμματεία της επιτροπής/Committee secretariat/Secrétariat de la commission/Tajništvo odbora/Segreteria della commissione/ Komitejas sekretariāts/Komiteto sekretoriatas/A bizottság titkársága/Sekretarjat tal-kumitat/Commissiesecretariaat/Sekretariat komisji/Sekretariado da comissão/Sekretariat comisie/Sekretariat odbora/Valiokunnan sihteeristö/Utskottssekretariatet	
Peter Lang, Igor Miskulin, André de Munter	
Сътрудник/Asistente/Asistent/Assistent/Assistentz/Βοηθός/Assistant/Assistente/Palīgs/Padējējas/Asszisztens/Asystent/Pomočnik/Avustaja/Assistenten	
Vesselina Veleva	

- * (P) = Председател/Presidente/Předseda/Formand/Vorsitzender/Esimees/Πρόεδρος/Chairman/Président/Predsjednik/Priekšsēdētājs/Pirmininkas/Elnök/Chairman/Voorzitter/Przewodniczący/Preşedinte/Predseda/Predsednik/Puheenjohtaja/Ordförande
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- (M) = Член/Miembro/Člen/Medlem./Mitglied/Parlamendiliige/Βουλευτής/Member/Membre/Član/Membro/Deputāts/Narys/Képviselő/Membru/Lid/Członek/Membro/Membru/Člen/Poslanec/Jäsen/Ledamot
- (F) = Длъжностно лице/Funcionario/Úředník/Tjenestemand/Beamter/Ametnik/Υπάλληλος/Official/Fonctionnaire/Dužnosnik/Funzionario/Ierēdnis/Pareigūnas/Tisztviselő/Ufficjal/Ambtenaar/Urzędnik/Funcionário/Funcionar/Úradník/Uradnik/Virkamies/Tjänsteman