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TWINNING PROJECT

EU SUPPORT TO THE PARLIAMENTS OF BiH IN EU INTEGRATION TASKS



EU TWINNING FACTSHEETS / NEWS ON THE EU INTEGRATION PROCESS

THE ROLE OF THE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENTS IN THE EU INTEGRATION PROCESS

➤ WHERE IS NOW BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA IN THE EU INTEGRATION PROCESS?

Bosnia and Herzegovina is recognized by the EU as a potential candidate for EU membership. An official application for accession to the European Union was submitted in 2016. In response, in May 2019 the European Commission issued its Opinion on BiH's application for membership of the European Union and an accompanying Analytical Report, containing extensive recommendations on the necessary measures to be taken by the BiH authorities related to granting of candidate country status and opening of accession negotiations. In October 2019 the Council of Ministers of BiH adopted an Action Plan for the Implementation of Priorities from the European Commission Analytical Report. On 26 March 2020, the new enlargement methodology was endorsed by EU Member States Heads of State and Government which will be consequently put in practice. In October 2020, the European Commission issued its annual country report on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

➤ WHY IS THE ROLE OF THE MPS AND PARLIAMENTS IN THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS IMPORTANT?

Parliaments are sovereign legislative bodies and due to this fact, they are the main symbols of democratic political representation. As directly elected bodies, parliaments ensure the democratic legitimacy of the constitutional system. Based on that, all important social, economic and political issues are reflected in the parliaments. Therefore, parliaments shall play an important role in supporting, monitoring and guiding of the EU integration process.

➤ HOW CAN A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT PARTICIPATE IN MONITORING THE EU ACCESSION PROCESS?

Parliaments wield a wide range of supervisory powers, particularly as regards of the executive. The supervisory powers of parliaments refer to the political control or supervision exercised by parliaments over the actions of the executive branches of their respective governance level. Parliament exercises continuous supervision of the government and ensures that the executive respects the will and demands of the voters, as expressed by the public in elections. Thus, the government shall inform the parliament on the progress of the implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement and on the overall status of the EU integration process and law approximation falling into its competence. MPs can participate in the process of oversight through various tools which are laid down in their Rules of Procedure and other legal documents, among others:

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- submit questions and interpellations to the government in EU integration related matters at plenary session;
- request government reports and strategic documents on the EU integration process and debate those on committee sessions;
- put specific EU integration related matters on the agenda of standing committees, according to their competences, and invite the Members of executive bodies to the committee meeting in order to provide information about the relevant EU Integration issue;
- holding political debate days on plenary, further public hearings and thematic sessions on (joint) committee meetings about EU integration issues.

► HOW CAN A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT CONTRIBUTE TO THE LEGAL APPROXIMATION PROCESS?

Parliament shall have a focus on legal approximation. The legal approximation to the EU acquis is a legal obligation stemming from the Stabilization and Association Agreement. The tasks of the parliament in the legal approximation contain several phases: understanding, debating and verifying of the draft legislative acts aimed at approximation and handling the submitted amendments and finally adopting the drafts. Among other, it can be ensured by:

- requesting and ensuring the check of compliance of each draft and proposal with EU law during the course of the entire legislative process;
- requesting an annual plan ahead of the year about legal approximation from the government, along with a report at the end of the year, and discuss it on plenary and/or committee sessions.

► HOW CAN A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT STRENGTHEN AND RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION?

As the body providing the widest publicity of political debates, the parliament should play a key role in informing the general public about the association process. This can be achieved first and foremost by strengthening the openness and transparency of the activities of the parliament and especially of its bodies dealing with EU matters.

MPs can use a great number of tools to increase awareness on EU integration, among others:

- adopting a parliament-wide EU communication Action Plan, and systematically organizing/participating on events promoting internal preparation for EU integration, across the country;
- involving credible representatives of the civil society into the work of the parliamentary committees what gives more legitimacy and effectiveness to the debates on EU integration;
- organizing and promoting seminars for different target groups and opinion leaders who have a multiplying role in the society (such as teachers, students, journalists, representatives of the civil society) to introduce discuss EU-related issues of great importance and highlighting the activities and competences of the parliament in the accession process;
- informing the media through various channels about EU integration affairs that are discussed by the parliamentary bodies;
- distributing printed and electronic materials dealing with EU issues prepared by the parliamentary staff through various channels (libraries, schools, public events, etc);
- emphasizing that due to their representative function MPs can ensure that opinion and needs of their voters are expressed and presented in political debates related to EU integration.

► WHAT KIND OF EXPERT ASSISTANCE IS AT THE DISPOSAL OF A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT IN EU INTEGRATION MATTERS?

Members can rely on expert assistance of their parliamentary administration, especially of the unit responsible for dealing with EU integration. The parliamentary staff needs to provide regular and overall information to MPs on the developments of the integration process and especially its parliamentary aspects, drawing their attention to the most topical issues. This enables MPs to be equipped with comprehensive information which is indispensable for them to take necessary political decisions and to inform the general public during the EU integration process.

► HOW TO USE MEANS OF PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY IN THE EU INTEGRATION PROCESS?

Parliamentary diplomacy is an asset in the enlargement process to strengthen the international reputation and support for the country. Regular contacts with the European Parliament, especially through the Stabilization and Association Parliamentary Committee as the joint body of the European Union and Bosnia and Herzegovina, further with parliaments of EU Member States as well as regional parliamentary cooperation are key to the success of the integration process.