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*Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo*

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**DSEE\_PV(2021)0306\_0**

# **MINUTES**

**of the meeting of 3 June 2021, 11.00-12.30**

**Brussels (remote - WebEx)**

The meeting opened at 11.02 on Thursday, 3 June 2021, with Romeo FRANZ (Chair) presiding.

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

The agenda was adopted unchanged.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the meeting of the Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo of 27 May 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the 27 May 2021 were adopted without any changes.

3. Exchange of views with H.E. Ms Emina MERDAN, Ambassador - Head of the Mission of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the EU, Mr Alberto CAMMARATA, Deputy Head of Unit for BiH and Albania in the European Commission (DG NEAR) and Ms Elsa FENET, Head of the Western Balkans Division of the European External Action Service, on the political and economic situation in BiH and EU-BiH relations

**Ambassador Emina MERDAN** welcomed ‘the long-awaited SAPC’, which ‘will strengthen parliamentary dialogue as an important part of the SAA process and will enable implementation of one of the key priorities’. She expressed satisfaction over the continuous exchanges of visits and ongoing political dialogue with the EU during the pandemic,

mentioning the EU-Western Balkans Zagreb Summit, AFET's recent report on BiH, visits by HR/VP Borrell, Commissioner Várhelyi and Commissioner Johansson to BiH, as well as two visits by the BiH Presidency, a visit by the BiH MFA and a visit by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers to Brussels. This confirmed that the region remained politically relevant on the EU agenda. She also referred to the Western Balkans Speakers' Summit hosted by President Sassoli in January 2020.

The Ambassador reiterated her appreciation for the unwavering support of EU Member States and EU institutions (particularly the EP) for BiH's EU integration, and further welcomed EU assistance, stressing the importance of investments in long-term recovery and infrastructure projects. Further support and continuous delivery of vaccines through the COVAX mechanism was also needed: the vaccination campaign was launched late, and so far only 5 % of the population in the Federation had been vaccinated (4,5% had received one dose, a mere 0,5% had received two doses). She stressed that despite the pandemic, BiH had kept its focus on EU integration, as EU membership remained a strategic goal and a foreign policy priority for the country. The country's commitment had been mirrored in the recently adopted conclusion by the BiH Presidency to initiate the process of the implementation of the 14 key priorities.

Ms Merdan also informed that certain progress had been made regarding the amendment of the electoral law, which allowed for the local elections in Mostar to be held in December 2020. She mentioned the establishment of the inter-agency working group for amending the electoral law and the successful adoption of the proposed RoP for the SAPC. Finally, she informed that the government had adopted the draft law on amendments on the public procurement law, that a revised strategy for work on war crime cases had been adopted, that BiH had adopted the global framework for fiscal balance and policy for the period 2021-2023 and that the ERP (Economic Reform Programme) had been submitted to the EC.

**Alberto CAMMARATA**, deputy HoU for BiH and Albania at DG NEAR, also underlined the importance of the upcoming SAPC meeting to 'develop parliamentary dialogue as an engine of the EU integration process'. BiH should urgently move ahead with reforms to meet the key priorities and make the most of the months prior to the 2022 elections. He argued that the divisive and secessionist talk of the past weeks should stop, and that BiH should focus on reforms - including electoral and constitutional ones - and on the recovery from the pandemic instead. As specific urgent issues he mentioned public procurement legislation (the SNSD had voted against the adoption of the law), legislation on conflict of interests (plenty of expert support had been provided and a Venice Commission opinion was expected in July) and amendments on the law on the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of BiH. Some progress had been made in the rule of law area but further efforts were needed in order to restore the citizens' trust in the institutions, and to show that commitment was not expressed merely declaratively.

Furthermore, Mr Cammarata highlighted problems with the implementation of the SAA and said that the pandemic had exacerbated existing structural weaknesses. He disapproved of the initiative to introduce customs duties on meat products in order to mitigate the difficult situation for farmers and urged the authorities to improve domestic conditions rather than to create new trade barriers. Regarding vaccination, he commented that the EU was committed to continue to support BiH, that it had delivered 45 000 doses of vaccines to the country so far, and that an additional 55 000 doses were in the pipeline and planned to be delivered by

the end of June.

