FOREWORD

Dear colleagues and friends,

It is my pleasure to inform you that the team of the European Policy Centre, invigorated with new members, has successfully realized a series of activities aimed at the adoption of European values and political culture.

In mid-September we gathered prominent experts and researchers from the region and Europe at a two-day conference on improving the performance of public administration. We discussed the roles and importance of performance audit and policy evaluation in the EU accession process.

During October we consulted on the topic of open government in Serbia with colleagues from the civil sector, at a joint meeting held in the Palace of Serbia. We agreed that cooperation between government and civil society during the drafting and implementation of reforms is the cornerstone of open and accountable government.

During the presentation of the draft study entitled “Competition policy in Serbia - what is the problem” in October, we included both professionals and the wider public in a discussion of issues in competition policy. We encountered valuable support from civil society colleagues and representatives of institutions which appreciated the objective approach of the study and research that preceded it, and expressed their willingness to collaborate. The central issue was the questionable capacity of the institutions which apply the rules of competition.

Recently, we held a second consecutive session of the Working group of the National Convention of the EU on chapter 1 - free movement of goods, where we held the role of coordinator. We concluded that Serbia is facing 12 months of hard work in order to identify potential barriers to trade with the EU, and to estimate the costs which the state and the economy will have to bear due to harmonization with EU technical regulations and standards.

The goal of all of our completed and future activities is to contribute to strengthening the capacity of Serbia to become a successful and credible EU member, which would fully contribute to the European arena and thoroughly realise the benefits of membership.

Respectfully,
Nebija Lazarević

CEP RESEARCHES

Monitoring Public Administration Reform in the Western Balkans

In the following three years, the European Policy Centre will implement a regional project - “Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform (WeBER)”.

The project is supported by the European Commission within “Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2014-2015 - Support to Regional Thematic Networks of CSOs”, with five partner organisations from the Western Balkans and one from the EU (EPI - Macedonia, IA - Crna Gora, IDM - Albania, VPI - BIH GOP - Kosovo and EPC - Belgium).

The project aims at strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations and media in the Western Balkans to participate in the creation and implementation of public administration reform. Civil society organisations have been recognized as important actors in creating public policy at the national and regional levels, which is why this project seeks to strengthen their supervisory and consulting capabilities. Quality-oriented and analytical reporting by media on the topic of public administration reform, accompanied by evidence-based arguments, has an equally important role in these processes. Therefore, the project includes media as an important target group.

Supporting Young Professionals

Thanks to the Think Tank Young Professional Development Programme of the Open Society Foundations, researcher Katarina Kosmina has joined the CEP team. As part of her research, she will focus on local self-government capacities for attracting IPA funded projects.

The Think Tank Young Professional Development Programme intends to help independent research centres from Central and Eastern Europe to draw in recent graduate and post-graduate students in social sciences, giving them an opportunity to attain firsthand experience in policy research.

Katarina Kosmina, CEP Researcher
Developments of the new law on salaries

Though at first sight, the Draft Law on Salaries in the public sector is not significantly different from its predecessors, it can significantly improve the current situation. Currently, the public sector is characterized by a serious lack of transparency in salaries, significant differences in payment for the same or similar jobs in different parts of public administration, and is hence deprived from a just system. For the new law to realise its full potential, its key elements are the broad scope of the law, adequate and consistent implementation, and strong political support.

The new law links a wide range of institutions, which are currently covered by different laws, with no common principles to bind them together. It also establishes common principles for over 500,000 employees in the broad category of public administration, and creates the foundation for specific laws to be made for more narrow categories.

In addition to civil servants and employees, who work in state administration (ministries, special organizations and Government services), independent institutions (such as the State Audit Institution) and professional services of the Assembly and the Presidency, this new law should also cover employees in health, education, cultural institutions, social welfare, sports, in the autonomous region, municipalities and cities, judiciary, police, as well as public agencies. Read more in Milena Lazarević’s article for the daily newspaper Danas here.

Refugee crisis - Observations from the October and November CEP Insights

In the analytical text “Handling the Refugee Influx: Between the Laws, Borders, and Political Discourses”, authors Katarina Kosmina and Lana Radovanović presented the basic legal framework of the EU asylum package, border policies and political discourse of Serbia and EU Member States. Furthermore, the Dublin III Regulation, along with the problems it presents was critiqued, explaining the negative implications it has on Serbia, and the refugees and migrants who travel through it.

In “Lessons Not Learned: Commentary on the EU’s 17-point Plan and Its Alternative”, the recent 17-point plan was deconstructed and its implications for both the EU and Western Balkan countries were considered. Authors critiqued its most controversial measures, such as the predominant focus on border control and the overall generality of its measures. An alternative to the plan was offered, namely, triggering the Temporary Protection Directive, which would remove ample pressure from the asylum systems of EU Member States and would allow time for a renegotiation of the Dublin system which must be replaced with a more cohesive and efficient EU asylum system.

Overall, both insights advise Serbia to continue with its humanitarian approach to the mass influx, both in terms of its pro-refugee political discourse and specific policies aimed at aiding refugees. Authors propose training for administrative and police staff to properly handle vulnerable groups such as refugees, sensitizing local populations to the diversity of the incoming groups of refugees, regionally mobilizing volunteers, and working on developing an efficient asylum system in the long term.

Accelerating the public administration reform

The European Commission report on Serbia’s progress for 2015 pays great attention to administrative and other capacities for implementation. The word “capacity” appears as a leitmotif of the Report given that it is mentioned 110 times, which demonstrates that focusing on implementation is not simply a worn off phrase, but that Serbia’s progress in terms of EU accession will be measured through actual implementation of the regulations, not only through their formal adoption.

