



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

from : General Secretariat of the Council
to : Delegations

Subject: Summary of the plenary session of the European Parliament held in Brussels on
28 March 2012
Enlargement report for Serbia - Council and Commission statements

Minister Wammen, on behalf of the Council, delivered the speech set out in [Annex I](#).

Mr Füle, on behalf of the Commission, delivered the speech set out in [Annex II](#).

The rapporteur, Mr Kacin (ALDE, SI), said that the decision to grant Serbia candidate status was an important turning point for the region as the European perspective became more realistic. He expressed the hope that the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue would not subsequently be neglected. The rapporteur was in favour of launching the EU accession process as soon as possible after the elections. Though he welcomed the progress made by Serbia in many areas, he stressed that more had to be done, in particular as regards the fight against corruption. Mr Kacin underlined that the independent authorities needed to carry out their work.

For the political groups, the following speakers took the floor:

- Mr Schöpflin (EPP, HU) welcomed the Parliament report and said that it would serve as a guide for Serbia's next government in its approach to Europe. He considered that Serbia should receive credit for its efforts, though some (governance) issues remained.

Mr Schöpflin also called on Serbia to adopt a realistic approach as regards Kosovo and expressed the view that its citizenship concept was not yet sufficiently inclusive to provide full rights to some non-Serbian groups.

- Ms Koppa (S&D, EL) also welcomed the Parliament report and said that candidate status constituted recognition of the efforts made. She added that despite the current economic crisis, the expansion of the EU was continuing and she considered that all Balkans countries should become EU members. Ms Koppa underscored the great credit to President Tadić for his commitments and hoped that the dialogue with Kosovo would lead to a successful outcome.
- Ms Brantner (Greens/EFA, DE) described the Parliament report as well balanced since it recognised the efforts that had been made (cooperation with UN Tribunal, economic and state reforms, compromises as regards Kosovo) as well as the shortcomings. She called on Serbia to sign the agreement on integrated border management as it has been agreed at political level. She insisted on fulfilment by Serbia of the accession criteria set, in particular as regards its relationship with Kosovo, but also the fight against corruption, minorities, judiciary reform, etc.
- Mr Piotrowski (ECR, PL) noted that the EU was continuing its expansion to the Balkans. He took the view that some parts of the Parliament report were contradictory and considered that EU's interference in the region could be negative. He considered that more attention should have been drawn to the situation of Christians.
- Mr Ransdorf (GUE/NGL, CZ) said that Serbia's EU accession process contributed to the stability of Europe and the Balkans, in that way removing any basis for chauvinism. He insisted on the need for Serbia to respect minorities and stressed some of its major achievements.

The many interventions by individual Members largely mirrored the speakers from political groups and in general the Parliament report was very much positively received. Many Members welcomed Serbia's candidate statute and called for the EU accession process to be launched as soon as possible. Some Members also recalled the contribution of Serbia's EU integration progress to stability in the region. Several Members stressed that Serbia had to continue its reforms in different areas (democratic structures, corruption, organised crime, judiciary, etc.) and a number of speakers underlined the importance of, and the need to make progress in, the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. Many Members criticised Serbia, with varying degrees of harshness, for its handling of minorities.

In reply, Commissioner Füle took issue with some of the comments made by MEPs on minorities in Serbia and outlined the achievements in that area. He indicated that the Commission would report on this issue in its next progress report. He made clear that the accession criteria had to be fulfilled and said that in that context, the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue was a top priority and that the Commission would look at all outstanding issues.

Minister Wammen thanked Members for the lively debate. He said that EU enlargement was a success and that granting Serbia candidate status was the result of the reforms it had undertaken and its cooperation with ICTY. Minister Wammen underlined that Serbia's integration was based on merit and that in many areas further reform was still needed. He added that the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue was not only important for the two parties but for the whole region and that more progress was also needed in this area.

Speech by Minister Wammen; Brussels, 28 March 2012

Mr President, on behalf of the Danish Presidency of the Council it is a great pleasure to address this Parliament once again, this time to review the integration progress of Serbia. First of all, let me restate that the Presidency very much appreciates Parliament's active engagement with the EU enlargement process. Your active and constructive contribution to the general debate on enlargement and to Serbia's integration process in particular is a precious political asset to us. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank rapporteur Kacin for his work.

I would like to underline that the EU approach is rigorous but fair, delivering on its commitments against clear requirements. This was the case with Croatia when we successfully concluded accession negotiations, and this was the case with Serbia when the European Council decided to grant candidate status to the country.

