

# BULLETIN

## European Affairs in the Croatian Parliament



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The “European Affairs in the Croatian Parliament” bulletin is published monthly by the European Affairs Department. It provides the reader with an overview of parliamentary activities in the field of EU affairs and inter-parliamentary cooperation as well as with access to EU documents forwarded to national parliaments.

### In Focus

#### Completion of the twinning project in the BiH Parliaments

From May 2019 to October 2021, the Croatian Parliament participated as a junior partner in the twinning project *Empowerment and further support to the Parliaments of Bosnia and Herzegovina in EU integration tasks*. **For the first time**, the Croatian Parliament participated in a project **as an institutional partner, as part of the implementing consortium**.

The Hungarian National Assembly was the leading partner in the implementing consortium, while the Croatian Parliament and the Austrian Parliament participated as junior partners. The value of the project amounted to € 2,300,000.

#### Project objectives

**General objective:** Strengthening the capacities of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska and the Brčko District Assembly, as well as the Cantonal Assemblies, to exercise their tasks related to the EU accession process and the implementation of the EU-BiH Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

**Specific objectives:** Strengthening the administrative structures of the BiH Parliaments by:

- Providing assistance to the BiH Parliaments in the implementation of their European Integration Action Plans adopted in the framework of previous projects;
- Strengthening cooperation between the Parliaments of BiH in matters pertaining to European integration;
- Encouraging the involvement of Cantonal Parliaments in the tasks related to European integration;
- Supporting the technical capacities of the BiH Parliaments in the process of legislation harmonization.

#### Implementation

The project was launched at an opening ceremony held in Sarajevo on 27 June 2019. The then Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Croatian Parliament Domagoj Ivan Milošević attended the opening ceremony.

The Conference of the Political Leaders of the BiH Parliaments held in Sarajevo on 18 October 2021 closed the project. The Conference was attended by the Speakers of the Hungarian National Assembly and the Austrian Parliament, while the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament was represented by his envoy Marko Pavić.



A total of **12 experts** participated in the project activities carried out by the Croatian Parliament and they took part in 35 expert missions within the project activities. Furthermore, Members of the Croatian Parliament – the Vice-Chair of the Foreign Policy Committee in the 10<sup>th</sup> term of and the Chair of the Committee on European Affairs Committee in the 7<sup>th</sup> term of Parliament – participated in the implementation of the activities intended for Members of the BiH Parliaments.

As a participating partner, the Croatian Parliament played its part in the development of the project proposal, the development of the project work plan, quarterly plans and the dynamics of project implementation. Through its junior project manager, the Sabor participated in the preparation of all project documents and in all the meetings involving project managers. The Croatian Parliament received reimbursement of the costs for participating in the implementation of the project for each day of work of parliamentary experts on the project.

#### **Main outcomes of the project:**

- Implementation of recommendations from previous projects and new recommendations for improving the role of the BiH Parliaments in the process of European integration;
- Development and adoption of a **Priority Plan for the BiH Parliaments to step up the process of European integration**;
- Development of EU communication action plans of the BiH Parliaments;
- Establishment of an electronic documentation centre on the EU;
- Establishment of fully functional units for European integration in the Parliaments of BiH;
- Improved understanding of the process of alignment with the acquis;
- **Joint Action Plan** for Cantonal Assemblies for their inclusion in European integration processes, signed on 1 July 2021.

#### Project in numbers:

- 61 workshops or trainings;
- 30 information activities on the European Union and its policies, with 19 different printed materials for MPs and staff;
- 17 draft laws discussed from the aspect of harmonization with the acquis;
- 19 events held for the BiH Parliaments (conferences or meetings).

#### Croatian Parliament as provider of technical assistance

After its accession to the European Union membership on 1 July 2013, the Croatian Parliament has been **increasingly active in supporting other parliaments in strengthening their administrative capacity**.

Since strengthening of bilateral relations is Croatia's foreign policy priority, particularly in the context of the policy of enlargement of the European Union to the countries of Southeast Europe, **the Croatian Parliament is extremely committed to cooperation with the countries in the region by assisting other parliaments**. Apart from its recent experience from the process of accession to the European Union, Croatia's advantage as a partner is the proximity of languages, common starting points related to the political and economic system and legislation from the shared past, as well as knowledge of the culture and customs of Southeast Europe.

However, aware of the strategic importance of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Croatian Parliament, within its capabilities, also provides support to the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Southern Neighbourhood. In addition to the experience in the process of accession to the European Union, Croatia has other valuable experiences to share with regard to the transition processes and reforms. This refers in particular to the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law, the fight against corruption, the promotion of media freedom, the representation of national minorities, the involvement of civil society in the work of parliament and other topics.



Ever since the Croatian Parliament began providing technical assistance, its **staff have participated in about a hundred different activities** aimed at transferring acquired experience and knowledge, i.e. providing technical assistance, such as:

- **hosting study visits** of other countries' parliamentary and government staff;
- **participating as experts** in EU twinning projects;
- **participating as lecturers** in technical assistance projects of various organizers (OSCE, DCAF, UNDP, GIZ and others).

