EUROPEAN COMMISSION REPORT ON SERBIA FOR 2016: MARK: STRONG 2 FOR SERBIA

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As we had hoped...

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The National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA)

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The station on the road to the implementation of the Paris Agreement
COP22 – Summit of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Marrakesh

INTRODUCING PP. 13
Chapter 10-Information society and media

The second meeting of the Joint Committee for the Implementation of the Agreement on Co-operation between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of Montenegro was held in Belgrade. Representatives of Serbia and Montenegro met to share experiences and information relating to negotiations on the accession of these countries to the European Union. At the meeting they discussed the current status of negotiations and cross-section in the context of negotiating chapters 27 (Environment), 23 and 24 (Judiciary and fundamental rights; justice, freedom and security), 20 (Enterprise and industrial policy), 14 and 21 (Traffic and the Trans-European networks).

Read more...

13th – 15th Novem. The Committee for European Integration at the meeting of COSAC

Delegation of the Committee for European Integration of the National Assembly took part in the 56th plenary meeting of the Conference of Parliamentary Committee for European Affairs of EU member states - COSAC, which was held in Bratislava, in the framework of the parliamentary dimension of the Slovak presidency of the European Union.

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17th November The second revised NPAA has been adopted

Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the second revised National Programme for the Adoption of the EU Acquis (NPAA). This document presents a detailed plan for harmonising the legal and institutional framework with the acquis communautaire and an overview of measures and activities for achieving full compliance with all the rights and obligations arising from the acquis.

Read more...

22nd November New contract under the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation has been signed

The European Investment Fund (EIF) and Erste Bank Serbia have signed a new guarantee agreement aimed at supporting micro-enterprises in Serbia under the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). The guarantee agreement will cover a loan portfolio of EUR 4.7 million for around 800 Serbian micro-borrowers, who will be able to benefit from loans with attractive conditions, without having to provide additional guarantees.

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23rd November Cross-border Programme Serbia-Macedonia 2016–2020

The European Commission has adopted the new Cross-border Co-operation Programme Serbia-Macedonia 2016 – 2020 at the 12th IPA Committee meeting. The total value of this Programme is over four million euros, of which three and a half million euros were provided through IPA funds of the European Union. The priorities of the Cross-border Co-operation Programme Serbia-Macedonia are the promotion of employment, labour mobility and cross-border social and cultural inclusion, encouraging the development of tourism and preservation of cultural and natural heritage.

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30th November Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Implementation of the Justice Agreement

The representative of the Kosovo, Edita Tahiri, and a representative of Serbia, Marko Djuric, chief negotiators for the EU-facilitated Dialogue, agreed on the final steps for the implementation of the Justice Agreement, reached within the Dialogue on 9th February 2015. The European Union commends the parties for this achievement and urges them to accelerate progress on all other outstanding Agreements implementation work, in particular the Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities and on Energy.

Read more...
In most chapters, according to the European Commission Report for Serbia 2016, Serbia has made some progress. However, the average mark of progress is inferior to the report from last year.

The European Commission published Serbia 2016 Report on 9th November. This report covers the period from October 2015 to September 2016. It is based on input from a variety of sources, including contributions from the government of Serbia, the EU Member States, European Parliament reports and information from various international and non-governmental organisations.

Thanks to changes in reporting methodology introduced in 2015, assessment of the current situation and progress in a given area can be easily compared with the last year’s findings, which makes a re-interpretation of the report significantly limited. If these language constructions are translated into a numerical scale from one to five, which was adopted by the European Commission as part of the changes in the methodology of reporting, the average mark which Serbia has received in the overall report amounts to 2.96, while the average mark in the report for 2015 was 3.15.

Political criteria
(Democracy, Public administration reform, Rule of law, Human rights and the protection of minorities, Regional issues and international obligations)

Facts and figures that we should most worry about relate to the state of democracy and rule of law: in the field of freedom of expression and the fight against corruption, Serbia’s progress is assessed lower than in 2015. As regards the assessment of the current situation, Serbia received the same average mark as last year – “some level of preparation” which is “mark 2”.

As in the report from 2015, 2016 Report states that the civil society and parliament are involved in the process of accession negotiations, but the process of adopting the laws remains critical. It is recommended that the transparency and quality of law-making should be further enhanced, and the use of urgent procedures limited.