Although the Report notes positive results, great emphasis is placed on achieving the determined reform goals, while particular expectations are expressed regarding public administration reform. Serbia scored moderate willingness for public administration reform, and was commended for the quality of the Reform action plan. In this section of the Report, the European Commission insists on depoliticization of administration, i.e. refraining from party-based recruitment. In the first place, this refers to managerial positions (deputy ministers and directors, their deputies and assistants), since the implementation of calls for these positions is often delayed to the maximum legal limits. What lies ahead is also the regulation of relations between institutions which are responsible for planning and coordinating government policy. Concerning this, it is firstly necessary to clarify the role and facilitate the smooth operation of the Public Policy Secretariat, which leads initiatives for arranging the current chaotic strategic and planning framework in Serbia, with over a hundred strategies that are often overlapping or conflicting.

We seriously need to consider the European Commission requirements on preventing the outflow of highly-qualified cadres

“We seriously need to consider the European Commission requirements on preventing the outflow of highly-qualified cadres” –不死不休, Milena Lazarević, CEP Senior Programme Manager.
CEP EVENTS

TEN Conference on Improving Public Administration Performance

This September, the TEN network, consisting of European Policy Centre (CEP) from Belgrade, European Policy Institute (EPI) from Skopje and Institute Alternative from Podgorica (IA), held a two-day regional conference "Improving Performance of Public Administration: Current Experiences and Future Perspectives." Focus of the conference was the role and significance of performance audit and policy evaluation for the improvement of policy making and achieving better public administration in the context of the EU accession process.

Consultative Meeting on Open Government in Serbia

Consultative meeting Open Government in Serbia: "Implementation of Action Plan for Execution of Open Government Partnership 2014-2015" was held on September 21 in the Palace of Serbia, in organisation of the European Policy Centre. The meeting topic was the assessment of mid-term implementation of measures and activities predicted by the Action plan.

Jelena Miletic, CEP, stressed the importance of taking participation in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) as a unique initiative which highlights the principle of cooperation between the Government and civil society during the making and implementation of reforms, in order to attain a more open and responsible governance.

The role of CEP in this process was elaborated by Milena Lazarevic, CEP senior program manager: "European Policy Centre, as the Independent Reporting Mechanism provides an assessment of the level of realisation of measures and activities of the Action Plan, and evaluates to what extent the Plan, and its obligations present the values of the Partnership in the context of Serbia." Drazen Maravic, State Secretary, spoke on behalf of the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government, the institution authorized for coordination of preparation, implementation and reporting of the Plan for the implementation of OGP initiatives. He invited expert civil society organisations to get involved in this initiative and help public administration achieve the expected results.

The presentation of the findings of the Action Plan monitoring was followed by a discussion in working groups. The work of the participants was divided by areas that corresponded to the obligations of the Action Plan: fiscal transparency, fight against corruption, access to information and public participation. They talked about the problems and successes in implementing the Plan, as well as the main obstacles and possible ways to overcome them.

Benchmarks Slow Down EU Negotiations

Working group on Chapter 1 – Free Movement of Goods, within National Convention on the EU held a consultative meeting on November 3rd at the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, coordinated by the CEP. In attendance were representatives of the Ministry of Economy, Serbian European Integration Office, consumer organisations and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Nebojša Lazarevic, a member of the core Negotiating Team for Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the EU, in charge of Chapter 1, opened the discussion and explained the obstacles the Team is confronted with. He emphasized issues in the negotiation process on chapters with opening benchmarks set by the EU. "Chapter 1 will not be formally opened until all Member States in the Council agree with the assessment of the European Commission that the candidate country fulfilled all conditions laid down in Chapter 1. This significantly slows down the process of negotiations, and member states gain more power in the integration process, in comparison with the Commission. This method of negotiation was introduced in EU integration process of Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia."

The general conclusion of the meeting is that Serbia is facing 12 months of hard work in order to identify potential barriers regarding trade with the EU. Assessment of the costs that our country and the economy have to bear due to harmonization with EU technical regulations and standards is required. Serbian demands for postponing the implementation of certain directives will also be formulated.
**CEP RECOMMENDS**

**The 2015 Enlargement Package**

**What is New and How Does it Help the Enlargement Countries?**

The European Commission released annual reports on November 10 which assessed the readiness of the Western Balkans countries and Turkey to meet the requirements of EU membership and presented further steps needed to tackle the remaining challenges.

There have been significant advances for Serbia, in the first place regarding the completion of the action plans for the rule of law, key agreements reached with Kosovo, promoting regional links, the plan for economic reform, and its humanitarian approach to the influx of refugees.

However, the report indicates that more must be done in terms of creating conditions for freedom of expression and implementation of the public administration reform. Recommendations are related to the role of regulatory bodies, media financing and the regulation of advertising.

The European Commission’s 2015 Enlargement Package has been impatiently awaited due to the long-announced methodological improvements compared to the previous years, particularly concerning the new and enhanced approach to assessments in country-specific reports, as well as the Enlargement Strategy now covering the entire Commission’s mandate.

Report on Serbia for 2015 can be downloaded [here](#).

Reports on all the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey can be downloaded [here](#).

**What are the concrete novelties introduced this year and why are they characterised as improvements? Why are there no more “progress” reports? How will the new approach contribute to countries’ advancement towards the EU and what are the main concerns in this regard? Finally, will the new methodology continue to be adjusted to the emerging circumstances? Additionally, the overall question is: How efficient is the Enlargement Package in intending to assist the countries on their path towards the membership?**

Dragana Bajic, Sena Maric and Milena Lazarevic, as the authors of a CEP insight “The 2015 Enlargement Package: What Is New And How It Helps The Enlargement Countries?” gave answers to these and many other questions.