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Policy

**Serbia 10 years after: moving on  
towards the EU - what is expected of  
Serbia as a candidate country?**

Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Public Hearing, The European Parliament

**Brussels, 16 September 2010**

Dear Mr Chairman, dear Deputy Prime Minister, dear honourable members of parliament, distinguished guests.

The series of events that you have organised today in Brussels, Mr Deputy prime Minister, is a demonstration of commitment of Serbia to the EU perspective. It also comes as very timely, just days after the remarkable achievement at the UN General Assembly for Serbia, for Kosovo, for the Stability of the region as the whole.

I would like to commend the courageous and responsible approach taken by Serbia's leadership and the good work done with the EU on this matter. The adopted resolution on the opinion of the International Court of Justice is a major step towards a process of dialogue between Belgrade and Kosovo that the EU will support.

As good neighbourly relations are an essential element of the Stabilisation and Association process, we can also now hope for a new turn in the relations between the EU and Serbia.

### **10 years of EU-Serbia relations**

Marking 10 years of EU-Serbia relations allows realising how much ground has already been covered.

10 years ago, the European Union stood aside the Serbian people in their democratic revival. On the eve of the 5th October 2000, as events were unfolding in Belgrade and in the rest of the country, the then President of the European Commission Romano Prodi shared the emotions of the Serbian people and stated:

*"I am watching events unfold in Belgrade with concern and hope. It is time to heed the popular will. Time for speedy, peaceful transition to democracy. Europe stands ready to welcome the new Serbia with open arms.[...] Serbia is Europe. The road to peace and reconciliation is now open, leaving violence and hatred behind".*

Only a few weeks after that acceleration of history, the EU reaffirmed the European perspective of all Western Balkan countries at the Zagreb Summit; it opened its market to products from the region; and it delivered 200m€ of emergency assistance, including much needed heating fuel, to the people of Serbia, in order to help stabilise the situation.

This commitment has since ever been present within EU institutions and certainly in the European Commission, as we were conscious of the particular responsibility that the European Union is to assume in the region.

While the strict application of the conditions attached to the Enlargement process have not allowed for any shortcut, it is equally true that the EU has endlessly strived to support Serbia's reintegration into the European mainstream, helped reconnect its networks to the ones of its neighbours, included Serbia in many of its strategies, the latest of which is the Danube Strategy. And we did again last year when we agreed to use part of our financial assistance as budget support to help Serbia alleviating the impact of the economic crisis.

### ***Recent developments***

In the more recent period we have yet moved a number of steps forward.

#### **- Lisbon treaty and Enlargement policy**

Let me first mention, on the side of the EU, the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty as I consider it of key importance for the enlargement process.

In the most obvious sense the Lisbon Treaty creates the necessary institutional certainty to allow accession to go ahead. This is important because it is through the Lisbon Treaty that the European Union is able to keep its most fundamental promise to the countries of the Western Balkans made at the Zagreb Summit ten years ago. And the recent Council consensus on the UN General Assembly resolution has to be seen in this context too.

It is also important to note that the Lisbon treaty does not create any new criteria or raise any obstacles to accession. It has, however, placed further emphasis on the key characteristic of the European Union: that it is a Union of shared values, a Union of its citizen's and for its citizens.

Another reason why the Lisbon treaty is important, in our context of enlargement policy, is that it has put the European Foreign policy on new foundations and gives us the right combination of instruments and powers to make a decisive contribution to resolving open issues in the region.

#### **- New steps in the bilateral relations between Serbia and the EU**

a) the Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-related issues has entered into force and Serbia has started with determination to implement its provisions for more than 18 months now. With his background, Božidar Djelić is well placed to know how important such a comprehensive framework is for all domestic and foreign economic actors who are active or plan to develop their business in Serbia. In June, the Council also decided to proceed with the SAA ratification and four Member states have already done so. I hope that the European Parliament will also soon be in a position to give its assent.

b) the visa liberalisation was another huge success for the citizens of Serbia – the number of biometric passports delivered up to date, more than two million, is a proof of the fantastic expectation among the people of Serbia we have responded to.

Together with all other policies in place, such as in the areas of Education and youth, Research, Innovation, we are gradually reconnecting large sectors of Serbian society with the EU and counterparts in Member States.

This will without any doubt have a lasting impact and contribute to nurture a new spirit in favour of the European project.

#### ***New prospects for decisive action***

We have arrived now at a critical juncture. Serbia applied to join the European Union which was an important manifestation of its commitment to European integration.

It is not difficult to see how beneficial for you and for the EU a move to the next steps of accession can represent. While the road to accession is a long and arduous one, it also entails new opportunities all along its path.

The Commission stands ready as soon as the Council decides it to prepare an Opinion on Serbia's application. As the visa dialogue has shown the way, you must remain fully mobilised and continue to deliver steadily and consistently on reforms as this will pay off for the preparation of the opinion and its findings.

This means, and this largely in your hand Deputy prime Minister, that efforts should without waiting be intensified, on the basis of the National Programme on EU integration. Areas where we have expressed concerns should also be tackled as a matter of priority in order to be recorded in the opinion and favourably prepare the subsequent steps of your European integration. In this regard, preparations of our progress report on this year's progress in Serbia are still underway. The report itself will be published in November. I hope to still see significant improvements materialise until the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, when we close the report.

Let me close here.

Dear Deputy Prime Minister, the Serbian government holds a particular responsibility to move the EU reform agenda and address important outstanding issues.

I would like to encourage you to embrace the coming period with a renewed European spirit. The European spirit is not about compromising against your national interests; it is instead about projecting yourself in the future, about having a more pragmatic and realistic consideration of your interest, while at the same time you take into account others' interests in order to identify the best possible compromise, the one which sees winning all sides. Only through dialogue and a high sense of responsibility will it be possible to pursue decisively the European perspective.

We therefore sincerely hope that in the coming period, your country will continue to demonstrate a high sense of responsibility on matters such as regional cooperation and relations with Kosovo, as we have witnessed last week in the preparation of UN General Assembly debate.

In the crucial period to come, I wish to assure you that you can count on the European Commission as a sincere, if demanding, partner. Be assured that in my capacity, I will join forces with you to foster such a new spirit in Serbia and help it make the best for its future.

Thank you for your attention