

# EU AND SERBIA

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***Abstract:** The aim this paper is to analyze problematic integration process of Serbia into the European Union. Main focus is on closely explaining how Kosovo is influencing the path towards membership. It explains present status between Serbia and European Union and between Serbia and Kosovo.*

***Keywords:** Serbia, European Union, Kosovo, integration process, regional cooperation*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Created on a heterogeneous structure, on the basis of ethnicity, culture, tradition and religion as the core of its physical and geographical composition, the region of Balkans has been shaped by a unique history. And today it represents sui generis in terms of European integration.

As one of the Balkan countries Serbia faces an important crossroads in its development. It is trying to integrate into the European Union (EU), but its progress has been almost stopped by tensions with its neighbors and some EU countries over the independence of Serbia's Kosovo province.

Serbia's most important foreign policy objectives are to secure membership in the European Union and to stop international recognition of Kosovo's independence. The European Union signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with Serbia on April 29, 2008. It provides a framework for enhanced cooperation between the EU and Serbia in a many fields, with the perspective of EU membership. **Serbia is taking "all legal and diplomatic measures" to preserve Kosovo as part of Serbia.**

## 2. CRITERIA FOR SERBIA'S EU ACCESSION

This chapter is dealing with the criteria that the EU put in front of Serbia, and they introduction will show that accepting independent Kosovo has not been a formal criteria for the EU membership. However, some of the criteria suggest that present Serbia's position on Kosovo has to be changed. In its negotiations with Serbia EU defined several conditions for the accession. First was "Copenhagen criteria" and the second are SAP conditions, subject to the successful implementation of the SAA.

This sensitive problem is difficult, because many countries applied for the entry in to the European Union. These countries have various histories with different religions and many of these areas are not the countries of Europe and have a different geographical conception. The states with low functioning economy and democracy would like to be a part of the European Union, as well (Konjević, Grahovac 2011)

There are also specific conditions such as full cooperation with ICTY, creation of real chances for return of refugees and internally displaced persons. One of the most important political conditions is strong regional cooperation. On the one side SAA is unilaterally implemented by Serbia but on the other Serbia is the only regional state whose contractual relationship with the EU is in one part “frozen” - ratification of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), signed in April 2008, remains conditional on the EU Council of Ministers’ assessment of whether Serbia has displayed full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

After a largely favorable report on Serbia’s cooperation with the ICTY from the Tribunal’s chief prosecutor, the EU decided on December 8, 2009, to unfreeze the key trade provisions of the SAA. The full application of Interim agreement on trade and trade related issues between Serbia and the European Union (EU) started on 1 February 2010 and it will have both an economic and a political significance.

*From the economic side Serbia will become an attractive market for foreign investors. Politically, this is going to be an important element in deciding about Serbia’s application for the EU membership. (Delegation of EU to the Republic of Serbia, Full application of Interim Trade Agreement starts on 1 February, para.2) Integration of Serbia should be very important for both sides. Serbia experienced a lot of problems past two decades, wars, sanctions, NATO bombing, dictatorship regime, few times dissolution of a state. And now there is a space and will for EU integration. From the EU side biggest positive is safeness and stability in the region, accomplishing international duties, stabilization of political situation, while on the other side EU is seen as a tool for economical welfare and a better life standard.*

“The development of regional cooperation is in the best interests of all the western Balkan countries: it is a key factor for establishing political stability, security and economic prosperity. It corresponds to a commitment made by the countries of the region at the EU–Western Balkans Summits of Zagreb (2000) and Thessaloniki (2003)“. (Olli Rehn, Regional cooperation in the western Balkans: A policy priority for the European Union, p.2) Regional cooperation is also a specific requirement of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, which has been signed and ratified by Serbia. Regional cooperation is therefore a very important EU’s policy framework for the Western Balkans in Stabilization and Association process, which offers to the countries possibility of the EU membership.

The western Balkan countries are realizing that there are certain responsibilities towards each other and that they have many challenges in common, especially in process of EU integration. Countries like Serbia now see considerable benefits of increasingly close regional cooperation — political understanding, economic and social prosperity. “Extended regional cooperation in south-eastern Europe is essential, regardless of the different stage of integration of the various countries, and an important criterion for the European course of the western Balkan countries. The stability, prosperity and security of the region are of significant interest to the EU“. (Olli Rehn, Regional cooperation in the western Balkans: A policy priority for the European Union, p.2).

When talking about regional cooperation we have to mention regional initiatives such as Stability Pack for South Eastern Europe, European Cooperation Process (SEEC) and Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA).

Serbia is a country that actively participates in different ways of regional cooperation, but from the Kosovo's declaration of independence, regional cooperation have been affected by Serbia's approach to participation in regional for a together with Kosovo officials.

When reading interviews with European officials and politicians, almost none of them said that accepting independent Kosovo is a precondition for Serbia to join EU. But what is very important when asked this kind of question almost every one of them says that the very important aspect is the European future for the whole region. As an example of this I will cite interview with Stefan Fule, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and the EU Neighborhood Policy and longtime Czech diplomat, who said that the European Commission's neutral attitude towards Kosovo is firm. (B92, File: Nova faza integracija Srbije, 2010)

### 3. CONCLUSION

"The position of the European Union remains unchanged. We are not going to relate the Kosovo independence and Serbia's accession. Bilateral questions should be solved parallel with integration process before joining the Union. Any country that intends to join EU should demonstrate good relations with its neighbors, based on cooperation, tolerance and mutual understanding; we want to include the Western Balkan, and we offer European perspective for the whole region." (Politika, File: Nećemo povezivati status Kosova i evrointegracije, 2010, para. 3)

Integration of western Balkan into the EU I see as a very important priority for EU in the future. It will not only help to stabilize the region, but also to raise the quality of life of ordinary people. Serbia as a central part of the Western Balkan region is very important factor for integration of the whole region.

Finally I would like to emphasize that process of EU integration will need more effort, people's patience and political will, but there is a real chance that in present decade Serbia could become member of the EU, which would be positive not only to the country but, to the whole region. My opinion is that this process is already happening; we will just have to wait a little bit more in order to be part of the "European family".

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