Activities related to the provision of technical assistance in the Croatian Parliament are **coordinated and implemented by the Office for International and European Affairs**, in cooperation with the Office of the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, the Secretary of the Croatian Parliament, the European Affairs Committee and other committees having the experience required for technical assistance projects.

**Currently**, the Croatian Parliament is participating in the activities of the INTER PARES project aimed at **strengthening the capacity of the Parliament of Montenegro**. The project began in October 2021, with a planned duration of one year.

## **Activities of the Croatian Parliament in the Decision-Making Process**

### **Activities of the parliamentary committees**

#### European Affairs Committee

27<sup>th</sup> session held on 4 November 2021 (held jointly with Committee on Finance and Central Budget and Committee on Regional Development and EU Funds)

Member of European Court of Auditors Ivana Maletić presented Annual Report for 2020.

The auditors found that the overall level of irregularities in EU spending has remained stable, at 2.7 % in 2020 (2019: 2.7 %). In 2020, more than half of the audited spending (59 %) was considered high-risk expenditure, a further increase compared to 2019 (53%) and before. The rules and eligibility criteria governing this type of expenditure are often complex, which makes errors more likely. Material error continues to affect high-risk expenditure at an estimated rate of 4.0 % (2019: 4.9 %). As in the previous year, the auditors have therefore concluded that the level of error in this substantial type of spending is pervasive, and issued an adverse opinion on EU expenditure for 2020.

Six cases of suspected fraud were reported in 2020 arising from our audit work– fewer than in 2019, when nine cases were reported. The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has opened investigations into all of them.

The EU response to the COVID-19 pandemic will have a very substantial impact on the EU's finances: for the 2021-2027 financial period, the combined funding allocation from the Next Generation EU (NGEU) instrument and the multiannual financial framework (MFF) will be €1 824 billion, almost twice the amount of spending in the previous MFF period. In view of this, the auditors point out the risk of a delayed start to the implementation of shared management funds in the 2021-2027 financial period. A delayed start affected the implementation of funds the 2014-2020 financial period as well.

The ECA points out that Member States' absorption of the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds has continued to be slower than planned. By the end of 2020, the final year of the current seven-year budget, only 55 % of the agreed EU funding for the 2014-2020 period had been paid out. This has had the effect of inflating outstanding commitments, which reached €303.2 billion by the end of 2020, the equivalent of nearly two annual budgets. The auditors note that there are considerable differences between Member States.



While Finland, for example, had absorbed 79 % of its total allocation by the end of 2020, the three Member States where the absorption rate was lowest (Italy, Croatia and Spain) had only used around 45 % of their committed amounts.

28<sup>th</sup> session held on 25 November 2021

The European Affairs Committee held a preceding discussion on the activities of the Croatian Parliament in European affairs, at which European Commission Vice-President Dubravka Šuica presented the 2022 Commission Work Programme. Members of the European Affairs Committee, chairs of the interested committees in the Croatian Parliament and Croatian MEPs took part in the discussion.

European Affairs Committee has forwarded 8 [European documents](#) in the procedure for the consideration of the Positions of the Republic of Croatia for 2021.

#### Agriculture Committee

38<sup>th</sup> session held on 8 November 2021

Committee has discussed European Court of Auditors Annual Report for 2020. with member of the Court Ivana Maletić

41<sup>st</sup> session held on 25 November 2021

Committee has discussed Farm to Fork Strategy with Gijs Schilthuis, Head of Unit for Policy Perspectives at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development.

### **Monitoring the work of the Government in the European Union institutions**

#### Council

The Croatian Government submitted to the relevant parliamentary committees its positions for 13 Council meetings held in November 2021.

### **EU documents Forwarded Directly to the Croatian Parliament**

According to the Protocol (no 1) on the Role of the National Parliaments in the European Union, all draft laws and communications shall be forwarded directly to the national parliaments.

The Croatian Parliament publishes on a daily basis the EU documents received, along with the information on: document number, adoption procedure, transmission date and subsidiarity deadline.

In November 2021, EU institutions forwarded to the Croatian Parliament [40 documents](#): 24 draft laws and 16 communications and other non-binding documents.

### **Inter-parliamentary Cooperation in the European Union**

Inter-parliamentary cooperation in the European Union encompasses the cooperation between the European Parliament and the national parliaments and the cooperation among the national parliaments in the frame of the parliamentary dimension of the Council Presidency.

### **9 November - Bruxelles, videoconference - Interparliamentary Committee Meeting on the expectations of national Parliaments for the Conference on the Future of Europe AFCD**

Chairman of the Committee on Regional Development and EU Funds Marko Pavić participated at the Meeting.



At the start of the meeting, members from national parliaments and the European Parliament were addressed by the Co-Chairs of the CoFoE and both representatives from the Slovenian and French parliaments.