The report re-states that Serbia is moderately prepared in the field of public administration reform. Good progress was achieved with the adoption of key programmes, strategies and
European Commission report on Serbia is a document by which the EC provides information on progress made in meeting the requirements and objectives set by the EU, as well as a summary of the operational measures to be taken on the basis of established plans of action.

To recall, the European Commission has made a number of changes in the Enlargement Package for 2015 compared to previous years. The aim was to further increase the quality of assessment in reports, but also the reliability of the package as a source of information for all stakeholders. These changes should increase the transparency of the process and enable better and more detailed review of the reforms to all stakeholders, including civil society. Accordingly, the reports: 1) give a broader picture of the current situation in order to show more clearly at which level the countries are in terms of preparedness to meet the criteria for membership; 2) provide additional guidance on what the governments should focus in the coming year, and 3) include more harmonised reports in terms of preparedness, including civil society. The aim was to further increase the quality of assessment in reports, but also the reliability of the package as a source of information for all stakeholders. These changes should increase the transparency of the process and enable better and more detailed review of the reforms to all stakeholders, including civil society. Accordingly, the reports: 1) give a broader picture of the current situation in order to show more clearly at which level the countries are in terms of preparedness to meet the criteria for membership; 2) provide additional guidance on what the governments should focus in the coming year, and 3) include more harmonised reports.

Very good progress was made in securing the implementation of the legal and institutional framework for the development of civil society. However, Serbia needs to professionalise and depoliticise the administration and and make recruitment and dismissal procedures more transparent.

Assessment of the state of the judiciary has not changed in relation to the report of 2015. It is stated that the issue of political influence in this area is still alarming. The quality and efficiency of the judiciary and access to justice remain undermined by an uneven distribution of workload, a burdensome case backlog and the lack of a free legal aid system.

Serbia has achieved some level of preparation in preventing and fighting corruption. Corruption remains prevalent in many areas and continues to be a serious problem. The institutional setup is not yet functioning as a credible deterrent for corruptive practices. A track record of effective investigations, prosecutions and convictions in corruption cases is required, including at high level.

The report also says that it is necessary to ensure consistent implementation of the legal and institutional framework for the respect of basic human rights. No progress was made in securing conditions for the full exercise of freedom of expression. Further sustained efforts are needed to improve the situation of persons belonging to the most discriminated groups (Roma, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, persons with disabilities, persons with HIV/AIDS and other socially vulnerable groups).

It is stated that Serbia participated constructively in regional initiatives and worked to improve its bilateral relations in a spirit of reconciliation, good neighbourly relations and establish a climate conducive to addressing open bilateral issues and the legacies of the past.

Regarding the normalisation of relations with Kosovo, Serbia remained committed to the implementation of the agreements reached in the EU-facilitated dialogue. Continued efforts are needed to implement the agreements already reached with Kosovo.

**CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

“Some progress was made towards establishing an enabling environment for the development and financing of civil society. However, further efforts are needed to ensure systematic inclusion of civil society in policy dialogue and help develop its full potential,” says the EC Report. It is emphasised that an empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system while civil society organisations (CSOs) and human rights defenders play a key role in raising awareness of civil, political and socioeconomic rights.

“Also, the Report says that a new Director of the Government Office for Co-operation with Civil Society was appointed in March, one year after the resignation of his predecessor. The Office continued with initiatives aimed at improving co-operation between the state and the civil sector and at enhancing the legal, financial and institutional framework for the development of civil society.”

It was noted that co-operation between civil society and parliament in the area of EU negotiations has improved, notably through the National Convent on European Integration, as evidenced in the public consultations on chapters 23 and 24. Guidelines for Co-operation between the core negotiating team, representatives of civil society organisations, the National Convent and the Chamber of Commerce were adopted in April, aiming to improve the level of inclusion of civil society in the negotiations.

In the area of policy-making, the Report state that civil society struggles to exert influence on policy-making and at the same time faces obstacles from parts of the public administration. At many levels, civil society participation in policy-making is still to a large extent ad hoc, which means that the full potential of the sector is not being realised.

It was also noted that the Strategy for an enabling environment for development of civil society organisations in the Republic of Serbia 2015-2019 (produced in 2015) has still not been adopted and the Council for Civil Society Co-operation remains to be set up.
Economic criteria
(Existence of a functioning market economy, capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market EU forces)

As regards the economic criteria, Serbia is moderately prepared in developing a functioning market economy. Good progress was made to address some of the policy weaknesses, in particular with regard to the budget deficit and restructuring of publicly-owned enterprises. Economic reforms have brought clear results in terms of growth prospects and reduction of domestic and external imbalances. In view of the still high level of government debt, fiscal consolidation needs to be sustained. The restructuring of large state-owned utilities is still to be completed. Credit activity is recovering but the high level of non-performing loans remains an issue. Unemployment remains high, particularly among youth. Further expansion of the private sector is hampered by weaknesses in the rule of law.

