

EUROPEAN POLICY CENTRE - CEP BELGRADE

# 2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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# INTRODUCTION

## I MAIN DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PERIOD 2019 - 2020

In 2019 and 2020, the European Policy Centre (CEP) remained strongly focused on numerous pertinent issues in its four programme areas, focusing on Serbia, the Western Balkans and Europe at large. CEP made significant accomplishments in the organisation's work, including the enhancement of its organisational capacities. In fact, as a result of its continued positive development, CEP emerged, for a third year in a row, as the highest-ranked think tank in the Western Balkan region in 2020 in the rankings of a prominent American programme of the University of Pennsylvania ([Go To Think Tanks Index](#)), as well as the seventh among think tanks in Central and Eastern Europe.

In this period, public administration reform (PAR), and in particular the impact that administration has on citizens, their rights and the organisation of public services, remained one of the key topics. In addition, CEP was one of the 6 civil society organisations selected to be a part of the state-run working group for the creation of a new PAR strategy in Serbia, for the period 2021–2030. Furthermore, CEP supported the OECD in the preparation of the first Government at Glance report for the Western Balkans, in the performance of the assessment of PAR in Serbia against the SIGMA/OECD Principles of Public Administration and was one of the first organisations in Serbia to research on government reaction to COVID-19 through telework experience of civil servants during the initial lockdown period. Driven by the accomplishments of the “Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform” – WeBER project, the European Commission supported its next phase, – [WeBER 2.0 \(Western Balkan Civil Society Empowerment for a Reformed Public Administration\)](#), which will last until December 2022.

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic was the most significant element that shaped the work of CEP in 2020 and to a large extent in 2021. Not only that the aspect of the pandemic was introduced in the research and policy products throughout all our programme areas, but it also impacted our everyday work and resulted in even more flexible work engagements in CEP office.

In the reporting period, CEP made a breakthrough into new topics and new areas, such as judiciary and access to justice for citizens as well as research on the influence of third actors on Serbia's European integration process. In the scope of the project “Access to justice in enforcement proceedings – building a model through consumer protection lens”, supported by the USAID Rule of Law Initiative, we brought together for the first time and initiated dialogue of all interested parties in enforcement proceedings: consumer protection organisations and organisations dealing with human rights, public enforcement officers and their association, local self-governments and public utilities.

In December 2019, in cooperation with the Delegation of the European Union to Serbia and the EU Info Centre, CEP, began implementing the one-year initiative Europe Closer to You, with twelve events. The aim of this project is to address some of the most important everyday aspects of the European integration process and make them accessible to citizens through discussions with competent experts in specific areas and those whose interests are most at stake. All events are open to the media and the public (with a focus on youth) who are given the opportunity to participate in the discussions.

Strong cooperation with the National Convention on EU (NCEU) continued in 2019. Beside leading the NCEU Working Groups (WGs) that have been under CEP's coordination since its establishments (for Negotiation Chapters 1, 3 and 28), CEP took over coordination of two additional NCEU WGs: WG for Negotiation Chapters 4 and 9, and a newly established Multi-Sector WG for political criteria, focused on monitoring the state of democracy, public administration reforms and media freedoms in Serbia.

The events that CEP organised in this period, became more and more popular, especially with the introduction of online events (via Zoom). Our experts have become recognised in the international community as well, and our programme staff took part in various, high level think tank conferences and other events throughout the globe (Rio de Janeiro, Shanghai, Paris, Madrid, etc.), where they had opportunity to moderate panels and exchange knowledge with peers from prominent think tanks.

In 2019 and 2020 we strengthened and further enriched our international cooperation and partnerships. As a result of our international presence at important global events, as well as the OSIFE funded project “Europeanisation Beyond Process” we established partnerships with leading think tanks in five EU member states: the Netherlands, Finland, Germany, Italy and France. Some of these partnerships have already resulted in new projects and initiatives that are being implemented in 2021.

CEP continued to have a strong presence in the media and to be recognised as one of the most prominent think tanks in Serbia and the region, despite the difficult conditions in the area of media freedoms. Media outlets, national and regional, regularly seek comments from CEP experts from all programme areas.

In 2019, CEP initiated a podcast channel “*European Talks*”, in form of short conversations related to unpacking complex issues related to Serbia’s relations with the EU and its member states. Each podcast episode entails talking to experts, diplomats, and other relevant actors. This is the first podcast channel led by a think tank in the region on this topic. It is slowly gaining more audience and relevance in instigating debates relating to Serbia’s and region’s relationships with the EU.

Moreover, CEP devoted additional efforts in building its internal capacities and skills, in both its programme and project management area. Under the OSIFE funded project “Europeanisation Beyond Process”, CEP researchers attended a week-long, intensive training “Enhancing skills in applying qualitative and quantitative methods in policy research” delivered by prominent EU professors. In addition, in mid-2019, our project staff attended two-day introductory course on the new European Commission’s project management methodology, *PM2 (PM squared)*, being thus the first non-governmental organisation in Serbia to get acquainted with this methodology, and creating preconditions for further dissemination of the PM2 methodology to public administrations and civil societies throughout the Western Balkan region in the future. CEP also continued developing its HR capacities and in 2019 organised HR trainings for the management staff – on stress management, providing feedback to employees, and defining annual goals.

Regarding human resources, the organisation enriched itself with five new employees with educational background from prominent EU universities and Belgrade university, while a number of interns from both Belgrade university and EU member states (France, Poland, etc.) joined our team for several months throughout the year. We also reaffirmed our capability to quickly mobilise large number of quality experts in different areas for the needs of large EU and other donor projects in Serbia and Western Balkan region.

The following sections of the report present CEP’s achievements within its four programme areas in greater detail, as well as some additional horizontal results.



#ThinkTanksReact: A Worldwide Solidarity Campaign



European Talks podcast on the escalation of violence in the Caucasus

As far as CEP’s policy products are concerned, the 2019-2020 period was highly productive, with CEP publishing four policy studies, 19 policy briefs, four CEP insights, four CEP presents, 7 discussion papers, four reports, three guidelines, 27 CEP infographics, 58 CEP blogs, five Think for Europe (TEN) publications related to the Europe&us programme and recording 31 podcast episodes.

