



D-RS_PV(2022)03_03

MINUTES

of the meeting of 3 March 2022, 13.30-15.00

Brussels, room ANTALL 6Q2 and remotely via *Interactio*

The meeting opened at 13.35 on Thursday, 3 March 2022, with Tanja Fajon (Chair) presiding.

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

The Agenda was adopted without any changes as in the draft.

2. Adoption of the draft minutes of the 30 September 2021 delegation meeting

The draft minutes from the delegation meeting of 30 September 2021 were adopted as in the draft.

3. Chair's announcements

In her introduction of the meeting, D-RS Chair Tanja FAJON (S&D, SL) reminded that the meeting was taking place against the horrific background of attacks by Russia against Ukraine. She firmly condemned Russia's military aggression against a sovereign state in Europe and expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian people in these difficult days. She also welcomed Serbia's stance on Ukraine's territorial integrity and the fact that Serbia voted on Wednesday the UN Resolution condemning Russia's aggression, but deeply regretted its decision not to align with EU sanctions against Russia and unequivocally condemn its military aggression.

D-RS Chair further stated that since President Vučić announced the dissolution of Serbia's National Assembly and called early parliamentary elections on 3 April, she had decided together with the SAPC Co-Chair Mr Orlić, to postpone this joint meeting until a further date which would be confirmed as soon as the new NARS Delegation is up and running.

Nevertheless, she said that it was important to have an exchange within the Delegation on the upcoming elections before the next joint meeting.

4. Assessment of the implementation of the conclusions of the EP-facilitated Inter-Party Dialogue by Co-Facilitators Ms Tanja FAJON and Mr Vladimír BILČÍK:

D-RS Chair Ms Tanja FAJON (S&D, SL) first paid tribute to late IPD Co-Facilitator, former MEP and her immediate predecessor as D-RS Chair Mr Eduard KUKAN, who passed away on 10 February 2022. She then continued to assess the second phase of the IPD, including two fully-fledged rounds of dialogues in July and September 2021, which managed to get all political parties represented in the Serbian parliament as well as the Serbian opposition in Serbia to sit together around one table. She noted the delayed adoption of the 16 concrete measures that had agreed as a result of the IPD and regretted that some political forces had pulled out from the process.

Ms FAJON reminded that the objective of the IPD process, apart from increasing trust in the electoral process, was to establish a dialogue among political opponents and to contribute to strengthening the role of parliament. She also stated that the overall media landscape remained deeply polarized with some improvements, in particular in the Public Broadcaster RTS/RTV. She recalled that the improvement of conditions for political competition in Serbia was an ongoing and arduous process. She also highlighted two main elements for the 16 measures introduced in the dialogue, namely the establishment of a Temporary Supervisory Body which would be in charge of media monitoring and the temporary change of the Republic Electoral Commission, which would include representatives of the opposition not represented at the parliament and the fact that they both could help improve the conditions of the next elections.

Moreover, the D-RS Chair explained that the process had included an exchange of opinions with civil society representatives which she considered crucial. She concluded by saying that the European Parliament would observe the upcoming elections as part of the international election observation efforts.

EP Standing rapporteur on Serbia Mr Vladimír BILČÍK (EPP, SK) also started his intervention by paying tribute to late Mr Eduard KUKAN. He then went on to remind participants of the possible consequences of the ‘current state of war’ on the enlargement procedure saying that the war could be an opportunity for the future of the Western Balkans. The recently adopted EP resolution condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine sent a clear message to Serbia. He recalled that Serbia’s decision in that matter would have serious political consequences for the future. He joined D-RS Chair in welcoming Serbia’s recent vote of the UN Resolution condemning Russia’s aggression, but clearly stated that Serbia’s decision to not sanction Russia is not aligned with the EU’s position.

Moreover, Mr BILČÍK (EPP, SK) also recognized the positive outcomes of the Inter-Party Dialogue by stating that this was a crucial moment for Serbia’s democracy and that including the opposition parties in the IPD process had been extremely important. All IPD measures need to be fully implemented. Various issues such as media polarization and public trust in the elections continue to persist in Serbia. However, these issues can be tackled with further implementation of the IPD measures and increasing transparency and publicity and Serbia has now a chance to have more free and fair elections.

Ms Elsa FENET, from the EEAS welcomed Wednesday’s UN vote on Russian aggression

against Ukraine as a ‘historical’ one, as all of the Western Balkan countries voted in favour. EEAS is also closely following the upcoming elections in Serbia, including the voting of Kosovo Serbs and expects Serbia and Kosovo to come to a mutually acceptable arrangement. Serbia is expected to further increase its CFSP alignment.