Serbia is moderately prepared to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Public and private investments increased, although the level of investment activity remains below the economy’s needs. The quality, equality and relevance of education and training do not match societal needs. Some progress was made concerning support to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurship but SMEs face a number of challenges, including an unpredictable business environment, a high level of para-fiscal charges, and difficult and costly access to finance.

Interesting is the fact that - despite all the praise for the economic results - Serbia received the same marks for a functioning market economy and capacity to cope with the pressures of the market, as well as in the report of 2015.

NON-COMPLIANCE WITH THE STABILISATION AND ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT (SAA)

In contrast to the last year’s report, the European Commission in its 2016 Report states that Serbia needs to fulfill its obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), in particular on safeguard measures on some agricultural products, State aid control, and fiscal discrimination. In late July, Serbia informed of their decision to extend the duration of safeguard measures on imports from the EU of dairy and pig-meat products by a further 6 months until end 2016. However, consultations with the Serbian authorities on the justification for such measures were inconclusive. Therefore, Serbia was recommended to discontinue the safeguard measures as soon as possible. Other issues of compliance with the SAA include the discriminatory application of excise duties on alcohol and coffee and should be removed.

The report states that in many cases, State aid continues to be granted to unprofitable public companies or in a non-transparent manner. Investment aid, in particular, is not granted on the basis of predictable criteria in line with the EU and SAA state aid rules. The report states that it is not yet clear that the aid granted to the Smederevo steel mill is compatible with protocol 5 of the SAA, but in September, the Serbian authorities provided information to the Commission in the context of its investigation on this case. Not all existing aid schemes, particularly the fiscal schemes, have been fully aligned with the acquis, although the SAA deadline for their alignment was 1st February 2014. Serbia has so far failed to notify its classification of territorial units in line with the EU regulation on a nomenclature of territorial units for statistics (NUTS), which is an obligation of the SAA due since 2014. The absence of an agreed nomenclature prevents deeper co-operation with the Commission across many policy areas.

NEW CALENDAR FOR THE PUBLICATION OF THE REPORT

The Commission is planning to move the adoption of the annual Enlargement package from its traditional time slot in the autumn to a new slot in the spring. This would mean that the next package would not be adopted in October/November 2017, but in spring 2018.

This new timing would allow the Commission to harmonise its reporting period with the calendar year, which is the usual basis for gathering statistical data. The new timing of the package will also allow the Commission to harmonise its package reporting cycle with the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) cycle. This would lend more weight to the economic fundamentals of the enlargement policy, ensure stronger coherence between the package and the ERP process, and work to lend greater visibility to the latter.
CHAPTER PROGRESS IN THE MONITORED AREA

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Ability to assume the obligations of membership (33 negotiating chapters)

When it comes to preparedness and progress in individual negotiating chapters, there has been no change in the assessment for most of them. As regards its ability to assume the obligations of membership, Serbia has continued to align its legislation with the EU acquis across the board. Compared to the previous year, the level of preparation increased in agriculture (Chapter 11), environment (Chapter 27), transport (Chapter 14) and the Customs Union (Chapter 29). However, if we recall the report of the European Commission for 2015 the level of preparation in the areas of agriculture and environment was marked with the lowest grade, that is in "an early stage of preparation" so this year’s "grade 2" to "a certain level of preparation" is still not commendable.

Rated as the worst chapters in which there has been no progress in the past year are: Chapter 3 (Right of establishment and freedom to provide services), Chapter 4 (Free movement of capital), Chapter 7 (Intellectual Property Law), Section 8 (Competition Policy) and Chapter 12 (Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy).

In the area of public procurement (Chapter 5) and financial services (Chapter 9) the decline was recorded, and Serbia was rated with “mark 2” (some progress), as opposed to the report from 2015, where it was “good progress” noted (mark 3). The European Commission underlines that Serbia needs to make significant efforts in all areas to improve the competitiveness, efficiency and transparency in public procurement procedures and to take further steps to align its legislation with EU standards in the field of financial services.