1

PROGRAMME AREA 1

GOOD  
GOVERNANCE

“Good Governance,” remains CEP’s largest and most developed programme area. It continued to achieve significant results in 2019 and 2020 through the implementation of projects and initiatives at the national and regional levels. CEP’s experts in this programme area were involved and contributed to all main developments related to good governance in Serbia. The most important achievements are listed below:

## WeBER 2.0: Western Balkan civil society empowerment for a reformed public administration

The European Commission has recognised the achievements of WeBER, CEP’s flagship PAR initiative, and supported its next phase for [three years starting from December 2019](#). Under the name WeBER 2.0, it relies on the previous results of (and further nourishes) the project’s evidence-based, civil-society approach to monitoring government progress in PAR based on EU requirements, as guided by SIGMA’s [Principles of Public Administration](#). With innovations such as pilot monitoring of whether PAR is mainstreamed into sectoral policies, the introduction of an online consultation platform for citizens, and two new rounds of fully applying the PAR Monitor to name a few, the WeBER journey continues in full gear with exciting opportunities for furthering the engagement of civil society in the Western Balkans in governance reforms. The ultimate impact of WeBER 2.0 is an empowered civil society armed with the knowledge, skills and tools to monitor PAR and hold national and local governments to account.

Beginning of 2020, CEP laid the groundwork for the WeBER 2.0 activities at the regional level. With purpose to innovate and turn the [WeBER website](#) into a portal that connects all PAR stakeholders from the region and EU, CEP incorporated and launched the online consultation feature through Loomio. This feature innovated the work of the WeBER Platform and National Working Groups (NWGs). Additionally, based on the EU experience with the European Citizen Consultations (ECCs), training on citizen consultations was held in May 2020 with aim to create a pool of trainers from civil societies in the region on modalities for implementing citizen consultations that can facilitate stronger citizen involvement in the design and delivery of PAR.

Finally, the second cycle of the WeBER PAR monitoring was implemented in 2020. As the result, the publication of the regional comparative Western Balkan PAR Monitor report, and six National PAR Monitor reports are scheduled for publishing in the first half of 2021. As this was the second systematic WeBER PAR monitoring in the region by the civil society, second edition of PAR Monitor reports will offer not only benchmarking between Western Balkan administrations, but also comparison with the baseline 2017/2018 monitoring cycle.

## Good governance going global: recognition and internationalisation

Following the recognition of CEP as one of best think tanks in Central and Eastern Europe, and as the highest-ranked think tank in the Western as of 2018 by the [Go To Think Tank Index](#), which bears special importance for Good Governance as it recognises CEP’s role in seeking to improve policymaking in Serbia, CEP’s work in this programme area gained an increasingly international perspective with the organisation growing ties with the global policy community. In 2020, CEP continued to closely work together with policy community around the globe and promote collaboration, importance of evidence, and the necessity to join forces in the times of uncertainty, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In April 2020, together with more than 170 think tanks and policy-oriented organisations from 60 countries, CEP participated in the *Global Town Hall on Saving Lives and Livelihoods initiative* as a response to the COVID-19 crisis and new and unprecedented policy problems it brought. Within-



Under WeBER2.0, CEP has started in 2020 the Small Grant Facility which resulted in the selection of 30 local and grassroots CSOs from the Western Balkan region (out of 166 applications received) who will be implementing projects on PAR in their local communities in 2021.



Event: “The Future of Think Tanks and Policy Advice in the Context of Democratic Crises” organised for the launch of 2019’s Global Go To Think Tank Index



*Times of Crisis, Time for Think Tanks: Case of the Western Balkans, organised for the launch of 2020's Global Go To Think Tank Index*

the same initiative CEP was one of the leading think tanks in a few working groups that sought to discuss risks and opportunities for think tanks, including *Being Fit for Uncertain Future - New Operating Models for Think Tanks Research, Communications and Funding* and *Digitization and beyond: Reinventing events*. In addition, November, CEP took part in the virtual *2020 Global Think Tank Summit: Think Tanks and Policy Advice in a World Disrupted and Transformed* on what think tanks must do to survive and thrive in a disrupted world. CEP's active participation in Think Tank summits extends back to 2019 and [The Global Think Tank Summit in Rio de Janeiro](#) which gave CEP the opportunity to chair a discussion on building bottom-up pressure on governments and global governance institutions to regulate the use of artificial intelligence, while at [the European think tank Summit in Madrid](#) CEP engaged in an exchange of practices among European think tanks on harnessing technology for improved governance.

## Expanding cooperation with the OECD

CEP has provided expert support in PAR to the [OECD's SIGMA programme](#) for several years. Keeping in mind that SIGMA plays an important role in the PAR agenda in Serbia, building deeper ties and a working relationship with the OECD/SIGMA is a major achievement of CEP, expanding our in-house PAR expertise and adding to our PAR credibility.

Among main CEP's recent contributions was support in preparation of the first ever Government at a Glance report on the Western Balkans published in 2020. Government at a Glance is a flagship OECD publication for its member countries which "focuses on progress made by OECD countries in achieving people-centricity in their public management and governance practices and in-service delivery."



*Blog post: Work from home during the pandemic: An opportunity to modernise the work conditions of civil servants*

In early 2020, CEP was one of the first think tanks in Serbia to research government response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Under SIGMA's support, CEP developed the robust research methodology and conducted the complete research on the telework experience of civil servants in Serbia during the state of emergency. Preliminary results and recommendations were discussed with the main government stakeholders, including the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the Human Resources Management Office, and the Office for Information Technologies and eGovernment. As the final result, CEP team drafted the research study titled "Towards more flexible work arrangements for civil servants in Serbia: Learning from COVID-19 crisis". The study examined the experiences of civil servants while teleworking during the lockdown months, and their preferences regarding telework as a possible work arrangement in the future. The study developed recommendations for improving both legal framework and practice to enable public administration to better face a potential similar crisis in the future and introduce more flexible work arrangements for civil servants as an integral part of HRM policy.

Moreover, in the last quarter of 2020 SIGMA, launched a regional survey on the governance of public agencies in EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood countries. CEP supported SIGMA in this project for Serbia by setting up and implementing country-specific survey and performing auxiliary research. The main purpose of the survey was to gather data on agency governance, focusing on the autonomy of different types of agencies, the accountability mechanisms and governance arrangements between agencies and ministries, results of which will feed into the preparation of the SIGMA report "The organisation of public administration at central level in the Enlargement and neighbouring countries: Agency governance, autonomy and accountability". Moreover, it should further help the EU and national governments to shape the reform agenda, and to open new opportunities for international assistance in creating conditions for more effective and efficient implementation of core functions of public agencies.

