



# **2023**

# **ANNUAL REPORT**

EUROPEAN POLICY CENTRE

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>MAIN DEVELOPMENTS</b> .....	3
<b>PROGRAMME AREA 1: GOOD GOVERNANCE</b> .....	5
<b>FROM WeBER 2.0 TO 3.0 – UNWAVERING CIVIL SOCIETY EFFORTS FOR BETTER PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM</b> .....	5
<b>STRATEGIC VISION IN ACTION</b> .....	6
<b>OECD/SIGMA AND CEP JOIN FORCES ONCE MORE FOR BETTER GOVERNANCE</b> .....	6
<b>OGP IN SERBIA – CEP MONITORS THE 2023-2027 ACTION PLAN CO-CREATION</b> .....	6
<b>CONSTITUENCIES FOR JUDICIAL REFORM IN SERBIA - THIRD MONITORING REPORT UNVEILED</b> .....	7
<b>SUPPORTING THE ANTI-CORRUPTION &amp; GOOD GOVERNANCE IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE</b> .	7
<b>GOOD GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS IN 2023</b> .....	8
<b>PROGRAMME AREA 2: INTERNAL MARKET AND COMPETITIVENESS</b> .....	9
<b>ECONOMIC REFORM PROGRAMME – ERP</b> .....	9
<b>HEADING NCEU WORKING GROUPS FOR ECONOMIC CHAPTERS</b> .....	9
<b>QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE, COMPETITIVENESS DEVELOPMENT FACTORS</b> .....	11
<b>CONTINUATION OF RESEARCH ON CIRCULAR AND ECONOMIC MIGRATION IN SERBIA</b> 12	
<b>CONTINUOUS SUPPORT TO EDUCATION REFORM FOR BETTER ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS</b> .....	13
<b>PROGRAMME AREA 3: REGIONAL POLICY, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT</b> .....	13
<b>TOWARDS GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT</b> .....	13
<b>FOOD SAFETY IN SERBIA</b> .....	14
<b>PROGRAMME AREA 4: OUR EUROPE</b> .....	14
<b>TOWARDS TEMPLATE 2.0 FOR STAGED ACCESSION TO THE EU</b> .....	14
<b>FROM RESEARCH TO ADVOCACY</b> .....	15
<b>HORIZON PROJECT ON THE HORIZON</b> .....	15
<b>OTHER RELEVANT WORK</b> .....	16
<b>VISIBILITY OF EXPERTISE</b> .....	16
<b>EXPANDING THE STAFF</b> .....	17
<b>PROJECT AND FINANCE TEAM</b> .....	17
<b>CEP AND THE MEDIA</b> .....	17
<b>CEP STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE</b> .....	19
<b>FINANCIAL DATA AND FUNDING SOURCES</b> .....	20

## MAIN DEVELOPMENTS

*In 2023, CEP maintained its dedication and concentration on the essential issues outlined in our mission and program areas. Even with the obstacles posed by a swiftly evolving global political environment, CEP made considerable progress toward fulfilling its mission, enhancing its organisational capabilities, and broadening its influence. This report highlights CEP's achievements in 2023, emphasising our successes and the range of ongoing initiatives.*

CEP continued to refine the Staged Accession Model with support from the Open Society Foundation, producing 17 new issue papers. This effort, in collaboration with the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) from Brussels, three members of the Think for Europe Network (TEN)<sup>1</sup> and two independent regional experts<sup>2</sup>, included six national papers analysing the Model's application to the WB6, the financial and economic impacts on EU and acceding countries, and the potential gradual institutional participation of candidate countries. Key areas covered were sectoral integration within the SAA regime, pre-accession funding enhancement, and legal aspects of temporarily suspending veto rights after EU accession. The culmination was Template 2.0, integrating the latest findings to meet the needs of candidates and member states effectively. CEP's advocacy campaign, funded by the Open Society Foundation, included visits to seven EU member states in 2023 as well as participation in several important conferences, garnering strong support for the Model as a comprehensive effort for gradual integration. Recognising the crucial timing, member states strongly supported the Model, acknowledging it as one of the most comprehensive efforts to operationalise the concept of gradual integration.

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During 2023, CEP successfully finalized its WeBER 2.0 project and simultaneously started implementing activities in the first year of WeBER 3.0. WeBER 2.0 saw the completion of research and advocacy activities, while WeBER 3.0 lays the foundation for future efforts, emphasizing the development of citizen-centric methodology for PAR problem-solving at the local level. This methodology is set to be used in the implementation of the WeBER Small Grant Facility dedicated to CSO engagement in PAR within local self-government units in the Western Balkans.