Written by: Danijela Božović

Comparison of assessment of progress in 2015 and 2016 in the individual sections
What is the outcome of Serbia in the European Commission Report when it comes to Chapter 27 (Environment and climate change), and are the things actually like that as being written in the Report?

Thus, according to the conclusion of the EC on Chapter 27, Serbia has made a step forward and addressed the key recommendations from the previous year. However, one gets the impression that the EC was too mild when assessing the situation in Serbia for Chapter 27, as well as some other chapters. The second conclusion is that in addition to shortages of money and staff, for Serbia’s progress regarding Chapter 27 a lack of political willingness to do anything has been noticed.

“Serbia has been praised for adopting a document in 2015 called “Intended Nationally Determined Contributions for Reductions in Greenhouse Gas Emissions” says Mirko Popovic, project manager in the field of environmental protection in the Belgrade Open School (BOS) which is a member of the Coalition 27 – a network of organisations that monitor the negotiations on Chapter 27. “However, if we deal with the basic mathematics from this document, we can see that according to it Serbia does not envisage the reduction of greenhouse gases emission (GHG) by 2030, but on the contrary – their increase. The document states that compared to 1990 levels Serbia will achieve a reduction of 9.8 percent, but if one refers to figures relating to 2013, we can see that it is actually the increase of 15 percent,” says Popovic.

Serbia has achieved some level of preparation in this area. Some progress has been made in further aligning policies and legislation with the acquis, including in waste, nature protection and climate change. Serbia improved its strategic planning and set up a Green Fund, both key recommendations in 2015. In the coming period, Serbia should in particular:

– enhance administrative and financial capacity by strengthening the environmental protection agency’s monitoring and reporting, adequately resourcing the new environmental finance facility (Green Fund) and improving inter-institutional coordination at both central and local level;
– intensify efforts regarding implementation and enforcement including closing non-compliant landfills, investing in waste separation and recycling, reinforcing air quality monitoring and advancing on river basin management;
– ratify the Paris Agreement and start implementing it, including by developing a comprehensive strategy for climate change that is consistent with the EU 2030 framework for climate and energy policies and well integrated in all relevant sectors.

Financing and capacity

The solution for the financing of environmental protection is also questionable. Environmental Protection Fund, which was abolished in 2012, has been re-established through this year’s amendments to the Law on Environmental Protection and is called “Green Fund of the Republic of Serbia” (thereby, a serious analysis of the previous Fund performance and results has never been made, so that the new fund might operate in a better way). The idea is that, according to the European “polluter pays” principle, resources from this Fund are used for environmental protection. However, the legal solution envisaged that this fund should be so-called budgetary fund, in accordance with the law regulating the budget system. In translation, the Ministry of Finance will be in charge of this fund, as well as for the rest of the budget.

“During public debate, when adopting the amendments of the new Law on Environmental Protection, based on the experience we had with funds for environmental protection at the local level, we pointed out that the budget fund solution is not good”, says Ljubinka Kaludjerovic, Secretary of the Committee on Environment and Emergencies, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities. “At the local level we have the situation when the money overflows through the budget throughout the year, and is not spent on environmental protection, on December 31 we have funds in that position, and on the first of January the funds are gone. Therefore, we have unspent funds in a country where everyone is crying out for money. There is something wrong. And it is very possible that this has been happening at the national level, as well” says Ljubinka Kaludjerovic.

She points out that, in addition to finances, a large issue is the lack of administrative capacities, both at central and local level, which the European Commission has been stating for years in their reports. “An illustrative example of how our lack of staff has a negative impact even on the reporting could be the Environmental Protection Agency, where positions have not been filled, in accordance with its job classification.”
Because there is not enough staff, there is no possibility that someone goes on the spot and check the situation when there is a suspicion in certain information received from the municipalities. And the situation is such that in some municipalities people interpret the law in accordance with its practice, and for the same questionnaires one can get completely inconsistent data – for example, data on waste at two neighbouring municipalities are such as if one municipality is in Manhattan and the other in central Africa”, says Kaludjerovic.

Water protection is the most expensive

“A similar situation exists when it comes to nature protection,” says Goran Sekulić from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), which is also a member of the Coalition 27. According to him, the main task in the field of nature protection is to establish a European ecological network “Natura 2000”. It is a system of protected areas, which focuses on the protection of habitats and species of European Community importance. “However, according to Sekulic, there is neither great progress in Serbia when it comes to legal documents (Regulation on the Ecological Network and the Regulation on Appropriate Assessment), nor in data collection and mapping, because, according to the directives governing this field, Serbia should complete a detailed mapping of habitats and species and propose area network "Natura 2000".

