Dear colleagues and friends,

Allow me to introduce our first Europe&Us newsletter of 2016. We have had a very busy first half of the year, which we entered in full speed with interesting new projects, novel research efforts, and quite a few joint endeavors and events with our partners across the country, region, and wider in Europe.

EU integration of Serbia continues to progress, with an expected opening of new negotiation chapters by mid-2016. Regarding these and other important developments, this issue presents CEP’s events and projects as a result of our active involvement in researching, analysing and monitoring Serbia’s EU integration, including our coordination of Working Groups of the National Convention on the EU (NCEU) for Negotiation Chapters 1 and 28. The dynamic discussions within the sessions contributed to the drafting and publishing of the new issue of NCEU Book of Recommendations, which provides views of the civil society in respect to government measures and steps taken up in the EU accession negotiations.

One of the highlights from the previous period was the official launch of the regional EU-funded “Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform (WeBER).” WeBER is expected to make a tangible impact on public policy dialogue in 6 participating countries and sustainably enhance competences and participation of the civil society and the media in the public administration reform process.

Finally, end of March was marked by the launch of the first report on the progress of Serbia for 2014/2015 within the Open Government Partnership (OGP). As the national researcher of the Independent Reporting Mechanism, CEP will continue to monitor the implementation of Serbia’s OGP Action Plan and provide recommendations on how the process can be improved.

I hope you will enjoy the Winter/Spring 2016 issue of Europe&Us. We are looking forward to the months ahead, with many planned activities and projects, about which we would be excited to inform you in our next, summer issue.

Respectfully,

Nebojša Lazarević

CEP RESEARCHES

Towards a Smart Retention Policy for Sustainable EU Integration of Serbia

Retention policy for state administration staff working on EU integration and funds management tasks represents a key prerequisite for successful EU integration and membership, due to the complexity and specificity of the tasks involved. CEP is researching this issue within the project “Support to the EU Integration Process” implemented by the German Organisation for International Cooperation (GIZ). Additionally supported by Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of the Republic of Serbia (SIPRU), CEP has been engaged for the purposes of analysing the actual state of play, determining the causes, as well as the scope and depth of the problem of high staff turnover, and providing policy options and recommendations. Research results would provide a basis for developing an informed and efficient retention policy for public administration staff in Serbia. During project implementation, CEP is successfully cooperating with the European Integration Office, which is the main beneficiary.

CEP Juniors Advancing Their Research Skills

During the first quarter of 2016, CEP’s junior staff had the opportunity to attend various regional programmes, workshops, and trainings aimed at building their research and analytical capacities. Researcher Miloš Ďindić attended the Advocacy and Lobbying for CSOs training in February, organised by TACSO in Skopje, which provided a solid and systematic overview of the ways to develop advocacy strategies and prepare and conduct advocacy actions.

In addition, under the Regional Research Promotion Programme, researcher Katarina Kosmina participated in a training seminar on “Qualitative Data Management and Analysis”, held in February in Belgrade, while Junior Researcher Dragana Bajčić spent 10 days in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, at the RRPP Research Academy – a comprehensive training on social science research methods tailored for junior researchers in the Western Balkans. Finally, Katarina Tadić, Junior Researcher, participates in the 2016 edition of the TRAIN Programme (Think Tanks Providing Research and Advice through Interaction and Networking), organised by The German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP).
British Support to Reforms in Serbia

The UK Government is providing reform assistance to Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, within the Good Governance Fund (GGF), supporting reforms in two strategic priority areas, namely, good governance and economic development. The specific areas to be supported by the fund include: anti-corruption measures, improving the business environment, judicial reform, key sector reforms (e.g. banking and energy), strengthening the rule of law and supporting independent media. GGF consists of three delivery mechanisms, one of which is the Special Technical Assistance Mechanism which is operated by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) UK.

CEP is the main partner to PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in Serbia. The British Embassy in Belgrade steers the Good Governance Fund and takes decisions on which projects to support. A dedicated joint UK Government team in London is overseeing the wider GGF.

Reform assistance to Serbia

Подршка реформама у Србији

CEP FOLLOWS

Politika Daily: Equal Pay for Equal Work

In an interview for the daily Politika on March 6, CEP Programme Director Milena Lazarević talked about the implementation of the Law on the Salary System in the Public Sector and explained what still needs to be done, in order for the changes envisaged by the Law to come to life.

“The implementation of the Law will start in 2017, and it is perfectly common that systemic laws are given a longer period prior to their full implementation. A lot needs to be done before that, such as harmonization of specific laws, adoption of by-laws, particularly job classification,” stressed Milena Lazarević. She also explained that in 2016, all coefficients will be calculated according to the unified salary base, which will make the system more transparent, since the salaries will be more comparable. Further, it is expected that by the end of 2016, the laws which regulate labour relations and salaries in different parts of the public sector, such as health, education, culture, will be adopted. The entire interview is available (in Serbian) here.

CEP Celebrates the World Consumer Rights Day

On the occasion of March 15, the World Consumer Rights Day, CEP Director Nebojša Lazarević emphasized the great importance the consumer protection and the insufficient attention they gain by the decision-makers in Serbia.

“The 2014 Law on Consumer protection is a step in the right direction, but specific regulations are still an issue. The areas in which problems are felt the most by citizens as consumers include telecommunication, financial and public utility services (parking, remote heating, water system),” explains Mr Lazarević. Consumer protection is one of the areas which are inexpensive for the government, yet they bring huge benefits, not just to the consumers, but to the economy, as well. “Attention should be given to the awareness of consumers, since the experience teaches us that a well-informed consumer can more easily protect his/her rights.”