**Elsa FENET**, Head of the Western Balkans Division of the European External Action Service, confirmed that HR/VP Borrell had been very active in putting the Western Balkans high on the EU agenda, and welcomed the resumption of the parliamentary dialogue on 17 June. She underlined that the proper functioning of the SAPC was one of the key priorities. Furthermore, she welcomed the EP's report on BiH, "which forms an important basis for today's discussion and the SAPC meeting and is an important tool to advocate reforms and legislative processes". Regarding electoral / constitutional reform, she was pleased that last week's EP report reflected the same view in terms of format and content of these reforms. The EEAS was working on the ground with the US and other international partners for an inclusive and transparent process with sufficient ambition to address the different concerns. In addition, no steps should be taken that would make the implementation of ECHR rulings even more challenging.

As there were no elections in BiH in 2021, Ms Fenet stressed that it was paramount to achieve progress on some of the 14 key priorities before the upcoming elections in 2022. She informed that the EUSR and Head of the EU Delegation in BiH Johann Sattler had addressed the inter-agency working group on 2 June and that contributions from civil society and academia were necessary, but that one should also engage with political leaders as a 2/3 majority would be needed in parliament. She expressed concern over BiH's decreasing foreign policy alignment (now down to about 50%, which along with Serbia represents the lowest alignment in the region) and said that the EU expected progress, not a reserve trend. With regard to the issue of migration, she hoped that another humanitarian crisis like last winter could be averted.

Standing rapporteur for BIH **Paulo RANGEL** supported the messages presented by Ms Fenet and Mr Cammarata, and underlined the importance of seizing the window of opportunity of 2021 to deliver on key reforms. He underscored that the process of electoral and constitutional change and rule of law related reforms should be locally owned, but that the EU could help facilitate the process as an honest broker, advisor or mediator, given its vested interest and engagement in BiH's future. He asked Ambassador Merdan about the commitment and readiness of the various domestic authorities, political leaders and stakeholders to address these issues and try to reach a solution. Ambassador Merdan reiterated the unanimous commitment of all involved stakeholders to BiH's EU path, but stressed that there was always a risk that the political dimension would slow down the implementation of concrete requirements. She informed that reforms in the framework of EU integration were much more likely to be implemented and adopted than reforms outside that framework.

Chair **Romeo FRANZ** regretted that the inter-agency working group did not include the Central Election Commission and representatives of CSOs, and stressed that he did not want "another deal behind closed doors" but an inclusive and transparent process. Mr Cammarata and Ms Fenet agreed that the constitutional reform process needed to be inclusive and that the role of CSOs and academia was fundamental in this respect. They reassured that the decision setting up the inter-agency working group specifically stipulated that the working group was obliged to consult with those stakeholders. The Chair also expressed concern over illegal pushbacks of migrants and instances of Croatian police entering BiH, thus not respecting its territorial integrity. Mr Cammarata confirmed that the EC was aware of these issues, that it was in touch with the Croatian authorities and that border management needed to be in line

with EU law. He stressed that there was a system in place and that it was up to the competent authorities to deal with these allegations. Standing rapporteur Rangel commented that the EC's recent positive opinion on the accession of Croatia to Schengen proved that while border management issues existed those allegations were not a deep source of concern.

Second Vice-Chair **Željana ZOVKO** asked Ambassador Merdan about the potential future scenario if the next elections resulted in a blockage and the inability to form a government. Furthermore, she addressed the health crisis in the country, specifically mentioning the "Respirator Affair", and raised the issue of a visa-free regime being granted for citizens from Saudi Arabia. Ambassador Merdan commented that the respirator embezzlement scandal was currently being processed in court, that the current pandemic had shown the weakness of the health care system and that further efforts were needed. She was optimistic about the next elections and the prospect of adopting necessary changes to the electoral legislation. The visa-free regime was merely a proposal which had not been adopted and was meant as a temporary waiver for Saudi citizens solely for touristic purposes. Ms Fenet and Mr Cammarata reacted by underlining that there were other ways to support the country's tourism sector, and that BiH was expected to align itself with the EU's visa policy.