“The part of water protection and water management is significant, and is usually marked as the most problematic part in Chapter 27 – it requires the largest funds, because of the largest infrastructure measurements, or the construction of a water treatment plant”, said Goran Sekulic. “The percentage of municipal waste water being treated before discharged in Serbia is negligible. It is estimated to be less than 10 percent, but functionally it is probably less than five percent. Actually, whole Belgrade discharges water without treatment – there is no water treatment facility, so there are both municipal and industrial water," says Sekulic, adding that, in addition to already mentioned lack of staff, there is no co-operation between sectors: “The co-operation between, for example, nature protection and water protection must exist – as it is inevitably necessary, but at a slow pace in Serbia”.

The fact that these changes are moving at a slow pace could be associated with the impression that the State is simply indifferent to these changes, or, perhaps, it is simply interested in changes not to occur. “We have been in the process of European integration for more than 10 years. It is questionable what is going on, if every year we have a requirement to increase administrative capacities,” says Mirko Popovic."We come to the point – where decisions are being made. There are people in state administration that work with environmental protection and who can deal with that burden. There are people in the private sector who, since becoming a part of the common market, must develop, and they are investing in knowledge and in its staff. There is also a civil society, which can help, but at the level of political decision-making it seems as if there is a decision not to enter that process”, says Popovic.

Can you see the air?

Air quality is one of the key issues with regard to Chapter 27. Although Serbia has passed the assessment of the EU for transposition, the transfer of EU legislation in our legal system did not contribute to better measurement, or to monitoring and air quality. This problem has grown so large that even the citizens and representatives of local governments from Kraljevo, Uzice, Valjevo, Belgrade are aware they are breathing polluted air, and even recognise the source of pollution, whether it comes from the wood, coal or from the traffic. In a sense, it is a "lucky" circumstance that such pollution can literally be "smelled" because the measurement network is unreliable. The report on the air quality by the Environmental Protection Agency states that data are properly collected from only 25 percent of measuring points. Since 2012, measurements implementation degree has been continuously declining (when monitoring stations were purchased, with EU funds), and it may be said that the real measurement does not exist. In addition, there is often a misconception that the air quality is more or less fine. For example, on the basis of local measurements in Kraljevo, it is known that permissible values are exceeded for more than a third of the calendar year. However, in the above-mentioned report, Kraljevo is “colored” in green, which indicates good air quality.

Prepared by Radmilo Marković for the weekly „Vreme” in co-operation with the Heinrich Boell Foundation and the RES foundation, which published a series of articles dedicated to climate change-Political climate
Omission of Savamala as explicit reference in the report has been as met by Belgrade as a great diplomatic victory. It has not been won easily: months before the release of report, diplomatic representatives of Serbia in all EU member states were given the order to put their back into lobbying for not speaking about Savamala and thus draw the attention of the hosts on the possible consequences. In the end they succeeded, thanks to Germany, whose representatives in the European Council secured that those references to Savamala, which had been involved in several drafts, be crossed out of the final document.

With this compromise the EU temporarily secured peace in the house (or more precisely in the neighbourhood), but further damaged their already shaky credibility when it comes to fundamental European values.

As for the rest of the report, it is striking that, probably as compensation, criticism is significantly tightened (as compared to the previous year) due to the poor state of the media in connection with freedom of speech in general. “No progress was made in improving conditions for the full exercise of freedom of expression,” the report said. In other areas there was “moderate” or “some” progress, which, translated to the school marking system was somewhere between marks two and three. Every modest praise is accompanied with large shortcomings, so the report notes that in terms of public administration reform there has been a “good” progress, but it is neither professionalised nor depoliticised; in the area of judicial reform the issue of political influence on judges and prosecutors has not been resolved; small and medium enterprises are faced with unpredictable external environment, high para-fiscal levies and they hardly get to already expensive loans... There is no need to go deeper into the details, because all of this, after all, is known to even casual observers of local conditions.

Package of the annual European Commission reports on Serbia’s progress in the enlargement process was delayed this year for almost a month compared to the usual time of publication (mid-October). It was also late last year, and although no one in Brussels had officially said, the reason was the same: it was necessary to “iron” parts of the report on Turkey relating to human rights violations. The Commission needs a co-operation with Turkey over the refugee crisis, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is sensitive to criticism, so could get angry and splash the continent with new waves of refugees from the Middle East, and this is a scenario that no one in the EU does want to even imagine.