Finally, starting in 2020 CEP continues to provide support to one of the SIGMA's core initiatives in Serbia, and the rest of the Western Balkans, which is assessment of state of PAR [against the Principles of Public Administration](#). As the result of these assessments SIGMA publishes monitoring reports that feed directly into the European Commission's country reports on the progress in the EU accession process.

## Opening the doors of justice for civil society and citizens in Serbia

In order to empower civil society and better understand citizens' priorities in judicial reform in Serbia, CEP coordinated and led a consortium of 11 partner organisations and professional judicial associations to develop a methodology for monitoring judicial reform within the second component of USAID-supported [Constituencies for Judicial Reform project](#). Managing an exceptionally iterative and participative process of the project, CEP delivered a methodology that features a set of compound indicators which focus on the citizen-facing aspects and outcomes of judicial processes in Serbia. The purpose of monitoring is to continuously monitor access to justice through the lens of legal framework and its implementation in practice. Over the course of 2020, the first cycle of the field research and analysis for monitoring report was successfully completed in line with developed methodology, despite significant obstacles due the Covid-19 pandemic that had a strong impact on functioning of courts and other judicial institutions. CEP had crucial role in steering the joint research effort of all 12 CSOs of the monitoring platform, as well as providing support to partners, and developed draft of the first monitoring report that will be published in 2021. This project will ultimately result in the production of three monitoring reports. Such endeavour represents CEP's greatest footprint in rule of law up to date.

Additionally, in 2019 and 2020, CEP supported, actively participated, and moderated a communication mechanism between citizens and representatives of the judiciary through local council meetings in different municipalities in Serbia. In 2019 the local council meetings were held in courts in Novi Sad, Kragujevac and Leskovac and hosted together more than 100 citizens who discussed topics such as fair trials within reasonable timeframes, and changes in the Law on Enforcement and Security Interest and their effects on citizens, with representatives from the judiciary. In 2020, these events were organised mostly online due to COVID-19 pandemic with participants from judicial institutions across Serbia. Topics such as the right to trial with a reasonable time, the role of the president of the court, rights and duties of witnesses in the court proceedings were thoroughly discussed with some of the most notable legal professionals and citizens could genuinely participate and submit their concerns.

In addition, CEP produced a citizen-friendly booklet on consumer protection. The main idea behind this [Consumer Protection Guide](#) was to provide simple and practical guidance to citizens on what they are legally entitled to as consumers, to educate them about consumer rights, to provide them with contacts from consumer counselling centres, and to describe the roles and importance of market inspection and consumer protection organisations. In terms of added value and achieving synergy among CEP's various programme areas, focusing on enforcement proceedings was an excellent opportunity for the promotion and advocacy of the results of another USAID-funded project, Access to justice in enforcement proceedings, as part of the Internal Market and Competitiveness programme area.

Finally, CEP produced a few citizen-friendly infographics on consumer protection. The main idea behind these materials on [consumers' rights](#) and [sellers' duties](#) was to provide simple and practical guidance to citizens on what they are legally entitled to as consumers, to educate them about consumer rights, and to describe seller's duties and their importance.



Consumer Protection Guide (in Serbian)



## Stepping up independent monitoring of the government

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2020 was the seventh year since CEP entered the [Open Government Partnership \(OGP\)](#) community as a national research organisation for Serbia affiliated with the OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM), and its role has grown ever since.

In that sense, the report also tackles government response to COVID-19 and its impact on the national OGP process, including transparency of decision-making, access to information, and public accountability during the crisis. The report will be published in 2021 following a thorough commenting process (by experts, government representatives, CSOs, the public). It will serve as an overview of achievements but also as an indicator of needed improvements in the open government area.

Previously, in November 2019, CEP released the [Serbia Design Report 2018-2020](#) which analysed the Serbian Government's OGP action plan, assessing the quality of its design and of the multi-stakeholder consultation process for its development. Recommendations from this report were presented to government representatives in July 2019 and served to further guide the action plan's implementation and increase its quality. [Serbia End-of-Term Report 2016-2018](#) released by CEP earlier in 2019 provided recommendations for public authorities to advance commitments in areas such as open data, access to information, service delivery, and others, which were used by the government to improve their OGP Action plan 2018-2020.

In 2020, as the concluding step in the 2018-2020 reporting cycle, CEP produced the final report on the implementation of Serbia's OGP Action plan 2018-2020. The report outlines main government's accomplishments following the completion of the action plan period and analyses how some of them have contributed to further government openness.

## Persistent influence on PAR policies

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In the reporting period, CEP remained a driver of high-level policy dialogue on public administration reform (PAR), bringing together key actors in the field and promoting civil society perspectives. Such initiatives are part of CEP's strong focus on good governance in Serbia and the Western Balkan region at large, as a prerequisite for accession to the EU. CEP also continued to illuminate the quintessential impact that administration has on citizens, their rights, and their abilities to obtain public services. For this reason, work was also done in 2019 in the area of public service delivery, voicing concerns on and expectations for the service orientation and citizen-centricity of administrative bodies such as in the [Steps towards the EU = steps towards an administration at citizens' service](#) panel discussion in December 2019. In addition, briefs and blogs such as "[Designing better public services in Serbia](#)" and "[Four things citizens want to see in the future service delivery policy in Serbia](#)" were published in 2019 in order to accentuate the issue.

During 2020, CEP continued to engage in the state-run working group for the creation of a new, PAR strategy in Serbia for the period 2021-2030, as one of six participating civil society organisations, with formal membership in the sub-group on service delivery. CEP's contribution to the work of this sub-group reflects in several CEP proposals being included in the Action plan for the implementation of the newly adopted PAR Strategy 2021-2030, an example being proposal to develop a framework for a systematic user engagement in all the phases of design and development of public services.

Finally, the European Commission consulted with CEP and other civil society organisations in October 2019 ahead of the PAR Special Group meeting between the Commission and government authorities of Serbia. Initiated by CEP in 2017 in its role as the WeBER Platform coordinator, consultations have not only become regular, with the third annual consultation event in a row, but have also become an indispensable aid to the Commission's scrutiny of the Serbian Government.

## Brand new national and regional initiatives underway

### *Local PAR Monitor*

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In December 2020, CEP launched the Local PAR Monitor under the project *Public Administration Monitoring for Better Local Governance*. It focuses particularly on the PAR monitoring in local self-governments in Serbia, with the intention to assess how the EU-SIGMA Principles of Public Administration are streamlined below central administration. Implemented in partnership with Centre for Equitable Regional Development (CenTriR), National Coalition for Decentralization (NKD) from Niš, and Ecological Centre Habitat from Vršac, Local PAR Monitor focuses on equipping local civil society organisations with tools, knowledge, and skills for PAR monitoring and advocacy at the local level based on facts and evidence. It will directly support 40 local CSOs with the aim of strengthening their capacities and providing mentoring support in the application of a comprehensive methodological framework. Local PAR Monitor will be implemented in 17 local self-government units.