#### 4. Any other business

There was no other business.

#### 5. Date and place of the next meeting

The second EU-BiH Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) meeting - to be held remotely - was scheduled for 17 June (14:00-17:00), more than five years after the first SAPC meeting in Sarajevo. Its agenda would consist of the adoption of the Rules of Procedure governing the EU-BiH SAPC meetings and a general discussion on EU-BiH relations and BiH's EU integration path.

The meeting closed at 12.29.

**ПРИСЪСТВЕН ЛИСТ/LISTA DE ASISTENCIA/PREZENČNÍ LISTINA/DELTAGERLISTE/  
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Delara Burkhardt (VC), Romeo Franz (C), Željana Zovko (VC)
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Paulo Rangel, Ruža Tomašić
Заместници/Suplentes/Náhradníci/Stedþótrædere/Stellvertreter/As endusliikmed/Avəzlı şəxslər/Substitutes/Suppléants/Zamjenici/Supplenti/Aizstājēji/Pavaduojantysnariai/Póttagok/Sostituti/Plaatsvervangers/Zastępcy/Membros suplentes/Supleanți/Náhradníci/Namestniki/Varajäsenet/Suppleanter
Thomas Waitz

209 (7)	
216 (3)	
56 (8) (Точка от дневния ред/Punto del orden del día/Bod pořadu jednání (OJ)/Punkt på dagsordenen/Tagesordnungspunkt/Päiväkorra punkt/Σημείο της ημερήσιας διάταξης/Agenda item/Point OJ/Točka dnevnog reda/Punto all'ordine del giorno/Darba kārtības punkts/Darbotvarķēs punktas/Napirendi pont/Punt Aģenda/Agendapunt/Punkt porządku dziennego/Ponto OD/Punct de pe ordinea de zi/Bod programu schôdze/Točka UL/Eesityslistan kohta/Punkt på föredragningslistan)	3
H.E. Ms Emina Merdan, Ambassador - Head of the Mission of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the EU Mr Alberto Cammarata, Deputy Head of Unit for BiH and Albania in the European Commission Ms Elsa Fenet, Head of the Western Balkans Division of the European External Action Service	

Наблюдатели/Observadores/Pozorovatel é/Observatér/Beobacht er/Vaatlejad/Παρατηρητές/Observers/Observateurs/Promatrači/Osservatori/Nověrotáji/Stebétojai/Megfigyelők/Osservaturi/Waarnemers/Obserwatorzy/Observadores/Observatori/Pozorovatelia/Opozovalci/Tarkkailijat/Observatörer

По покана на председателя/Por invitación del presidente/Na pozvání předsedy/Efter indbydelse fra formanden/Auf Einladung des Vorsitzenden/Esimene 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/Pirmminukui pakvetus/Az elnök meghívására/ Fuq stedina tač-'Chairman'/Op uitnodiging van de voorzitter/Na zaproszenie Przewodniczącego/A convite do Presidente/La invitación președintelui/Na pozvanie predsedu/Na povabilo predsednika/Puheenjohtajan kutsusta/På ordförandens inbjudan

Съвет/Consejo/Rada/Rådet/Rat/Nōukogu/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/Komisia/Komissió/Kommissionen (\*)

Davide Denti, Juliette Lequesne

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Mikko Väyrynen

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PPE	Jan Willem Vlasman, Collin Ermans
S&D	Jorgen Siil
Renew	Katlin Joala
ID	
Verts/ALE	Gesa Storz
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The Left	
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Cristina Stanculescu

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André de Munter, Tatiana Mrazikova, Kristine Sproge, Alisa Donlagic

Сътрудник/Asistente/Asistent/Assistent/Assistenz/Βοηθός/Assistant/Assistente/Palīgs/Padējējas/Asszisztens/Asystent/Pomočník/Avustaja/Assisternt

Cristina Chiorean

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