“Ironing” was also carried out on the report on Serbia, of course to a lesser extent, but still for the same reasons: hypersensitivity of authorities and the refugee crisis. In this crisis Serbia is not even nearly as significant as Turkey, but is now in the middle of the refugee route through the Western Balkans, and Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vucic, has been proven as extremely co-operative so far (which is written in the report), and it would not be good to worry him about “little things” such as night demolition in Savamala.

Omission of Savamala as explicit reference in the report has been as met by Belgrade as a great diplomatic victory. It has not been won easily: months before the release of report, diplomatic representatives of Serbia in all EU member states were given the order to put their back into lobbying for not speaking about Savamala and thus draw the attention of the hosts on the possible consequences. In the end they succeeded, thanks to Germany, whose representatives in the European Council secured that those references to Savamala, which had been involved in several drafts, be crossed out of the final document.

Omission of Savamala as explicit reference in the report has been as met by Belgrade as a great diplomatic victory. The head of the EU mission in Belgrade, Michael Davenport, stated after the publication of the report that Savamala was not included because “individual cases are never included in the report,” but that argument falls apart when comparing this year’s report to the previous one, where individual problems are clearly identified. After all, there was no word about Davenport himself, who has been exposed to defamation of particular regime media for months, and even of some officials, who have been constantly following him and perceive each of his contacts with anyone who is not in power as conspiring with the aim to destabilise Serbia and cause chaos in the country. In Brussels it was obviously assessed that he could endure. Indeed, Davenport heroically withstood several hours of harangue in the National Assembly when he tried to present the report.

This varnishing is harmful because through the case of Savamala, as noted by ombudsman Saša Janković, all key weaknesses of the rule of law in Serbia are reflected. That night we had an obvious example of arrogance of local authorities and a temporary suspension of the rule of law by national authorities, and reluctance of judicial authorities to investigate. With this compromise the EU temporarily secured peace in the house (or more precisely in the neighbourhood), but further damaged their already shaky credibility when it comes to fundamental European values. Serbia is here, however, only part of a global process of erosion of human rights standards and strengthening of various areas of authoritarian rule, thus it could be said that in this case it is keeping up with the world.
As for the rest of the report, it is striking that, probably as compensation, criticism is significantly tightened (as compared to the previous year) due to the poor state of the media in connection with freedom of speech in general.

There are two things we should worry about. The first is Vučić’s triumphant reaction to the lack of mention of Savamala. “I cannot hide a smile, we got the best ratings in the region,” said the Prime Minister, and later commented on the criticism of local actors at the expense of the EC leniency. “Some were engaged to put Savamala in the report,” he said. “People do not have a problem with saying bad things about their country, just because they do not like the current government.” As long as pushing the serious problems under the rug to make Serbia look more beautiful outside is seen as a success, and pointing to them as subversive activity, it will be difficult to make progress, not only on the European path but rather on any other road.

Another thing is that next year there will be no report, but according to the new system, it will come out in the spring of 2018. This is bad not only because it indicates a slowing of European integration (not only Serbia), but also because past experience shows that the annual reports have given a significant boost to reforms; some things were done at the last minute only to be put in the report, just like some students learn just before the exam. Reducing the number of reports will therefore probably have the same effect as postponement of exam period with such students, i.e. next year little or nothing will be done.

Past experience shows that the annual reports have given a significant boost to reforms; some things were done at the last minute only to be put in the report, just like some students learn just before the exam.

Finally, we should warn that the Commission has concluded that relatively little progress this year was partly caused by convening the extraordinary parliamentary elections in April, on which was spent, either for the campaign or for the negotiations on forming the government, nearly six months. These elections are considered by many to have been unnecessary because the previous government was relatively stable and popular, and the new government staff did not differ significantly from the previous one. Next year we are again awaiting the elections, presidential for certain and perhaps new parliamentary elections. Considering all listed above, we should not expect too much from the year of 2017.

The Eurostat regional yearbook 2016 gives a detailed statistical picture of the regions of the Member States of the European Union. Publication of statistical data for the regional level gives us an insight into their diversity, which cannot be seen if we take into account only the national statistics. Areas covered in the statistical analysis are: regional policy and the Europe 2020 population, health, education and training, labour market, economy, structural business statistics, research and innovation, the information society, tourism, transport and agriculture.

