

12th EU-Serbia SAPC, 28 January 2021, remote Summary of the meeting

The European Union-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee held its 12th meeting remote, through Interactio, on 28 January 2021 and discussed the state of play of the accession negotiations and EU-Serbia relations, including all topics of interest in the current situation.

Chair of the EP Delegation to the SAPC, Tanja Fajon, and newly re-appointed Serbian Co-Chair, Vladimir Orlić, co-chaired the meeting and welcomed:

- Serbian Minister for European Integration, Jadranka Joksimović;
- Secretary of State for European Affairs, Portuguese Presidency, Ana Paula Zacarias;
- Head of Unit for Serbia, European Commission (DG NEAR), Catherine Wendt;
- Head of Western Balkans Division, EEAS, Elsa Fenet.

Inter-Party Dialogue

Ms Fajon underlined that the Serbian refusal to include the EP-facilitated Inter-Party Dialogue (IPD) into the Agenda of the joint parliamentary meeting was regrettable, as the time is crucial in the context of the next elections announce for April 2022. She also warned against unacceptable efforts to undermine the EP's role in the Inter-Party Dialogue.

"The immediate continuation of the dialogue is in Serbia's best interest since it is linked to the wider European integration path. The European Parliament will continue to assist Serbia on its way to a European future", said Ms Fajon.

EP Rapporteur for Serbia, Vladimir Bilčík, stated that the European Parliament was ready for the second phase of the IPD, as time is pressing as early elections for spring 2022 were announced.

Stagnation in rule of law

In view of the upcoming elections, Ms Fajon declared that the EP's SAPC Delegation would closely monitor implementation of the [OSCE/ODIHR](#)'s 29 recommendations to improve the conduct of elections. She also drew attention to Serbia's lack of progress in rule of law, which may explain why no negotiating chapters were opened last year.

She underlined that the overall progress of Serbia's EU accession process continues to be depend on rule of law reforms and on advancement of normalisation talks with Pristina. D-RS Co-Chair Vladimir Orlić underlined that the Parliament of Serbia works at full speed on the realisation of Serbia's full EU membership.

The Minister of European Integration of Serbia, Jadranka Joksimović, echoed Orlić reaffirming that Serbia would continue actively with the process of European integration. Even though the country is late on certain reforms, she argued that 2020 brought many delays also to others, referring to EU Member State and European Commission reports.

More reforms needed

Portuguese Secretary of State for European Affairs, Ana Paula Zacarias, highlighted the Portuguese Presidency's commitment to enhance the enlargement process. She argued that the pace of negotiations would continue to depend on both progress and tangible results in rule of law and Belgrade's normalisation of relations with Pristina.

Moreover, media freedom, judiciary and electoral reforms are key.

EC Head of Unit for Serbia in DG NEAR, Ms Catherine Wendt, welcomed that Serbia had accepted the new enlargement methodology and the government's commitment in several areas. She encouraged Serbia to build on the positive steps taken so far to achieve concrete results on the ground.

Mixed balance of foreign policy

Head of Western Balkans Division in the EEAS, Elsa Fenet, advised that due to early elections in spring 2022, it was high time to start and make progress on the IPD. She condemned Serbia's decision on December to partially withdraw from freezing all military activities with Belarus and Russia.

On the Common Foreign Security Policy, Ms Fenet added that Serbia is stagnating its alignment rate and urged for further progress in that regard. On the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, she said that she was looking forward to its resumption following the Kosovo elections mid-February.

MEPs praised Serbia's decision to accept the new enlargement methodology and the conclusion of the Washington agreement as an important step for normalising not only Serbia-Kosovo but also Serbia-US relations. Some MEPs also warned against the dangers of Chinese technologies in Serbia and cautioned on data protection issues.

Serbian resilience

Serbian MPs presented Serbia's efforts to curtail the pandemic and to normalise relations with its neighbours. Both MEPs and Serbian MPs praised Serbia's economic resilience in times of pandemic. MPs also accused some media outlets of having significantly interfered with the June 2020 election campaign when they attacked President Vucic and his family.