### Implementing shared anti-corruption and good governance solutions in Southeast Europe

CEP has joined the multi-country project Implementing Shared Anti-corruption and Good Governance Solutions in Southeast Europe, led by the largest civil society anticorruption network - Southeast European Leadership for Development and Integrity (SELDI). It seeks to deliver shared anticorruption solutions to increase the accountability of state institutions and strengthen civil society and the rule of law in Southeast Europe through capacity building on implementing research innovation instruments, and the establishment of knowledge-sharing public-private partnership between civil society and public sector in 9 beneficiary countries. Project partners will implement Monitoring Anticorruption Policy Implementation (MACPI) which will result in analysis (technical reports) in targeted countries. In addition, project intends to upgrade [opentender.eu](#) portal for large scale public procurement analysis, by including new corruption risk indicators implemented annually in nine countries. Project is to be officially launched in early 2021.

### COVID-19 related writings in Good Governance area

In this programme area, CEP has published in 2020 several pieces on COVID-19 related good governance issues:

- Blog post *A Lack of Transparency: The COVID-19 Pandemic in Serbia*.
- Blog post *Work from home during the pandemic: An opportunity to modernise the work conditions of civil servants*.
- Blog post *COVID-19 Reminds Us of the Government's Perpetual Communication Flaws*.
- Blog post *The COVID-19 Crisis in Serbia: A New Reality, Yet Old Habits Remain Within the Civil Service*.
- Policy brief *Opening governments in times of lockdown: Lessons learned for citizen-oriented administrations from the COVID-19 crisis in the Western Balkans*.
- Policy brief *The Western Balkans and the COVID-19: Effects on good governance, rule of law and civil society*.
- Policy brief *Do new circumstances change routines? Public administration and service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Western Balkans*.

In the observed period, six policy briefs, three infographics, three reports and 12 blogs were published under Good Governance Programme Area.

All CEP policy products published in the first programme area can be accessed in English at the following links: [studies](#), [briefs](#), [insights](#), [presents](#), [discussion papers](#), [reports and other editions](#) and [infographics](#).



2

PROGRAMME AREA 2

# INTERNAL MARKET AND COMPETITIVENESS

In 2019 and 2020, CEP was more visible and present in public and amongst policy makers in respect to the topics covered by this Programme Area. This was the result of the several projects delivered that tackle economic issues, CEP's strong presence in National Convention on EU, and strengthened expertise in this area.

## NCEU

Alongside continued coordination and lead of three NCEU Working Groups (WGs) that have been under CEP's leadership since NCEU's establishment (WGs covering EU accession Negotiating Chapter 1 – Free movement of goods, Chapter 3 - The right of establishment and freedom to provide services, and Chapter 28 – Consumer and health protection), in December 2019 CEP took over coordination and re-establishment of NCEU Working Group that covers Negotiation chapters 4 (Free movement of capital) and 9 (Financial services).

Monitoring reports on progress within negotiating Chapters 1, 3, 4, 9 and 28 were published in the NCEU Book of Recommendations for 2019 and for 2020. CEP had an important opportunity to initiate the development of a methodology for monitoring implementation of ERP and contribute to defining specific reform priorities within this important policy document of the Government, focusing on the mentioned negotiation chapters. The involvement of CEP and other civil society organisations in these EU-accession negotiation areas allowed for valuable societal perspectives to become reflected in the endorsed government policy.

Having in mind that Covid-19 pandemic was the most important global topic in 2020, that significantly reflected on the Serbian public health system as well, so the focus of NCEU WG for Chapter 28 was on the current situation in health sector and implementation of Government's measures. Preliminary assessment of implemented measures and conclusions of the discussion on the Working Group were summarized in the contribution to the NCEU [Monitoring report on measures during the current situation in the field of social policies, employment, public health and consumer protection and education](#).

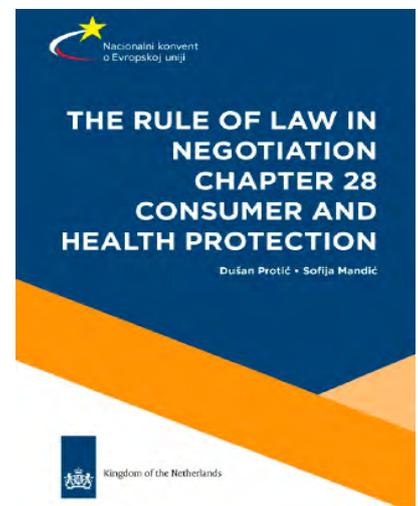
Rule of law has become one of the most important issues on the road of EU-accession of Serbia, and in light of providing inter-sectorial view of how the rule of law principle reflects across negotiation chapters, NCEU supported preparation of thematic analyses for several chapters. CEP programme manager Dušan Protić, as a co-author with Sofija Mandić of CEPRIS, prepared an analysis on [Rule of law in chapter 28 – Consumer and health protection](#).

## Bringing economic chapters in EU accession negotiations closer to citizens

Project "Strengthening Capacities of Civil Society Organisations for Active Participation in EU Negotiations through Selected National Convention for EU Working Group (Prepare to Participate – P2P)", officially was launched in December 2018, and after three-months inception period, started with the full implementation in March 2019. CEP, as a lead partner, has been delivering this project together with National Alliance for Local Economic Development (NALED) and Centre for Contemporary Policies (CSP).

The objective of the project is to enable diverse segments of the civil society to actively take part in the EU accession process to fully open the process to citizens. In addition to increasing the civil society organisations (CSOs) involvement in the EU negotiation process, the project goal is to strengthen their capacities to protect citizens' interests in their own projects and initiatives.

Beside regular meetings of NCEU Working Groups led by CEP, CEP's representatives in NCEU Programme Council participated in its regular sessions, strategic planning sessions and provided support for operation of NCEU central office. CEP's experts also participate in and support the work of NCEU Multi-sector WG on Economic Reform



*Analysis on Rule of law in chapter 28 – Consumer and health protection*

Therefore, the project activities will facilitate the effective involvement of civil society, in the EU negotiations on selected economic acquis chapters through the NCEU WGs and raise awareness on the importance of economic chapters for citizens' everyday life. With enhancing knowledge and skills in this area, civil society in Serbia will be able to continually protect and advocate the interests of citizens to policy makers. The project is financed by the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia.