“You can view the video statement of Nebojša Lazarević here.
First Independent Report within the Open Government Partnership Launched

On March 31, 2016, CEP presented the first report of the Independent Reporting Mechanism on the progress of Serbia for 2014-2015, within the multilateral initiative Open Government Partnership (OGP). Opening addresses were given by Kori Udovički, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, Veronica Cretu, Member of the Steering Board of the Open Government Partnership, and Milena Lazarević, Programme Director of the European Policy Centre. The event was organized by CEP, and along with government representatives, also gathered representatives of civil society organisations and independent state institutions.

“OGP and its principles are fully in line with our major objective, which is for the state to change its relationship with the citizens, to develop a mutual partnership”

We really have good results to report, since the OGP and its principles are fully in line with our major objective, which is for the state to change its relationship with the citizens, to develop a mutual partnership, given that the state needs to support citizens and businesses. Only in that way can we achieve economic growth and employment growth, which are our primary ambitions,” said Kori Udovički.

Report findings point out that Serbia has been able to implement its OGP commitments to a significant extent, with the most important achievements being related to budget transparency and civil society capacity building. “The most prominent challenge appears to be participation at the local level, and a recommendation for the coming period would be for the local governments to work on engaging and developing the civil society sector, as well as to participate more proactively themselves,” said Milena Lazarević.

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Independent Reporting Mechanism within the OGP performs annual evaluations of the development and implementation of the national action plans, with the purpose of encouraging dialogue and strengthening accountability. CEP acts as an Independent Reporting Mechanism for Serbia.

Highlights of the entire event are provided here, while our IRM report for Serbia can be accessed here.

Third Session of the National Convention on the EU for Chapter 28 Held

The third session of the Working Group (WG) of the National Convention on the EU (NKEU) for Chapter 28 – Consumer and Health Protection - was held on March 3rd at the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. The session was attended by the representatives of the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications, the Ministry of Health, as well as civil society organisations dealing with consumer protection and healthcare, who are members of the NCEU Working Group for the Chapter 28.

“The legal framework is now relatively solid, but full implementation is generally missing”

decade, the legal framework is now relatively solid, but full implementation is generally missing, due to insufficient administrative capacities and a lack of a proactive approach on the part of the line ministries,” stated Dušan Protić, Coordinator of the WG for Chapter 28. Opening of the negotiation chapters 23 and 24 in June 2016 would be very important from the perspective of consumer policy development. Without the implementation of the rule of law, public administration reform, and human rights enhancement, no other policy can be efficiently implemented either, including the protection of consumers rights and healthcare, it was concluded at the meeting.

European Policy Centre Newsletter
CEP Presents Recommendations for Negotiating Chapters 1 and 28 at the NCEU Plenary

CEP Programme Manager for Internal Market and Competitiveness, Dušan Protić, spoke at the third plenary session of the National Convention on the European Union (NCEU), as the coordinator of the working group on Chapter 1 - Free movement of goods and Chapter 28 - Consumer and Health Protection. He presented the key results of the work within the two working groups, as well as the recommendations and plans for the future. Dušan was also one of the authors of the newly published NCEU Book of Recommendations 2015/2016, which was presented at the event.

Highlights of the speech can be accessed here.

WeBER Project Officially Launched

In cooperation with 5 partner organisations from the Western Balkan countries and the European Policy Centre, Brussels, CEP held a regional kick-off meeting of the joint project "Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform (WeBER)", on February 22-23.

The WeBER Project, funded by the European Union and co-funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is dedicated to increasing the relevance, participation, and capacity of civil society organisations and the media in the Western Balkans to advocate for and influence the design and implementation of public administration reform (PAR). The network of partner organisations will jointly implement activities aimed at empowering local non-governmental actors and strengthening participatory democracy at the national and local level, to put consistent pressure on the governments to continue implementing the challenging administrative reforms post-EU accession. The SIGMA “Principles of Public Administration” thus offer a common denominator of PAR in all WB countries, setting its course towards EU membership.

WeBER methodology encompasses a combination of activities aimed at creating venues for CSO dialogue with the governments on PAR (regional PAR platform), and producing the evidence for meaningful dialogue – the PAR Monitor. In addition, benchmarking the countries through the Regional PAR Scoreboard based on country-level monitoring promotes regional peer pressure.

"European Commission’s Enlargement Strategy highlights public administration reform as one of the three pillars of fundamental reforms early in the enlargement process. This is the reason why this project is so relevant for all participating countries, especially having in mind common challenges faced by civil society, media and governments in the region during the public administration reform process”, said Milena Lazarević, Programme Director in CEP.

CEP Recommends

Protected Areas in Vojvodina: Status and Funding in the Context of European Integration

What is the current state of Vojvodina’s nature? How are nature protection areas regulated and financed? What are the challenges and opportunities with regard to the EU integration process? The new study addresses these questions and more, and provides a set of answers as well as recommendations for better nature protection in line with the EU standards. One of the authors who contributed to the study is Stefan Šipka, CEP Researcher.

The study was developed within the „Banatska platforma” project, which was implemented by the European Policy Centre (CEP), organisation Agroznanje and several other organisations gathered within the regional network Banatska platforma (the Banat Platform). The project and the study are financially supported by the Open Society Foundation, Serbia. The study is available in Serbian here.

Open Data Update: The Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection of the Republic of Serbia is the first institution in the country to open all of its data in accordance with open data principles. This data can be accessed in Serbian here.

Impressum

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