These achievements show that the political drive behind the EU enlargement process policy continues to promote positive change and sustainable reforms. This process has over many years been a decisive positive factor for peace, security and prosperity throughout Europe. On behalf of the Danish Presidency and the Member States, I would like to welcome the work of this Parliament, and in particular Mr Jelko Kacin's continuous commitment and positive contribution to the endeavour of advancing the enlargement policy of the European Union. The significance of Parliament's work in particular to maintain the support of EU citizens for further enlargement must be underlined. I can assure you that we will pay particular attention to the views of the European Parliament in this regard.

The European Council granted Serbia candidate country status on 1 March this year. I visited Belgrade as part of this process, both before and immediately after the decision was taken, and I can say that it was met with great appreciation by the President and the people of Serbia. We welcome the fact that Serbia and Kosovo reached agreement on regional cooperation and the implementation of the integrated management for crossing points, the IBM. We are aware that there are temporary difficulties in implementing the Regional Cooperation Agreement, and we are working to restore the situation and bring all parties back together.

What is of the utmost importance for Serbia now is to continue its good work on the EU reform agenda and to continue to actively implement the agreements reached within the framework of the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Priština dialogue. Maintaining good relations with all its neighbours will bring stability to Serbia and to the whole region. This remains a very important part of the integration process of Serbia.

It is clear from the opinion of the European Commission of October 2011 that Serbia has progressed towards fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria and the conditions of the Stabilisation and Association Process, and important steps have been taken towards establishing a functioning market economy and achieving macro-economic stability. However, as is reflected in your resolution, Serbia needs to make further efforts to maintain the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria, with particular attention to the rule of law.

Let me end by recalling that regional cooperation and good neighbourhood relations are key to progress in the Western Balkans region. We therefore encourage Belgrade to continue its active engagement in regional cooperation, and from the Presidency's point of view we are also looking forward to close cooperation with Parliament and the Commission, and with Commissioner Füle, in this regard.

Speech by Commissioner Füle; Brussels, 28 March 2012

Mr President, it is a great pleasure and honour for me to participate in today's debate on the European integration process of Serbia, not least because Serbia was granted candidate status by the European Council at the beginning of the month.

I am most grateful to the rapporteur, Mr Jelko Kacin, for having outlined comprehensively and accurately the many achievements, as well as the challenges, lying ahead of Serbia. That Serbia was granted candidate status is due firstly to the determination and vision of the Serbian leadership; secondly, to the priority given by all Serbian state institutions to the EU reform agenda; and thirdly, to their increasing efficiency in adopting and implementing key reforms, notably under the political criteria.

At the pinnacle of these achievements were the significant and consistent efforts of President Tadić to deliver on cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and to foster a new spirit of cooperation and reconciliation in the region, including by effectively engaging in the Belgrade/Priština dialogue.

We have now arrived at a major turning point in our relations with Serbia. Along with the forthcoming entry into force of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, these relations have been brought to a much higher level. I am confident that this will generate a new impetus for reforms and a new wind of change within all Serbian institutions. Ultimately, this gives a far better prospect to Serbian citizens who are eager to live in a country where democracy and the rule of law prevail while its economy recovers and develops in the best possible environment.

2011 was an important year for Serbia, a year of demanding challenges. 2012 will be equally paramount, as Serbia is eager to open accession negotiations. Qualifying for that major step will be the first task of the incoming government after the elections on 6 May.

There is serious work ahead for Serbia if the Commission is to recommend opening accession negotiations in its next progress report. Firstly, Serbia is expected to deliver on the key priority: making further progress towards a visible and sustainable improvement in its relations with Kosovo. This means in particular that Serbia needs to implement – and stick to the letter and spirit of – all agreements reached to date in the dialogue with Priština. Secondly, we will need to see the momentum of reforms continuing in order to confirm that Serbia sufficiently fulfils the political criteria.

We are determined to continue our engagement with Serbia. As long as the objective and criteria are clearly defined, I have strong faith in Serbia's capacity to mobilise itself and achieve the necessary additional progress to move towards accession negotiations. This will allow the negotiation process to push reforms and tackle even the most difficult challenges which lie ahead.

I am convinced that, with our joint support, Serbia will continue to embrace its European future. This will give a positive message to the whole region in order to consolidate peace and foster economic prosperity in the Western Balkans.

Thank you very much for your attention.