Thematically, project is focused on nine selected economic chapters in EU accession negotiation process<sup>1</sup> and ERP as the most important economic governance document that Serbia prepares.

Beside preparation of methodologies and guidelines for research activities and development of different policy products (that are to be finalised in first quarter of 2020), project team prepared CSO awareness raising strategy on interest and concerns of civil society in the EU accession negotiations, together with its first bi-annual action plan. This awareness raising strategy was accepted as NCEU awareness raising strategy for all economic chapters and would be integral part of NCEUs overall communication strategy. Several capacity building and awareness raising events were organised in 2019 – **round table for WG on Chapter 28 “Consumer and Health Protection”**, workshop on EU accession negotiation process, seminars on the content of different chapters, **local discussions**.



Breakfast with journalists “Economy in the focus: Serbian free trade agreements”



Infographic: Trade at the spotlight (in Serbian)

As one of the project's target groups and final beneficiaries are media, in October 2019 breakfast with journalists “Economy in the focus: Serbian free trade agreements” was delivered. Aiming to clarify and bust the myth on the most important Serbian trade partners and promote **infographic** developed in the scope of the project, the event gathered more than 10 journalists (from respectable dailies, weeklies and online portals). Following the event, journalists prepared different articles and reports, contributing visibility of the project and CEP.

In December 2020, and in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance, official consultations on draft ERP 2020–2022 and selected structural reforms were organised. The **event** gathered representatives of Government's Working group for development and monitoring of ERP and NCEU's Multi-Sector WG on ERP. Representatives of NCEU provided comments and suggestions on the draft ERP at the event itself, together with written contributions submitted to the Ministry of Finance after the event.

Aiming to support involvement of local CSOs in EU accession negotiations (through NCEU WGs) in selected economic chapters and to strengthen the capacities of these organisations, six **small grants** that presented the highest quality proposals within the open call were awarded in the scope of the project. All six local initiatives tackle one or more economic chapters and their implementation will contribute achievement of Prepare to participate project's goals. Also, implementation of these initiatives will bring closer EU accession negotiations to their communities.

1. Free Movement of Goods (Ch. 1); Right of establishment and freedom to provide services (Ch. 3); Company Law (Ch. 6); Competition Policy (Ch. 8); Taxation (Ch. 16); Economic and monetary policy (Ch. 17); Enterprise and Industrial Policy (Ch. 20), Consumer and Health Protection (Ch. 28), and Customs Union (Ch. 29)

## Consumers lens in enforcement proceedings of municipal utility services

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During 2019 CEP implemented project “Access to justice in enforcement proceedings – building a model through consumer protection lens”, supported by the USAID Rule of Law Project. The project aimed to examine the current state of protection of citizen’s rights in enforcement practices, especially with regard to municipal utility cases. For the first time in Serbia, irreconcilable opposites – public enforcers and representatives of consumer organisations, as well as other key actors – were brought together in an effort to build a platform for permanent dialogue and possible collaboration in order to raise the level of consumer protection in enforcement procedures. The first research effort addressing this topic since the introduction of a new enforcement system based on the key role of public enforcement officers, this project produced several policy products (studies, brochures, publications) and held events (info days and conferences) to raise consumers’ awareness of rights and obligations. Additionally, it produced recommendations towards bringing together consumer organisations, public enforcement officers and municipal utility companies in order to raise the level of consumer protection in this particular field.

The model of mechanism for continuous monitoring of consumer protection issues in enforcement cases was piloted locally on 30 October 2019 in Leskovac by [signing the memorandum of cooperation](#) between the Chamber of PEOs and CPO National parliament from Leskovac, i.e. by launching a channel for continuous communication and collaboration between the two signatories.

When it comes to policy products, this period also was fruitful and productive when it comes to CEP’s policy products as more papers was released under “Internal Market and Competitiveness” programme area than in any previous year – 37 policy products in total were developed and published (nine policy briefs, two policy studies, two CEP presents, six discussion papers, one report, three guidelines,<sup>14</sup> infographics and five blogs)<sup>2</sup>.

All CEP policy products published in the second programme area can be accessed in English at the following links: [studies](#), [briefs](#), [reports and other editions](#) and [infographics](#).

1. Some of these are cross-sector policy products, as they link topics from CEP’s second Programme area (Internal Market and Competitiveness) with issues relevant for its first Programme area (Good Governance)



3



PROGRAMME AREA 3

REGIONAL POLICY,  
ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT

CEP's Third Programme Area stagnated a bit in 2019 and 2020 due to the lack of donors that prioritised think tank initiatives in these particular fields and limited programmes available to CSOs.

In this period, CEP's activities in this Programme area were linked with [Banatska platforma](#), where CEP's experts continued to provide their support aiming to strengthen the capacities of CSOs in Banat's local communities to participate in EU accession negotiations with a focus on negotiating chapters 11 (agriculture and rural development), 12 (food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy) and 27 (environment). In cooperation with Habitat Ecological Centre from Vrsac, coordinator of Banatska platforma, three workshops for CSOs were delivered in different Banat municipalities, a workshop for media in Belgrade, while the TV show on the results of Banatska platforma, with speakers from CEP was produced and broadcasted.

Within the "Regional Policy, Energy, Environment" programme area in 2019, CEP published two Blog post on [climate changes and economy](#), and on [greenhouse gas emission](#).

All CEP policy products published in the third programme area can be accessed in English at the following links: [studies](#), [briefs](#), [insights](#), [presents](#), [discussion papers](#), [reports and other editions](#) and [infographics](#).

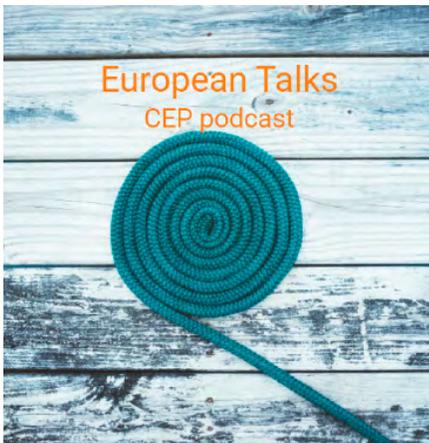


*Blog post "EU, Srbija i klimatski neutralna privreda"*

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PROGRAMME AREA 3  
EUROPE&US

The fact that 2020 was the most turbulent year for the relationship between Serbia and the EU, particularly after the Serbian President proclaimed that European solidarity was a fairy tale while referring to the COVID-19 pandemic, rendered all the more relevance to the work done by researchers from the Europe&Us programme area. The pandemic also allowed CEP researchers to expand the scope of their research by following, analysing and commenting on the effects of the pandemic on Serbia's EU accession path. Meanwhile, as the pandemic further complicated the geopolitics in the region, with a notable rise of China's influence, researchers kept their focus on analysing the role of non-EU actors in Serbia.