“Structural Indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe 2016” is a publication of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), published via the European Network of Education whose task is to explain the organisation and functioning of European education systems. Publication contains detailed structural indicators, data and information about the countries. In addition, in the publication you can find analysis of policies and reforms in the following areas: early childhood education and care, achievement in basic skills, early leaving from education and training, higher education and graduate employability.
Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the second revised National Programme for the Adoption of the EU Acquis (NPAA) at the meeting held on 17th November 2016. This document presents a detailed plan for harmonising the legal and institutional framework with the acquis communautaire and an overview of measures and activities for achieving full compliance with all the rights and obligations arising from the acquis. The NPAA defines development and strategic objectives, appropriate policies, reforms and measures necessary for the achievement of these objectives, establishes a detailed plan for the harmonisation of legislation and defines the human and budgetary resources, as well as other funds required for the implementation of the planned tasks. The NPAA sets out not only obligations relating to the transposition of the EU law into the national legal system, but also tasks that must be implemented in order to meet political and economic criteria for EU accession.

In accordance with the obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), as well as the accession negotiations, on 31st July 2014 Serbia adopted the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis from 2014 to 2018, which defines the priorities for harmonisation with European legislation in this period. Although the second revision of the NPAA, in accordance with the results of the screening, was planned and announced for 2015, the second revised NPAA was adopted only on 99th day of the government, i.e. 17th November 2016. It is important to note that the first period of application of the revised version of the NPAA expired on 31st December 2015. Meanwhile, for the period between two of the audits, plans to harmonise national legislation with the EU acquis through the NPAA were not specified, so there was no possibility for monitoring and reporting on legislative activity envisaged by that document. New European Commission report for 2016 concluded that there was a constant delay in the implementation of the obligations arising from the NPAA.

The second revision of the NPAA was organised after the completion of the screening process, detailed familiarisation with the most important parts of the acquis communautaire and consideration of the current state of play and possible challenges in terms of achieving full alignment of national legislation with EU regulations. Starting with the set aim of the Republic of Serbia to be fully prepared to undertake the obligations of EU membership by the end of 2018, it is envisaged that the implementation of the revised NPAA covers the period up to 31 December 2018.

The NPAA also forms the basis for the preparation of negotiating positions for the chapters which have not yet been submitted to the EU because one of the objectives of this document is also to reflect all the requirements and results of the negotiation process and to allow monitoring of the obligations undertaken within the chapters during the negotiations. In line with the experience of other candidate countries for EU membership, the NPAA is also one of the indicators of progress in terms of closing the chapters.

According to needs, the NPAA will be also revised in the future, taking into account steps achieved during the accession negotiations, as well as the development of the acquis in the EU. The second revised version National Programme for Adoption of the EU Acquis (NPAA) in the Serbian language can be downloaded here.
IN FOCUS

THE STATION ON THE ROAD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT

COP22 – Summit of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Marrakesh

22nd Summit of the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change – UNFCCC – COP22, was held in Marrakesh (Morocco) from 7th to 18th November 2016.

After adopting the Paris Agreement at the previous summit in Paris in December 2015, the Summit in Marrakesh was supposed to contribute to further agreements on the implementation of this Agreement.

Shortly before the start of COP22, the Paris Agreement entered into force (4th November 2016), for the Agreement has been ratified by at least 55 countries that emit 55% of global emissions of greenhouse gases. Namely, in accordance with Article 21, the Agreement shall enter into force one month after at least 55 countries that emit 55% of global emissions of greenhouse gases submit the instruments of ratification to the Convention.

At the Summit in Marrakesh, Parties affirmed their commitment to the Convention to implement the provisions of the Paris Agreement. So far, the Agreement has been ratified by 117 of the 197 Parties to the Convention, but Serbia is not yet among them.

In the COP22 final declaration, Parties to the Convention have affirmed their commitment to the rapid implementation of the Paris Agreement, bearing in mind the ambitious objectives and shared responsibility for its implementation. The necessity for joint action and the full implementation of the Agreement is stated in the final declaration: “The Heads of States and Governments are called for maximum political commitment to combat climate change.”

However, it is emphasised that there are different levels of responsibility and capacity, and what must be taken into account are the specificities of national frameworks. The members of the Convention stressed that action was needed at all levels and with the involvement of all stakeholders, especially civil society. At the Summit in Marrakesh they pointed to a direct link between the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the achievement of sustainable development goals, which are defined by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a document which was adopted in September 2015. Parties to the Convention called for the highest level of political com-

mitment to the fight against climate change, and increasing ambitions in reducing emissions of greenhouse gases as the highest priorities.

