



Second EU - Bosnia and Herzegovina SAPC meeting: the country's winding road to the EU

6.7.2021 [Meetings, agendas](#)



On 17 June, after more than five years, the Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (DSEE), held its second EU-Bosnia and Herzegovina Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) meeting, breathing new life into the parliamentary dimension of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

14 key priorities

The meeting focused on the adoption of the Rules of Procedure governing the EU-BiH SAPC and on constitutional and electoral issues related to the 14 key priorities set by the European Commission.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) must implement these priorities as part of its application for EU membership.

The way to the EU

The 14 priorities cover the fundamentals of the EU accession process. BiH needs to improve its electoral framework and the functioning of the judiciary, in line with European standards, and ensure the functionality of its institutions to take over EU obligations.

The country should also strengthen the prevention and fight against corruption and organised crime, ensure effective functioning of border management, and improve the protection of fundamental rights of all citizens.

Still at an early stage

Bosnia and Herzegovina is overall at an early stage regarding its level of preparedness to take on the obligations of EU membership and needs to significantly step up the process to align with the EU acquis and implement and enforce related legislation.

Despite achieving a certain degree of macroeconomic stability, the country needs to speed up its decision-making procedures and improve the business environment in order to become a functioning market economy.

Also, the public sector needs to improve its efficiency and transparency.

Unique opportunity for progress

After the meeting, the Co-Chairs Nebojša Radmanović and Romeo Franz, published a joint statement in which they acknowledged the 14 key priorities as non-negotiable and a prerequisite for BiH to further advance with its integration to the EU in view of receiving a candidate country status and open accession negotiations.

They agree that the progress in addressing these key priorities has so far remained limited and that the year ahead provides a unique opportunity to move forward, as no elections will take place in BiH within that timeframe.

Recovery from COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing problems in BiH. While the EU's assistance to BiH is welcomed in the fight against COVID-19, the statement by the Co-Chairs pointed out that the EU could and should do more in the allocation of vaccines to its immediate neighbours.

Ambassador of BiH to the EU, Emina Merdan, stressed the need for further support and assistance as so far only 5% of the population had been vaccinated. In that sense, the resumption of the inter-parliamentary cooperation is considered well-timed.

The next SAPC meeting will be held during the second half of 2021, breathing new life into the parliamentary dimension of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, which constitutes the legal basis for the relationship between the EU and BiH.

October 2022 elections

To prepare for the SAPC meeting, DSEE met also on 3 June and 27 May to discuss constitutional and electoral issues in the country, the state of play of fundamental rights and the contribution of civic activism.

Deputy HoU for BiH and Albania at DG NEAR, Alberto Cammarata, and Head of the Western Balkans Division of the European External Action Service, Elsa Fenet, argued for immediate action on reforms to meet the key priorities and make the most of the months prior to the 2022 elections in October.

Specific urgent issues include public procurement legislation, legislation on conflict of interests and amendments on the law on the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of BiH.

Reforms needed

Prof. Dr. at the University of Graz, Joseph Marko, elaborated on the problems of state reform and discussed the need for judicial reform, de-segregation of the educational system and the media and support to civil society's transitional justice efforts.

Independent legal counsel and researcher, Lejla Gačanica, explained that amending the Constitution should involve parliaments, civil society organizations and academia with the aim to strike a balance between ethnic and civil models.

Programme Officer at Civil Rights Defenders (CRD), Ena Bavčić, showed that public perception of the respect for fundamental rights in BiH is the lowest in the region and the space for civil society organizations is diminishing at an alarming rate. However, Activist and Research Officer at The Balkan Forum, Samir Beharić, highlighted some successful grassroots activism in the country, yet mentioned the continuing brain drain the country faces. Young people are like foreign direct investments, "they leave when talk about the war is involved", he declared.

More on SAPC

The EU-Bosnia and Herzegovina Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) is a forum for Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina and of the European Parliament to meet at regular intervals and exchange views, notably on Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU integration process.

It is established under the EU's Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is the legal basis for relations between the two parties, preparing Bosnia and Herzegovina for future EU membership.

More information:

[DSEE website](#)

[Joint Statement of the EU-BiH SAPC Co-Chairs](#)

[Press release on the EU-BiH SAPC](#)