5. *Exchange of views on the 3 April 2022 presidential, early parliamentary and Belgrade city elections in Serbia with Ms Nataša DRAGOJLOVIĆ, President of the National Convention on the European Union in Serbia (NCEU), Mr Bojan KLAČAR, Executive Director, Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID), Mr Rasa NEDELJKOV, Program Director, Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA)*

Ms Natasha DRAGOJLOVIĆ also opened her speech by expressing deep condolences for the passing of Mr. Kukan and by congratulating the Inter-Party dialogue team on their dedicated work. She expressed gratitude towards the team and confirmed that the main objective of including more parties in the upcoming elections had been achieved. She emphasized that the upcoming Serbian elections would be related to the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and the fact that citizens would have in mind the attitude of political parties towards Russia. She stated that each time the EU pressured Serbia, the support for EU membership by citizens had the tendency to decline. However, she noted that EU membership was still included in the agenda of the political parties and public support surpassed 50% in Serbia.

Ms DRAGOJLOVIĆ further stated that a positive outcome of the dialogue would be the active participation of the opposition in the 3 April 2022 elections as compared to the last elections which they had boycotted. She continued to say that legislative changes and some changes in regulations had increased the level of democratization and the opportunity to have fair elections. Moreover, new political actors have also appeared, including those who voice environmental issues. She also confirmed that the progress of media freedom in Serbia had been closely monitored by the Multi-Sectoral Working group of the National Convention and that the situation had still room for improvement. She continued to say that civil society representatives within NCEU would continue to closely monitor the negotiation process, even though their position was quite challenging.

Mr Bojan KLAČAR joined the discussion on the upcoming elections by saying that Serbia had adopted a new set of election laws as a result of the Inter-Party Dialogue as well had addressed some ODIHR recommendations. He stated that his main concern was related to the short time for their implementation. Furthermore, Mr KLAČAR recognized that after the Inter-Party Dialogue political party representatives were trying to send positive messages to avoid further polarization. However, polarization in the media continued to be very present.

Moreover, Mr KLAČAR predicted that the campaign would be tense between key political players and that CeSID expected a high voter turnout, more than 50%. He said that no big change at the national level was expected in light of the polls they had conducted. However, the situation in Belgrade could be challenging due to the presence of many small political parties and the Socialist Party of Serbia. In terms of topics highlighted by the parties, Mr KLAČAR stated that he could not assess the consequences of the Ukrainian crisis for the elections at the moment. He stated that in general, topics such as Kosovo, Russia and China had been present in political narratives of this election.

Mr Rasa NEDELJKOV opened his speech by stating that the upcoming Serbian election would take place in the shadow of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and that pro-regime media in Serbia

was exploiting the war to glorify Russia and to create new narratives. He continued to say that the upcoming election would be less favorable for those parties that were presenting a political alternative to the ruling majority. According to him, issues such as the misuse of insitutional advantages by the ruling majority, media polarization, methods of pressure on voters and increased distrust between the parties continued to exist.

Mr NEDELJKOV stated that CRTA's media monitoring had revealed a chronic lack of political pluralism and biased reporting on the ruling majority, with the president and the ruling party being present in the national media channels significantly more than other candidates. He recognized that the attempt to influence the uneven media representation by the Temporary Supervisory Body had not eliminated political bias in media channels. Mr NEDELJKOV concluded by stating that the distrust of citizens in the EU had further increased and that Serbia's positioning in the war in Ukraine would be decisive for its future.

Following interventions by the three civil society representatives, D-RS Chair Ms FAJON (S&D, SL) opened the floor for questions.

EP Standing rapporteur on Serbia Mr Vladimír BILČÍK (EPP, SK) required further specification on how the political actors in Serbia had been reacting to Putin's aggression, the media coverage of the political campaign and the coverage of other candidates as well as the plans they had regarding election observation.

Ms Gwendoline DELBOS-CORFIELD (Greens, FR) asked if there was a difficult atmosphere in the run-up to elections and how much hate speech was present. She also wished to know whether the CSOs had encountered any problems in terms of electoral observation and monitoring at the moment.

MEP Andor DELI (NI, HU) expressed his interest in knowing how the Serbian public reacted on the resolution of the European Parliament on Ukraine, which had a strong formulation on Serbia's non-alignment with sanctions towards Russia. He stated that this could endanger the accession negotiations.

D-RS Chair then gave the floor to the three civil society representatives to answer questions asked by MEPs.

Ms DRAGOJLOVIĆ stated that the Russia-Ukraine war could be a signal for the EU on how to prioritize and deal better with the Western Balkans and how to not give up on enlargement. She voiced her conviction that citizens of Serbia objected the idea of war and aggression in Europe. She continued to say that Serbia had shown alignment with the EU with its vote at the UN resolution. She also explained that President Vučić had felt pressured by the EU several times publicly and this may have been related to the elections.