The WeBER initiative expanded in scope with the launch of WeBER Plus, aimed at enhancing the capacities of regional and national CSOs in PAR monitoring through tailor-made training to be implemented in 2024. Additionally, 2023 marked the beginning of revising the PAR Monitor methodology after completing three monitoring cycles.

The Western Balkans PAR Monitor 2021/2022 edition was published in June 2023, with its national counterpart, the National PAR Monitor for Serbia 2021/2022, following in July. Besides providing a general overview of PAR in the WB and Serbia, CEP published five cross-cutting and issue-specific policy briefs on PAR subjects. The Mind (Y)our Reform citizen campaign analysed

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<sup>1</sup> European Policy Institute (EPI) from Skopje, Institute Alternative from Podgorica and Foreign Policy Initiative Bosnia and Herzegovina (FPI BH) from Sarajevo.

<sup>2</sup> Independent experts were hired from Tirana and Pristina.

over 1800 citizen experiences with public administration, presenting the results at EU, regional, and national levels, including policy dialogues in Brussels.

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CEP's strong engagement within the National Convention on EU (NCEU) continued in 2023. Besides leading the Working Groups (WGs) for Negotiation Chapters 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 28, as well as intersectoral WG for political criteria. The WGs held meetings throughout the year and discussed topics such as state regulation in the field of handicrafts, postal traffic, the possibility of further progress in areas regulated by the Law on foreign currency, Initiative for Amendments to the Law on Consumer Protection, among others.

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In last year, CEP participated in the tenth cycle of the Economic Reform Program (ERP) planning, covering the period 2024-2026. The ERP framework aims to enhance national economic competitiveness, growth, and development. CEP's proposal for consolidating structural reforms into three areas—Competitiveness, Sustainability and Resilience, and Human Capital and Social Policies—was incorporated into the final ERP version.

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Supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CEP also focused on improving the European Commission's monitoring and assessment of the "Functioning of Democratic Institutions" (FoDI) in the Western Balkans. This involved developing papers focused on ways to enhance EC assessment consistency, assessment quantification methodologies, and reporting scope. CEP advocated widely for these proposals, both in Brussels and in EU member states' administrations.

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In recent years, CEP's finances have been stable, with the budget for 2023 remaining nearly the same as the previous year.

Also in 2023, all 28 members of the CEP team were working on the implementation of 23 projects, 12 in programme area and 16 as part of project structure.

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Finally, in terms of developing policy products and outputs, CEP was highly productive in 2023 and published: eleven policy briefs, one CEP presents, fourteen discussion papers, five infographics, two insights, and thirteen blog posts.

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Over the past year, CEP has solidified its standing as a leading think tank known for innovative and creative insights, while also becoming a dependable and timely source of information. This was achieved through enhanced media relations and increased visibility. CEP consistently delivered high-quality information on EU integration and other critical issues for Serbia and the Western Balkans. CEP team members commented on a broad range of topics in prominent domestic and foreign media outlets, such as **Radio Television of Serbia (RTS), Euronews, N1, Nova S, European Western Balkans, Voice of America, Le Monde, Balkan Insight, Al Jazeera** and numerous others. Additionally, 2023 marked significant success in expanding CEP's reach on social media channels.

## RESEARCH, PROJECTS, AND PROGRAMMES:

### CEP'S 2023 ACHIEVEMENTS

#### PROGRAMME AREA 1: GOOD GOVERNANCE

*The first programme area of CEP focuses on issues related to the political criteria for EU accession, impacting various sectoral policies in Serbia. It is the largest programme area due to its broad scope and activity intensity. Central to this area is Public Administration Reform (PAR), crucial for implementing reforms necessary for EU integration. This programme area aims to build a stable, accountable democratic governance system based on the rule of law and human and minority rights. Key issues include government accountability, high-quality public services, decentralisation, and citizen involvement in policymaking and PAR.*

#### FROM WeBER 2.0 TO 3.0 – UNWAVERING CIVIL SOCIETY EFFORTS FOR BETTER PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM

During 2023, CEP successfully finalised the WeBER 2.0 project and, in parallel, implemented the first year of its successor – WeBER 3.0. WeBER 2.0 saw the completion of its research and advocacy activities, while with WeBER 3.0, we have laid the foundation for the future, and a strong emphasis was placed on developing the citizen-centric methodology for PAR problem-solving at the local level, to be used in the implementation of the WeBER Small Grant Facility dedicated to CSOs' engagement in PAR in local self-government units in the Western Balkan region. Additionally, in 2023, the WeBER initiative expanded in scope with the launch of the WeBER *Plus*, primarily aimed at enhancing the capacities of regional and national CSOs in PAR monitoring through tailor-made trainings, to be implemented in 2024. It is noteworthy that 2023 marked the beginning of a milestone process within the WeBER 3.0 - revision of PAR Monitor methodology after the three monitoring cycles completed to date.