At the Summit in Marrakesh, it was stressed that emission reduction must be attained before 2020, which is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the Paris Agreement. This statement should be interpreted in the light of the conclusions of the previous Agreement. Namely, at the Summit in Paris in 2015, it was concluded that the achievement of targets for reducing emissions, which were determined at the national level (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions - INDCs) would not lead to the desired reduction in emissions, and the revision of the intended contributions at the national level was necessary.

The Summit in Marrakesh has not brought a turning point in the global agreement on combating climate change, as was the case with the previous Summit, although such expectations did not exist. However, at this Summit, it was confirmed that in 2018 the Parties were expected to reach a new binding agreement on increasing the contribution to reducing emissions. Also, although there were expectations that the COP22 would be the Summit which would contribute to progress in the negotiations on reducing emissions in agriculture, significant progress in this area had not been made.

Written by: Mirko Popović
The acquis of the European Union which defines guidelines for electronic communications, information society services and audio-visual policy is part of the negotiating chapters 10.

When it comes to electronic communications, regulatory framework is aimed at opening the telecommunications market. The main objective is to strengthen competitiveness by creating conditions for easier access to the market and encourage investment in this sector. In the context of market regulation, the role of the EU is to establish rules that will cover all telecommunications networks and services; to provide equitable access to basic services (telephone, fax, internet, free emergency calls) at the optimum price to all users, including people with disabilities; to foster the competitiveness of reducing the dominant position of national companies in the telecommunication sector, which used to have a monopoly on certain services. In the context of electronic communications and information society, there are also negotiations on securing the independence of regulators; fixed broadband and mobile broadband telephony; the introduction of a unique emergency call number 112 and strengthening administrative capacity of the national regulatory body.

In the area of information society, regulatory framework is in line with the widespread use of the Internet in the EU. The biggest challenges in the area of Internet, activities on the Internet and ICT (Information and Communication Technology) standards are to supply a large number of virtual addresses, storage and transfer capacity, as well as the development of technical standards in the EU territory, in order to guarantee interoperability, internet privacy and Internet accessibility. The main objectives in the field of ICT, more precisely 13 specific goals relating to digital transformation, are located in the European Strategy 2010, in the Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE). Area of Information Society opens space for negotiations on further harmonisation with EU regulations and development in the field of e-government, e-health, e-justice and e-commerce.

Audio-visual policy is formulated at the national level, and the role the EU is to set basic rules and guidelines related to common interests, such as opening of EU markets and free competition. In the context of television services, the aim of the regulations is to co-ordinate national legislation in order to: freely trade TV programmes and video-on-demand services; protect cultural diversity; TV channels provide at least half the time to broadcast films and programmes made in Europe; in order to protect minors from inappropriate TV content and provide protection from undue advertising in the media. This authority regulates the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting within the digital television; internet access to European cultural heritage; digital libraries, interactive media content in Europe and the protection of users of video games.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT FOR SERBIA?

- More accessible mobile telephony services and roaming
- Protection of minors from undue media content
- Digitisation
- Unique emergency number 112
- Electronic signature

The European Commission announced that as of June 2017 there would be free roaming service for mobile phones paid by EU citizens when travelling from one country to another country in the Union. So, one of the advantages is that entering the EU, roaming billing will be abolished. Citizens of Serbia, the operators and the state will benefit from digitisation, which is implemented in Serbia within the European agenda. Digitisation will allow end users: better sound and picture quality, diverse content, more radio and television programmes, new services for people with disabilities and the elderly, improved additional services and more.

Digitisation will enable the state more efficient use of the radio-frequency spectrum, the use of the freed part of the spectrum for new services, promotion of technology development and new jobs.

In the area of mobile telephony, the citizens of Serbia will be able to choose between a large number of services and different operators, which is why the prices will be lower. Service users will be allowed a free change of operators in accordance with their needs, with the option to keep the current number and the previous number, regardless of the network to which they are switching. Free, unique European emergency number 112, which is used throughout the Union, will be introduced. It will be possible to call 112 from fixed and mobile phones to contact any emergency services.

In the area of information society, electronic signature, which saves time and reduces costs, will be introduced. In the field of audio-visual policy, a legal framework, which protects the interests of viewers, will be created. The duration of commercials within an hour in prime time on public television must not exceed four minutes.
If you wish to receive the “Let’s Speak about the Negotiations” newsletter regularly, please subscribe HERE.

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