Mr KLAČAR specified briefly that there was no significant difference between the President and the opposition if they were to exclude far right parties. In terms of the Serbian public, he stated that there was no clear opposition towards the EU or EU accession, even though positive attitudes towards Russia and China also existed. He also stated that they had been preparing a massive election observation mission and that they would observe 1000 polls and electoral administrations as well as municipalities in local election.

Mr NEDELJKOV made it clear that the opposition did not have space for media coverage in the country. Regarding Mr Ponos' media coverage, he said that the oppositon representative

had minor coverage compared to the President. In general, he said that politicians did not participate in public debates in the media in Serbia. Regarding the general public opinion, he stated that it was not clear on how it was divided but it was clear that president Vučić was not speaking highly of the EU. He further stated that they had prepared a huge election observation mission, which would comprise more than 3000 observers.

6. Any other issue

No other issues were raised during the meeting.

7. Date and place of the next meeting

D-RS Chair reminded that the date and place of the next meeting would be decided following consultations with the counterpart delegation.

The meeting closed at 15.00.

**ΠΡΗΕΒΕΤΒΗ ΛΗΕΤ/LISTA DE ASISTENCIA/PREZENČNÍ LISTINA/DELTAGERLISTE/
ANWESENHEITSLISTE/KOHALOLIJATE NIMEKIRI/KATACTAETH ΠAPONTΩN/RECORD OF ATTENDANCE/
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Tanja Fajon (P), Franc Bogovič (1 st VP)
Членове/Diputados/Poslanci/Medlemmer/Mitglieder/Parlamendiliikmed/Βουλευτές/Members/Députés/Zastupnici/Deputati/Deputăți/ Nariai/Képviselők/Membri/Leden/Posłowie/Deputados/Deputați/Jäsenet/Ledamöter
Salvatore De Meo, Eugen Tomac, Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel, Andor Deli
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Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, Valter Flego, Thijs Reuten

209 (7)
Vladimír Bilčík
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/Točka 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 schôdze/Točka UL/Esityslistan kohta/Punkt på föredragningslistan)

Наблюдатели/Observadores/Pozorovatelé/Observatører/Beobachter/Vaatlejad/Παρατηρητές/Observers/Observateurs/Promatrači/Osservatori/Nověrotáji/Stebêtojai/Megfigyelők/Osservatori/Waarnemers/Obserwatorzy/Observadores/Observatori/Pozorovatelja/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

Съвет/Consejo/Rada/Rådet/Rat/Nöukogu/Συμβούλιο/Council/Conseil/Vijeće/Consiglio/Padome/Taryba/Tanács/Kunsill/Raad/Conselho/Consiliu/Svet/Neuvosto/Rådet (*)
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Catherine Wendt (Head of Unit, DG NEAR), Maja Smrkolj (Political Desk Officer, DG NEAR), Barbara Jesus-Gimeno (Western Balkans, DG NEAR), Vincenzo Greco (DG NEAR), Fatih Aydogan (DG NEAR), Chloe Berger (DG NEAR)
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 Služba Działañ Zewnętrznych/Serviço Europeu para a Acção Externa/Serviciul european pentru acțiune externă/Európska služba pre vonkajšiu činnosť/Evropska služba za zunanje delovanje/Euroopan ulkosuhdehallinto/Europeiska avdelningen för yttre åtgärd (*)
Elsa Fenet (Head of Division for Western Balkans), Pawel Lacki (Desk Officer for Serbia), Mateja Norcic Stamcar (EU Delegation to Serbia, Deputy Head), Dirk Lorenz (EU Delegation to Serbia), Tamara Naranacic (EU Delegation to Serbia), Cristina Chiorean (Parliamentary Questions and Transparency Team), Mina Radoncic
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/Istituzjonijiet 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 toimielimet ja elimet/Andra institutioner och organ

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
Spela Han (APA to MEP Fajon), Jure Bizjak (APA to MEP Bogovic), Laura Heymans-Trimaj (APA to MEP Bilcik), Cristina Negoiescu (APA to MEP Tomac), Corneliu Bichinet (APA to MEP Tomac), Jasmine Rowlands (APA to MEP Delbos-Corfield), Una Kubora (APA to MEP Reuten), Catalina-Mihaela Ficut (APA to MEP Falca), Marta Rufino Campos (APA to MEP Campomenosi), Abel Pasztor (APA to MEP Deli)

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PPE	Jan Willem Vlasman, Bozena Marciniak
S&D	
Renew	Paul Ivan
ID	
Verts/ALE	Gesa Storz
ECR	
The Left	Charalampos Kontonis
NI	

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Tatiana Mrazikova
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Adam Isaacs, Peter Lang, Igor Miskulin, Andre De Munter, Vesselina Veleva, Kristine Sproge, Alessia Hajdini	
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Anna Parfjonova, Lea Fanku	

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