A featured research product in 2023 was the [Western Balkans PAR Monitor](#), as its 2021/2022 edition was published in June, while its national-level counterpart, [National PAR Monitor for Serbia 2021/2022](#) was published in July. Apart from the general overview of PAR in WB and Serbia within PAR Monitors, CEP published five more cross-cutting and issue-specific policy briefs on PAR subjects in WB and Serbia.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Mind (Y)our Reform citizen campaign resulted in the [analysis of feedback on citizens' experience with public administration](#). In 2023 alone, CEP collected more than 1800 experiences through the citizen portal and fieldwork. Most of the research results were presented at the EU, regional, and country level. In May, the second round of policy dialogue with Brussels-based EU institutions and think tanks was hosted in partnership with the European Policy Centre (EPC) from Brussels, engaging the EU audience on the most critical PAR issues in WB countries. The National PAR Monitor results were also presented and discussed with CSO partners and relevant state institutions through the [National Working Group for PAR meeting](#). In the reporting period, the regional WeBER Platform, as well as the National Working Group for PAR in Serbia, were also expanded with new members.

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<sup>3</sup> Three regional policy briefs dealt with cross-cutting issues, one policy brief was dedicated to a national *red flag* issue, and one more dealt with cross-cutting issues on the national level.

## STRATEGIC VISION IN ACTION

During 2023, CEP made significant progress in implementing its strategic goals in the Good Governance area. A four-year Framework partnership agreement was signed with the Delegation of the European Union in Serbia in the field of good governance, which also includes economic governance. This enabled implementation support of CEP's 2023 Annual Work Programme in this area (which operationalised the CEP's Strategic Plan for Good Governance). In the reporting year, CEP aimed to further advance the role of civil society in the implementation and monitoring of and advocacy for good governance policies, PAR and economic governance in line with the EU policies. The main efforts were aimed at supporting civil society's analytical and monitoring practices aimed at enhancing PAR and economic governance in Serbia in line with the EU accession requirements and fostering civil society's evidence-based advocacy and citizen engagement in these areas. Progress in the implementation of strategic goals is verified through the active involvement of civil society in implemented actions and confirmed by the reach of our policy products. At the same time, CSOs in these areas regularly turn to CEP as a focal point for the issues related to PAR and economic governance. Finally, the dialogue with the relevant authorities on PAR and economic governance issues, established in previous years, was strengthened.

Furthermore, ten informed policy solutions and evidence-based recommendations on PAR have been defined, presented and advocated for with relevant institutions, presented in the form of a policy brief titled [eConsultation Portal: new instrument, missed opportunities](#). Finally, ten awareness-raising events have been successfully implemented.

## OECD/SIGMA AND CEP JOIN FORCES ONCE MORE FOR BETTER GOVERNANCE

Following years of successful cooperation, the OECD/SIGMA and CEP upgraded their partnership by signing a framework contract in 2023, following an open competitive selection process. The selection of CEP as a local expert hub for SIGMA's activities in PAR in Serbia is an endorsement of the support provided by CEP's experts to SIGMA since 2014.

During 2023, we provided support in multiple project activities of OECD/SIGMA. CEP's experts continued to offer support and ideas for the complex and important process of professionalising and depoliticising the senior civil service in Serbia. Based on ideas developed by CEP's and SIGMA's experts, inter-ministerial consultations and discussions took place within the Government Special Working Group created to address this longstanding problem of Serbia's PAR.

Moreover, as part of the new Methodological Framework for the revised Principles of Public Administration, CEP has supported SIGMA in developing questionnaires for collecting data and calculating indicator values in two PAR areas - Strategic Framework, and Policy Development and Coordination. Finally, CEP's experts supported the development of a [study](#) on Parliamentary Scrutiny of Government Policy Making in the Western Balkans, which examines the role of parliaments in the region in ensuring evidence-based lawmaking.