*European Talks: CEP podcast*

In 2019 - 2020, CEP consolidated itself as a recognised interlocutor on EU affairs at national, regional and the global level. In 2019, we seized the opportunity created by the EU's renewed interest in enlargement, providing input on overcoming this impasse through our publications, events, media appearances and participation at international events. Though the regional TEN network that it has led since 2013, CEP forged partnerships and opportunities for cooperation with leading think tanks from five EU member states. Similarly, its work and expertise on EU-Western Balkans affairs made an impact in European capitals and beyond.

By expanding the scope and depth of research on relevant topics, our researchers continued producing an ever-increasing number of publications. For the same reason, researchers developed a fruitful cooperation with media outlets by regularly commenting for daily newspapers and weekly magazines on topics of relevance and by being hosted in television broadcasts. Hence, in 2020, CEP was continuously recognised as one of the key interlocutors in Serbia on topics of relevance for the EU, the Western Balkans and Serbia.

## Timely publication of policy products on topical issues

CEP addressed numerous pertinent issues related to Serbia and its relationship with the EU. It published a study on the impact of China's foreign policy on Serbia's EU integration process, a policy paper [analysing Serbian citizens' sentiments towards the EU](#), four "CEP Insights" focusing on the priorities of EU member states holding the Council of the EU's rotating presidency ([Finland](#), [Romania](#), [Germany](#) and [Croatia](#)), infographics explaining the [evolution of Brexit](#), as well as [blog entries](#), written to react promptly to relevant European and international developments. Among these are commentaries on the French proposal for a [revised EU accession methodology](#) and other proposals to revamp the EU accession process, on the [EU's new institutional cycle](#) as well as on [Brexit](#). Moreover, in 2019, CEP initiated a podcast channel called [European Talks](#), which is a short form conversation that aims to untangle difficult questions on various topics related to Serbia's relations with the EU and its member states, by talking to experts, diplomats, and other relevant actors. This is the first podcast channel led by a think tank in the region on this topic. It is slowly gaining more audience and relevance in instigating debates relating to Serbia's and region's relationships with the EU.

In terms of the enlargement, the key milestone of 2020 was the adoption of the revised methodology. Because of this, CEP published a paper in February 2020 titled "[\(Yet\) another "credible EU perspective"?](#)" in which it unboxed the Commission's new edition of carrots and sticks for the Western Balkans. CEP revisited this issue in August 2020 by taking a look at "[What does acceptance of the new accession methodology mean for Serbia?](#)". What is common for CEP's publications on this topic is the fact CEP advocated for using the momentum of such decision. Furthermore, by supporting this methodology, these papers encouraged the idea behind it – making the process of accession to the EU more credible, predictable, dynamic, and politically driven with the help of the new methodology. Additionally, this new methodology was recognised as favourable in comparison to previous methodology which was considered as a "technocratic" process of meeting certain EU technical requirements and standards.

Considering that the COVID-19 pandemic has dominated the agenda of European decision-makers in 2020, CEP adapted well to the changing environment by analysing [effects of](#)

the pandemic on Serbia's path to the EU. In that regard, together with its TEN partners, CEP published a brief analysing effects of the pandemic on good governance, rule of law and civil society in the Western Balkans. Although the EU heavily assisted Serbia during the pandemic, its efforts were often overshadowed by those of China, on whose side Serbian government openly stood in 2020. In order to better inform the public on the factual situation on the ground, CEP relied on infographics which, in a visually appealing manner, outlined [EU's financial assistance package to the Western Balkans](#) and presented the [timeline and details of assistance of all foreign assistance to Serbia during the pandemic](#). All in all, the analysis of the effects of the pandemic became an unavoidable point when it came to almost all policy products.

## Events which stirred debate on the EU's renewed approach to enlargement

In the period 2019 - 2020, CEP demonstrated an ability to anticipate "burning issues", initiating several pertinent debates. Besides its increasingly popular events on the rotation of Council presidencies, CEP organised five events that stirred the debate on changes necessary to the existing EU enlargement approach. The first, a discussion held in June 2019, dealt with the [failures of EU conditionality policy](#) to push forward improvements in Serbia's democratic performance. The second discussion held in November 2019, [shed light on the French proposals](#) for a revised accession process, discussing the feasibility of this plan and the steps ahead. In April 2020, CEP, as a part of the Think for Europe Network, in partnership with the Clingendael Institute, CEP organised an event titled "[The Zagreb Summit: a moment of decisions for the EU enlargement?](#)" Aim of the event was to provide a better understanding of the current state of EU enlargement policy and to facilitate an exchange of views between leading experts and the public both from the Western Balkans and the Netherlands.

Due to an increasing influence of external actors in Serbia, CEP, alongside KAS, organized an online discussion (webinar) in December 2020 aimed at assessing the then Serbia's geopolitical situation. Titled "[Serbia as a stopover? Assessing the strength of Russia's, China's and Turkey's leverage,](#)" this event brought together international experts to discuss how strong the political, economic, and social leverage of China, Russia, and Turkey *vis-à-vis* Serbia is. Moreover, this event addressed whether and to what extent the impact of these countries damaging to Serbia's EU accession process is. The discussion became even more relevant, considering that the geopolitics of the region is becoming ever more complex.

Meanwhile, as a part of the "Make Future Together: EU and the Western Balkans from the Youth Perspective" project, CEP organised a two-day event about freedom of expression online in November of 2020. The first day of the event included organising nation-wide youth consultations in order to find out the youth's perspective on internet freedoms and regulations of online content. The same kind of consultations were also held by TEN partners in all the Western Balkan countries. This way, the idea was to generate the voice of the youth, from the bottom-up perspective, all in the context of the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe. The inputs provided by the selected youth participants in Serbia, were further used in the [second day of the event](#) – a webinar which brought together experts who discussed the key challenges of internet freedoms which are being heavily exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.



