

Title: Time to implement better electoral conditions for all Serbian citizens

Mr Vladimír BILČÍK, European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on Serbia

Ms Tanja FAJON, Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee

Members of the European Parliament Ms Fajon and Mr Bilčík, together with Mr Knut Fleckenstein are in Belgrade today as Facilitators of the third and final round of the Inter-Party Dialogue in the Skupština on improving the conditions for holding the 2020 parliamentary elections. A second phase of the Dialogue in the Serbian Parliament would focus on improving political dialogue and the parliamentary culture in the Skupština, which is an essential condition for advancing Serbia's membership in the European Union. Ms Fajon and Mr Bilčík's role as Facilitators in this process demonstrates the highest level of commitment of the European Parliament in supporting Serbia on its path towards full European integration.

We came to facilitate this Dialogue at the request of the majority of the political forces in Serbia and so far, we have listened carefully and identified some proposals that enjoy broad consensus amongst the majority of the political forces, as well as proposals from the expert assessments by ODIHR, EC, Serbian civil society experts and citizens platforms.

The Dialogue has already delivered in achieving consensus in some of the areas identified as most important such as, the composition ("3+1") and work of the Electronic Media Regulator (REM); the regulation of the public broadcasters and media during the electoral campaign; improvement of the transparency and accuracy in the Voters List; amendments to three key laws (on Financing political activities; on Anti-Corruption Agency and on Public enterprises); as well as improvement of the monitoring and transparency of electoral bodies, including with the establishment of a new Supervisory Board by the Parliament.

It is now crucially important to implement all these commitments in a manner that every citizen feels confident that real improvements and changes are achieved.

We have made these proposals public through the conclusions of each round of the Dialogue and in an "*Implementation Table*" that measures the state of concrete delivery of the commitments made. Our analysis in the first two rounds of the Dialogue, indicate that progress has been made, but that the majority of the commitments, more than 60 percent, remain unachieved or partially achieved i.e. not implemented.

It is clear that significant steps must be taken as soon as possible, particularly in the area of freedom of the media and the role of public broadcasters. With good will and a proactive approach, both from the Government and the whole Opposition, the citizens could have significantly higher confidence in the electoral system when casting their votes in the upcoming elections.

With the third round of the Dialogue, we expect a better rate of implementation and new political push for a freer and fairer electoral environment.

There is, however, not a lot of time before the election campaign to improve conditions by implementing all commitments, such as the amendments to the three laws, the adoption of a new regulation for public broadcaster, the creation of a new Supervisory Body, the appointments ("3+1") to the REM. We would therefore suggest consideration of a timeline for elections, in full respect of the laws and the Constitution, which gives sufficient time to implement these commitments before

the election campaign and in order for all stakeholders, especially Serbia's citizens, to have full confidence in the electoral framework.

The whole opposition also has a responsibility to make full use of the dialogue and put forward constructive proposals, thereby engaging the government and representing the interests of their constituents by improving the conditions for elections.

Today, some in the opposition are boycotting the Parliament and the upcoming elections. However, the only way to guarantee political representation to their supporters is by engaging in the political and electoral process.

Coming from different political groups in the European Parliament, we are not here to judge individual proposals. We are here to listen, facilitate a dialogue and remind all participants that when giving proposals and implementing them everyone should respect parliamentary norms of consensual dialogue which is a basic principle of modern and democratic European parliamentary politics. Indeed all politicians have a responsibility to avoid inflammatory language and to counter hate-speech, aggravating social divisions, and disinformation in the media.

The European Parliament has delivered on its initial commitment to help the majority of the political forces to achieve consensus on key areas for improving the conditions for holding the upcoming parliamentary elections. We now call on all the political forces to work together to take the final steps necessary to ensure the widest possible participation in the upcoming elections.

The European Parliament also remains committed and motivated to support phase two of the Dialogue after the elections, if required, and work to improve the parliamentary culture in the new National Assembly, which is a necessary condition for progress on the EU perspective. The role and prerogatives of parliamentary opposition will need to be strengthened to ensure the necessary checks and balances which are indispensable in a modern democratic parliament.

As facilitators, we stand ready at any moment to provide additional support to the people of Serbia during this important electoral period. We have put forward a public record of the areas of consensus, but we leave the final objective assessment on the progress to implement commitments to improve the conditions for holding the parliamentary elections to the observation mission of OSCE/ODIHR and other international observers, including a European Parliament Observation Delegation.