At the end of 2023, CEP started preparations for the 2024 SIGMA assessment cycle for Serbia. Our participation in SIGMA assessments of PAR in Serbia, as national expert organisation, has been one of the cornerstones of our successful cooperation since the beginning.

## **OGP IN SERBIA – CEP MONITORS THE 2023-2027 ACTION PLAN CO-CREATION**

In 2023, CEP marked a jubilee of ten years as being a partner of the Open Government Partnership (OGP). In the past ten years, CEP's role as an Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) in Serbia has been operationalised through the development of multiple reports, briefs and active participation in the national OGP process. Timely and regular monitoring and participation in the co-creation process by IRM represents an underlying condition for high-quality reporting of the OGP country developments.

During 2023, a new cycle of adoption of the OGP National Action Plan (NAP) took place. CEP actively monitored the co-creation process by participating in all the meetings and consultations within the state-run Specialised Inter-Ministerial OGP Working Group, stimulating the process in line with OGP standards. At the beginning of the co-creation process, CEP presented recommendations, potential areas for improvement and adopting commitments based on examples of good practice of other countries' NAPs. Following the 12-month-long process, the Government of Serbia adopted the Action Plan in December 2023. This marked the first time that a 4-year Action Plan was adopted in Serbia. Within its IRM role, CEP will monitor implementation and report on the 2023-2027 Serbia Action Plan in collaboration with the OGP headquarters in Washington, DC.

## **CONSTITUENCIES FOR JUDICIAL REFORM IN SERBIA - THIRD MONITORING REPORT UNVEILED**

As one of the partners in this multi-annual project, the European Policy Centre (CEP), together with 11 partners, implemented the Project *Constituencies for Judicial Reform in Serbia* with the objective to strengthen citizens' trust in the work of judicial institutions in Serbia by improving communication between the citizens and the judiciary. In the course of 2023, CEP focused on finalising the third annual [Monitoring report on the state of the judiciary for 2022](#). The report was presented at the hybrid conference in December 2023, one year after the implementation of the second cycle, and after the Baseline report for 2020. The report is an independent and objective assessment based on the state-of-the-art methodology and indicators developed by the project partners, and it sheds light on developments vis-à-vis the past monitoring period.

In addition to the [Monitoring report](#), CEP organised a series of thematic events across Serbia during October 2023 with each event dedicated to a specific topic from the 2023 report – judicial ethics was discussed Kragujevac, judicial efficiency in Vršac, while the provision of legal aid was the focus of the thematic event in Niš. The value of these thematic sessions is to discuss findings and get feedback on monitoring report from interested citizens, representatives of local non-governmental organisations, lawyers, judges, and the academic community.

## **SUPPORTING THE ANTI-CORRUPTION & GOOD GOVERNANCE IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE**

Following the previous year's achievements, in 2023 CEP organised key events, conducted in-depth research, and actively engaged in media discussions about anti-corruption measures in the region within the [R2G4P project](#)<sup>4</sup>. In January, CEP hosted a policy forum titled "[Tackling State Capture in Southeast Europe](#)" in Belgrade bringing together regional experts, policymakers, and

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<sup>4</sup> Implementing shared anti-corruption and good governance solutions in Southeast Europe is a three-year-long project initiative supported by a grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway through the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation. The project was implemented by 12 partners in 9 countries. See more here: <https://cep.org.rs/en/initiatives/implementing-shared-anti-corruption-and-good-governance-solutions-in-southeast-europe/>

stakeholders to discuss strategies for addressing state capture. The discussions focused on identifying the root causes of state capture and proposing solutions to enhance governance and reduce corruption. Besides, in May 2023, CEP organised a summer school and R2G4P internal training in Belgrade where project partners were provided with comprehensive insights into tracking illicit financial activities and combating schemes designed to evade sanctions.

CEP also finalised the Monitoring Anticorruption Policy Implementation (MACPI) Technical Report based on research involving officials from the city of Novi Pazar. The findings were subsequently presented to high-level policy and decision-makers. MACPI Technical Reports for the city of Kragujevac involving both officials and clients were also completed and presented. Furthermore, CEP participated in the analysis "[Bridges to Nowhere: State Capture and Corruption Risks in Fiscal Transfers and Public Procurement at the Local Level in Southeast Europe](#)". This publication examines the allocation of finances from central to local levels and its dependence on the political situation, highlighting the corruption risks inherent to fiscal transfers and public procurement processes. In addition, CEP published a policy brief, "[Unveiling Challenges in Serbian Public Procurement: A Call for Change](#)", which analyses the key issues in the public procurement system, legal drawbacks and unlawful practices.

