



Civil society role in Serbia:
EU Accession Negotiations - contribution to the Rule of Law and
Human Rights

16 - 17 June 2016 - Brussels, Belgium

Report





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Event organised by TACSO P2P



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Introduction

Civil society organizations in Serbia closely follow the negotiation process of Serbia with the European Union. Especially those gathered in the civil society platform National Convention on the European Union – NCEU were active in monitoring and providing meaningful contributions to the Negotiation Team of the Republic of Serbia in the past three years.

Fully aware that the negotiations with the EU are a lengthy and demanding process, they continue to invest significant amount of their human and financial resources in order to increase their capacities and the ability to provide useful recommendations to the actors in the negotiation process.

One of the main recommendations provided by the civil society is that chapters concerning human rights namely Chapters 23 – Judiciary and Human rights and 24 - Justice, Freedom and Security have to be opened as soon as possible having in mind that they are focused on main building blocks of any democratic society. Also, civil society organizations in Serbia involved in the monitoring of the Chapters 23 and 24, were fully aware that Serbia full filled its obligations set as a precondition to open aforementioned chapters.

This study visit was organized aiming to enhance advocacy activities on the meetings with representatives of institutions and civil society organizations based in Brussels. The main goal of the visit was to present the progress made by Serbia and to stress once again the immense importance of opening chapters 23 and 24 for the whole Serbian society.

Meetings with the representatives of the European Commission, European Parliament, European Economic and Social Committee, representatives of civil society organizations from EU member states, provided also an opportunity to evaluate and improve the work done so far in order to conduct necessary improvements or to maintain practices that proved to be useful.



Conference Content and Proceedings

Day I

Meetings in EU institutions

On the first day of the study visit, representatives of the civil society organization had 3 separate meetings in the following order:

- Meeting with Mr. Ivan Gabor, Council of the European Union
- Meeting with Mr. Eduard Kukan, MEP European Parliament
- Meeting with Mr. Christos Makrides, DG NEAR

Meetings were conducted under the Chatham house rules. Meetings proved that there is a strong will by both sides to work diligently in order to open the chapters 23 and 24 as soon as possible. Also, it was proved that Serbia has to remain patient until the situation with the referendum in Great Britain was fully under control, having in mind the importance and the consequences of the potential Brexit.

Interlocutors had the chance to get the latest updates on the situation and the atmosphere in the Serbian society with a special regard to the protection of human rights and freedom of expression. NCEU was particularly evaluated as a unique and highly useful innovation, which will help Serbia in its accession to the EU. It was stressed that no other country in the accession process has had a platform as comprehensive as this one, with members that have such kind of expertise, as does Serbia.



Discussion with COELA and representatives of European Parliament and European Commission

Discussion with the members of COELA was held in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Serbia in Brussels. Members of COELA were also highly satisfied with the information received when it comes to the participation of the civil society organizations in the negotiation process. They stressed that Serbia deserves to open the chapters 23 and 24 in a short notice given that those chapters are ensuring good institutions, protection of human rights, and respecting the European values.

Also, it was mentioned several times during the meeting that one of the main achievements of the CSOs in Serbia is the ability to organize and structure their work in the field of European integrations through NCEU.



Day II

Open discussion about Serbia's progress in EU accession process and the role of CSOs hosted by European Movement International (for Brussels think-tanks, media, CSOs)

This meeting was an excellent opportunity to exchange the views on the negotiation process with the colleagues from the EU and to receive feedback on further steps and potential cooperation aiming to speed up Serbian accession talks. Networking and the discussion helped to further strengthen the ties between two sides and ensure the basis for further joint cooperation.



Meeting with Ms. Marina Škrabalo, EESC

Meeting with Ms. Škrabalo was used to exchange information on the negotiation process and to help further planning of the joint efforts to help the negotiation process. This meeting was highly useful giving that Ms. Škrabalo is a prominent civil society activist and thoroughly familiar with the situation in Serbia.



Meeting with the H.E. Ambassador Duško Lopandić and staff members

The end of the study visit was devoted to summarizing the impressions and recommendations with H.E. Ambassador Duško Lopandić and his team. Staff members present at the meeting were professionals highly skilled in the European integration matters. They had the chance to exchange information and contacts with the CSO delegation from Serbia and continued to be of great help to the CSO activists.

The work of the NCEU was once again evaluated with the highest marks and it was stressed that recommendations provided by the NCEU are always taken into account.





Conclusions

Some of the main conclusions after this study visit are:

- Serbia is fully ready to open chapters 23 and 24 in a short notice. The importance of these chapters has to be taken into account as well as the efforts taken by the Serbian Negotiation team. Chapters 23 and 24 are main pillars of functioning of one stable and prosperous state and as such can and will be strongly monitored by the CSOs in Serbia and the international community;
- Serbia should use the momentum and the Slovakian presidency, to speed up the negotiation process while at the same time maintaining high quality of the work invested in the preparations for opening the chapters;
- CSOs in Serbia, particularly those gathered in the NCEU are doing great work in monitoring the negotiation process while at the same time providing useful recommendations to the Negotiation Team and other actors involved in the accession process;
- CSOs in Serbia should aim to be more active in the advocating for opening the negotiation chapters in leading EU Member states such as Germany and France, in order to transfer valid and information based arguments for Serbia's accession to the EU;
- CSOs from Serbia and the EU have to work more closely, to exchange information via direct contact or already established networks in order to maintain trust and help European citizens to be better informed on the accession process of Serbia to the EU and its potential to enrich European society
- Transparency of the Negotiation process has to be kept at a high level from both sides and the efforts to involve the whole society of Serbia in the integration process have to be constant. This will lead to informed society that can take part in the creating the future of the EU.



Annex I: List of Participants

Name	Organisation	Contact
Natasa Dragojlovic	National Convention on the European Union/European Movement in Serbia	natasa.dragojlovic@emins.org
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Annex II: Agenda

Day 1: 16 June 2015

09:00 - 10:45 Meeting with Mr. Ivan Gabor, Council of the European Union

Representatives of civil society:

Milan Antonijevic, Sonja Stojanovic Gajic, Ivan Knezevic, Ivana Lazarevic

Meeting with Mr. Eduard Kukan, MEP European Parliament

Representatives of civil society:

Natasa Dragojlovic, Bojana Selakovic, Sara Dereta

10:45 - 11:00 Coffee Break

11:00 - 12:30 Meeting with Mr. Christos Makrides, DG NEAR

12:30 - 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 16.00 Discussion with COELA (Dutch and Slovak Presidency), Mission of the Republic of Serbia - EU

Day 2: 17 June, 2016

10:00 – 12:00 Open discussion about Serbia's progress in EU accession process and the role of the CSO hosted by European Movement International (for Brussels think tanks, media, CSOs)

Key Topics:

- *EU Accession process and Democracy – Are they interlinked*
- *How mighty is civil society*
- *Kosovo* as the specific case of Serbia's EU accession process*
- *Agriculture and rural development are they less politicized*

Moderator:

Petros Fasulas, Secretary General of European Movement International

12:00 - 13:00 Coffee Break

13:00 – 14:30 Meeting with Ms. Marina Škrabalo, EESC

15:30 – 16.30 Meeting with the H.E. Ambassador Duško Lopandić, Mission of the Republic of Serbia - EU



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Civil Society Organisations



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