The representative of the European Parliament and the Co-Chair of the CoFoE, Guy Verhofstadt, highlighted the CoFoE as a one-of-a-kind project set up by the three key EU institutions, which gives national parliaments and citizens the chance to become actively involved. He proposed the CoFoE structure become a possible permanent project for each new term of the European Parliament and presented the current status and progress of the CoFoE Citizens' Panels.

The representative of the Council of the EU and the Co-Chair of the CoFoE, as well as the State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, Gašper Dovžan, emphasized the important role of national parliaments as guardians of EU treaties and implementers of the Union's secondary legislation, as well as signatories of international agreements, which, in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, can also have an impact on the EU's primary legislation. He considered the topics to be appropriate for discussion at the CoFoE as it is the member states that will be implementing the CoFoE proposals and reports.

The representative the European Commission and the Co-Chair of the CoFoE, Dubravka Šuica, pointed to the important role of national parliamentary representatives in promoting the CoFoE in their local environment and in motivating citizens to participate in CoFoE events. She said that political representatives are a key bridge at the local, regional, and national level between citizens and EU institutions.

### **18 November - Bruxelles, videoconference - Interparliamentary Committee Meeting on the development of CAP Strategic plans in each Member States**

Chairwoman of the Agriculture Committee Marijana Petir and Deputy Chair Ružica Vukovac participated at the Meeting.

The European Parliament Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), in cooperation with the Legislative Dialogue Unit of the Directorate for Relations with national Parliaments, invited Members of national Parliaments of the EU Member States to attend a virtual Interparliamentary Committee Meeting (ICM) to express their views on the main elements of the new agricultural policy with a special focus on implementation challenges at national level.

### **29 – 30 November – Ljubljana, videoconference - LXVI COSAC Plenary Meeting**

Chairman of the European Affairs Committee Domagoj Hajduković and members of the Committee Davor Ivo Stier and Marko Pavić participated at the Meeting.

Representatives of the parliaments of the European Union discussed the following four topical issues with distinguished guests; the achievements of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU, working towards a European perspective for the Western Balkans (WB), the future role of young people in EU decision-making processes and beyond, and the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE).

The State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gašper Dovžan, presented the achievements of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

As part of the “Working Towards a European Perspective for the Western Balkans” topic, European Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi underlined the EU's commitment to the European perspective for the Western Balkans and highlighted the significant progress made in the region, which he described as a strategic priority for the EU, as reflected in the European Commission's economic and investment plan for the Western Balkans. State Secretary Dovžan, welcomed the achievements of this year's EU-Western Balkans Summit and stressed the importance of jointly addressing challenges in areas such as migration, climate change and cyberattacks



The speakers expressed their support for the EU enlargement process in the Western Balkans and saw the importance of the region also in terms of strengthening security, managing migration, and economic cooperation. They expressed concern about increased instability, corruption and the influence of non-European countries on the region, and called for clearer commitments from the EU on its future. The second day of the COSAC Plenary Meeting saw the appointment of the new Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat for 2022–2024, Bruno Dias Pinheiro from the Portuguese Parliament. Talking about “The Future Role of Young People in EU Decision-Making Processes and Beyond”, the following speakers presented their views: Vice-President of the European Parliament (EP), Roberta Metsola stressed the importance of communication between young people and decision-makers and underlined the importance of the EP’s cooperation with various educational institutions to make active European citizenship part of school curricula across the EU.

### **30 November - Bruxelles, videoconference - Interparliamentary Committee Meeting on violence against women**

Chairwoman of the Gender Equality Committee Marija Selak Raspudić participated at the Meeting. On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), in cooperation with the Legislative Dialogue Unit of the Directorate for Relations with national Parliaments, invited Members of national Parliaments of the EU Member States to attend the virtual Interparliamentary Committee Meeting (ICM) "Eliminating violence against women".

The ICM consisted of four panels exploring the current state of affairs in policy and practice in focus areas of gender-based violence. The first panel, co-organised with the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), dealt with sexual violence as a weapon of war. The prevention and fight against violence against women and girls with disabilities was addressed in the second panel. The third and fourth panels were organised jointly with the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and focussed on cyber-violence as well as the Istanbul Convention.

This meeting was a good opportunity for the FEMM Committee and the European Parliament, together with the national Parliaments, to mark this day and provide a global forum for an exchange of experiences and best practices in eliminating violence against women in the EU and on a global scale.

## **Inter-parliamentary activities in December 2021**

**3 – 4 December – Bruxelles, videoconference - 7th Summit of Speakers of the PA-UfM and Plenary Session of the PA-UfM**

**7 December – Ljubljana, videoconference - Conference on Digital Transformation in Education**

**9 December – Bruxelles, videoconference - Interparliamentary Committee Meeting on 'The situation of the rule of law in the EU'**

**10 December – Bruxelles, videoconference - third High-level Interparliamentary Conference on Migration and Asylum**