*The Zagreb Summit: a moment of decisions for the EU enlargement?*



*Restrictions on freedom of expression on the Internet: censorship or necessity*

## Partnerships and Advocacy in EU Capitals

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In the framework of the TEN Network, and under a two-year project “Europeanisation Beyond Process” funded by the Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE) partnerships have been established and boosted with leading think tanks in five EU member states: The Clingendael in the Netherlands, the Finnish Institute for International Affairs (FIIA), Aspen Institute Germany, the Instituto Affari Internazionali in Italy, and Institut Montaigne in France. CEP’s increased advocacy outreach towards European capitals, thus extending its EU enlargement influence beyond the Brussels “bubble”. It successfully led and participated in policy advocacy missions to Helsinki, The Hague, Paris and Berlin, where our representatives met and discussed possible improvements to enlargement process with relevant officials from government institutions dealing with EU affairs and enlargement. Yet, it should be noted that although CEP planned extensive advocacy outreach in 2020, these efforts were limited by the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March 2020. Nevertheless, CEP, together with TEN partners, managed to hold three advocacy events – one in Brussels, and two online with the relevant stakeholders from Denmark and Netherlands.

Just before the pandemic begun, CEP organised, alongside TEN, a fact-finding mission within the framework of the OSIFE project, in Copenhagen. It allowed the team to build its network of think tank and academic partners in this relevant, but often enlargement-sceptic country. During the same visit, TEN managed to reach the Danish audience, by publishing a paper in March 2020 advocating for recognition of the benefits of integrating the rest of the Balkans into the EU at a local [Magasinet Evropa](#).

As part of advocacy missions, CEP organised a closed-door event with the Clingendael in April 2020, attended by the selected expert community, consisting mainly of the Dutch stakeholders (from the parliament and the MFA) and EU-based experts on the Western Balkans. The event addressed the expectations from the forthcoming EU-WB Summit (Zagreb Summit) and the state of play in EU-WB relations. The webinar addressed the same topic under the name “[The Zagreb Summit: A moment of decisions for EU Enlargement?](#)”. The advocacy towards Netherlands was further pursued with a podcast episode with the Dutch ambassador to Serbia, and Montenegro, [H.E. Gilles Beschoor Plug](#).

Meanwhile, in June 2020, CEP and other TEN members participated in a closed-door discussion organised by the Aspen Institute Germany, with the aim of discussing long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Western Balkans. On that occasion, TEN presented a working paper with recommendations, which was later turned into a TEN policy brief. Besides TEN members, expert audience consisted of policy- and decision-makers from Germany and other EU member states, as well as expert community from the region and Europe. This meeting allowed TEN to position itself as relevant interlocutor from the region.

Finally, advocacy was also directed toward the European Parliament. Namely, the closed-door meeting at the European Parliament took place in February 2020 in Brussels and it was attended by four MEPs (Tanja Fajon and Tonino Picula from the S&D Group; as well as Irena Joveva and Klemen Goselj from Renew Europe political group) and around 40 officials of the EP Secretariat, political advisors and assistants to MEPs. Six TEN representatives presented their concerns about the existing EU enlargement framework and how can it be improved. The findings and messages were mainly based on two policy briefs published by TEN, within this project – [Curbing the Executive Bias in EU Enlargement Policy for Stronger Democracy in Western Balkans](#), and [Effective Benchmarking for Concrete Rule of Law Reforms in the Western Balkans](#). TEN representatives also had an opportunity to comment on the Commission’s communication on the revised EU accession process.

In addition, relations and cooperation established with the Brussels' based think-tanks (European Policy Centre - EPC, Centre for European Policy Studies – CEPS, Bruegel) were nurtured and deepened.

## Expansion of the scope of research

The policy studies from 2019 on China's influence on Serbia's EU integration process has marked an expansion of CEP's research focus to international aspects of Serbia's pursuit of EU membership. The topic was broadened and expanded in 2020, when the impact of influences from other global and regional powers on Serbia's EU policy, through a project supported by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Belgrade was analysed. Accompanying the work on policy study, the researchers also tackled the topic by producing briefs, infographics, podcasts, and blogs. A relevant example is a brief named *"What have we learned from the COVID-19 crisis in terms of Sino-Serbian relations?"*, published in April 2020.

During 2019 and 2020, research work within the Europe&Us programme area yielded 79 publications: two Policy Studies, four Policy Briefs (two drafts), four CEP Insights, one CEP Discussion Paper, two CEP Presents, 10 Infographics, together with 39 blogs, 14 podcast episodes, and three analytical texts written as part of the Think for Europe Network (TEN).



*Policy brief "What have we learned from the COVID-19 crisis in terms of Sino-Serbian relations?"*



# CROSS-CUTTING PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES



In 2019, we continued to work on the implementation of the Good Governance Programme (GGF) for Serbia, together with PwC Serbia and in close cooperation with the British Embassy in Serbia. The GGF is an initiative of the UK Government designed to provide reform assistance to Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine.

In the scope of the GGF in 2019, CEP has implemented and/or participated in delivery of four projects aiming to strengthen the capacities of National Academy for Public Administration (NAPA), Administrative Court, State Audit Institutions (SAI) and Cadastre.

## Gender Mainstreaming

CEP continues to integrate a gender perspective into the preparation, design, realisation, monitoring, and evaluation of all of its programme areas, policy products, individual projects, activities, and events in order to combat discrimination and promote equality in a wider sense between women and men.

## CEP and the media

In 2019 and 2020, CEP significantly strengthened its presence in the media and continued to advocate for its activities towards policy makers and citizens despite the difficult conditions in the area of media freedoms and COVID-19 pandemic issues that overburdened this area additionally. In 2019, CEP became the reference point that the media turn to when they need accurate comments on all the burning topics - Brexit, EU accession process, rule of law, consumer protection, the environment, while in 2020 CEP continued to cultivate its cooperation with a select circle of media and became certain in its decision to not collaborate with tabloids, media that spread fake news, including the media that are supported by the government (pro-regime media). Because of the focus of the media on the subjects related to the pandemic, this was the most common theme CEP spoke about in 2020, especially when it came to the **economic measures in preventing the consequences of the pandemic**. Also, CEP was active in speaking about the elections in Serbia, the European Commission report and the reports from the independent bodies on the state of rule of law in Serbia.



CEP also makes sure there is a gender balance in all activities. Out of 148 key speakers that participated in events organised by CEP, 92 were men and 56 were women.

The number of media appearances (over 100 in both 2019 and 2020) exceeded all expectations. Our experts appeared regularly on nationally broadcast TV stations RTS and N1, as well as the regional Al Jazeera and provided commentaries for media such as BBC in Serbian, B92, Blic, Politika, Danas and the European Western Balkans portal. Good links were established with the one of the most read and most influential weekly newspaper in Serbia, Vreme, which published several articles prepared by CEP's experts.

Among the most significant media appearances in 2019 and 2020, the one of Milena Lazarevic on N1 on the topic of the publication of the report from the [European Commission regarding Serbia's progress](#) needs to be singled out, as well as Ms Lazarevic's interview for *Karakter*, [What can Serbia hope for in 2020 on the road toward EU](#). Lazarevic was also active in speaking out on the topic of results of CEP's research on the use of public services during the pandemic, which was broadcasted by multiple media, including the portal [Dijalog.net](#). Strahinja Subotic had a notable appearance on N1. Furthermore, the state-owned Radio Television Serbia (RTS), numerous times broadcasted the statements of the CEP and appealed to us for a comment, among other things, on the topic of [What does the new Law on Prevention of Corruption bring](#). RTS also broadcasted CEP from the event [Investing in the environment costs](#), but it will cost us more if we do nothing, and from the event regarding the change of presidency of the [EU Council](#). The relationship between Serbia and China was also among the topics CEP frequently remarked on, which was also reported by this [public service](#).

In addition to the national media, CEP was also broadcasted on the European level - primarily through the Brussels *Euractiv*, which published several CEP's articles and blogs and quoted CEP's experts. Also, CEP gave a statement for the European portal Emerging Europe, for the article [Coronavirus postpones elections across emerging Europe](#). Except in Poland. CEP was quoted in the prestigious Financial Times, on several occasions: Mr Majstorovic, President of CEP's Governing Board was quoted in the article on [Vucic's nationalist party wins landslide victory in Serbian poll](#), as well as a letter to President Macron written by Milena Lazarević and Corina Stratulat. Moreover, CEP was quoted in the Macedonian portal [MIA](#) and on the [Democracy Digest](#) portal.

CEP has continued the practice of organising brunches with journalists, with the main objective of informing the media on the topics it analyses, as well as improving the quality of media coverage in the areas in which it operates.

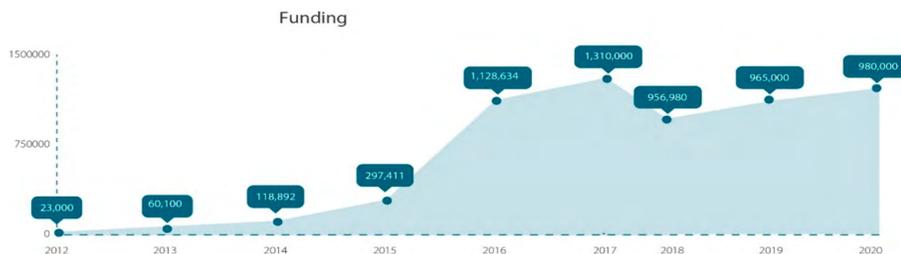
In 2019, CEP launched its podcast called *European Talks*. [14 episodes](#) of podcasts were recorded in the past years, and they attracted around 2000 listening. In 2020, [17 episodes](#) of European Talks were broadcasted, with more than 8000 listening. We developed new category of CEP's podcast in 2020 – WeBER Podcast, which focused on discussions on public administration reform with the experts from the Western Balkans.

Every CEP event was covered by the media, while more than 200 people attended CEP events in 2019. The majority of events in 2020 was organized online which significantly increased the number of visits to CEP events, where the average number of attendees was 70 and 80 people per panel. Also, online events did not reduce CEP's presence in the media-every online discussion was covered by the media and broadcast on media portals, and often on television as part of a news program. In December, CEP began holding hybrid events, the first of which is ["Economic challenges of Serbia in the European integration process"](#).

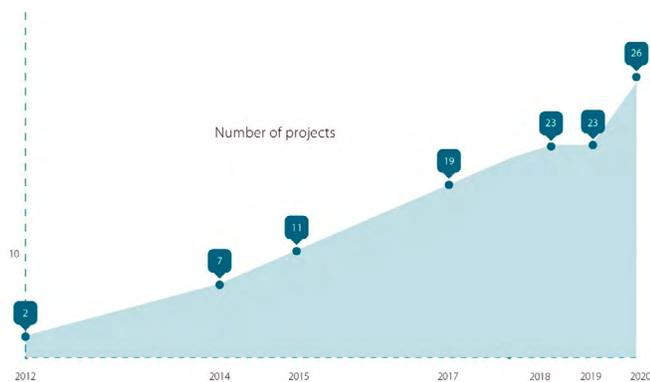
CEP continued to maintain a strong presence on social networks, which is one of the ways CEP communicates the most with its audience. Social media have become even more important channel for communication with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since May 2019, CEP has opened a profile on Instagram, and by the end of 2020, it has garnered over 1,200 followers. On Twitter CEP exceeded 3,000 followers, while on Facebook the number was over 11,000 at the end of 2020. CEP's videos, especially those from panel discussions that were streamed via social media, have been viewed more than 10,000 times.

## III FINANCIAL DATA AND FUNDING SOURCES

CEP's annual budget in the period 2019 - 2020 increased in comparison to 2018 and amounted EUR 965,000 in 2019 and 980,000 EUR in 2020.



In 2019, CEP implemented 23 projects, same as previous year and in 2020 36 projects.



CEP's sources of funding in 2019 and 2020 were the following:

- The European Union
- The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
- The U.K. Government through the Good Governance Fund (GGF)
- Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherland
- Organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD), through SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management), joint initiative with EU
- The Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE)
- The Open Government Partnership (OGP)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
- World Bank
- The Regional Cooperation Council – RCC
- British Council

In 2019, CEP implemented one project financed from the budget of the Republic of Serbia. This project amounted less than 0.5% of CEP's budget and can be considered as miscellaneous funding. In 2020, there was no funding from the Serbian government or from the domestic private sector.

European Policy Centre - CEP - is a nongovernmental, non-profit, independent think-tank, based in Belgrade. It was founded by a group of professionals in the areas of EU law, EU affairs, economics and public administration reform, with a shared vision of changing the policy making environment in Serbia for the better – by rendering it more evidence based, more open and inclusive and more substantially EU accession driven. Profound understanding of EU policies and the accession process, the workings of the Serbian administration, as well as strong social capital combine to create a think-tank capable of not only producing high quality research products but also penetrating the decision making arena to create tangible impact. Today, CEP organises its work into four programme areas:

- 1) Good Governance;
- 2) Internal Market and Competitiveness;
- 3) Regional Policy, Networks and Energy;
- 4) Europe&us.