### **GOOD GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS IN 2023**

Brand-new policy products were published in 2023 as a result of the third WeBER PAR monitoring cycle in Serbia and the Western Balkans. [Western Balkan PAR Monitor 2021/2022](#) stands out as the crowning achievement of the last monitoring cycle in the region. This comprehensive compilation report presents key findings for the entire Western Balkan region across six areas of PAR. While monitoring findings have brought forward some positive developments and practices in the region, it shows that governments in the region still face challenges and drawbacks when it comes to meeting citizens' needs. Together with this regional report, six national reports were published. In that regard, CEP published the [National PAR Monitor 2021/2022](#), which focused on the main achievements and shortcomings of PAR in Serbia. This report also provides a detailed list of recommendations directed towards responsible public authorities in all six areas of public administration.

In addition to regional and national PAR Monitor reports, research findings from the third PAR monitoring cycle were included in several policy papers published in 2023. One cross-cutting brief addressed the issue of (non)[transparency](#) in Western Balkans' public administrations, while the other two dealt with the administration's accessibility and the needs of vulnerable social groups both in [Serbia](#) and the [region](#). Also, CEP used findings from the PAR monitoring cycle to emphasise one of the key obstacles and long-standing red flag issues in the process of PAR. Namely, the policy brief titled "[The Neverending Story of Senior Civil Service Depoliticisation in Serbia](#)" addressed the issue of civil service politicisation, which creates weak institutions that consequently obstruct the country's development and improvement of living standards.

Through the "Mind (y)our reform!" regional citizens' campaign, CEP conducted online and field surveys with around 2750 citizens who shared their experiences in contact with the administration. The findings of this survey, together with a set of recommendations for responsible bodies, are published as a part of the [Analysis of the results of the campaign with citizens "Mind \(y\)our reform!"](#).

With the support of the Operational grant provided by the EU Delegation in Serbia, CEP produced two publications regarding public consultations in Serbia. In that regard, a policy paper entitled "[The eConsultation Portal: A New Instrument, Underutilised Opportunities](#)" analysed the



practice of using this online platform to consult external stakeholders in the policy development and law-making processes in Serbia. Additionally, an [infographic](#) illustrating key aspects of participation in public policy development in Serbia – specifically the distinctions between consultation processes and public debates – was published as a follow-up to the previous policy analysis.

Overall, in 2023, we released nine publications, including two PAR Monitor reports, four policy briefs, two analyses, and one infographic.

All CEP policy products published in the Good Governance programme area can be accessed at the following links, in [English](#), and in [Serbian](#).

## **PROGRAMME AREA 2: INTERNAL MARKET AND COMPETITIVENESS**

*Accordingly, in 2023, the second programme area provided its analytical and programming input during the consultation process and the preparation of the Economic Reform Programme (ERP), with the support of the Operational grant for the implementation of the strategic plan of the European Policy Centre (CEP). Noteworthy, CEP upheld its pivotal role in coordinating the National Convention on EU (NCEU) working groups within the framework of Cluster 2 - Internal Market. Moreover, accomplishments also include the execution of the Quality Infrastructure and Competitiveness Development Factors assignment, which focused on preparatory activities for enhancing the strategic and legislative framework as part of the EU for Better Business Environment project.*

### **ECONOMIC REFORM PROGRAMME – ERP**

During 2023, the tenth cycle of planning and preparation of the [Economic Reform Program \(ERP\)](#) was carried out with the support of the Operational grant for the implementation of the strategic plan of the Centre for European Policies (CEP). As in previous cycles, CEP gave its analytical and programming input during the consultation process and the preparation of the Economic reform programme ERP planning document. In this period, a particular challenge was the change in the methodology of the document preparation, in accordance with the guidelines of the European Commission, which required a reduction in the number of structural reforms and their different systematics by area compared to the previous period. Based on the given criteria of the new methodology, CEP formed a [proposal](#) in August 2023 for the way in which it is necessary to implement the funneling of several earlier structural reforms, into a smaller number of new ones, distributed in three areas: 1. Competitiveness 2. Sustainability and resilience 3. Human capital and social policies. This proposal was accepted and had an impact when defining the final version of the ERP 2024-2026. After that [monitoring report](#) was prepared, which systematises in one place the presentation of structural reforms foreseen and implemented during various ERP cycles. Also, consultations were organised within the NCEU WG for ERP.

### **HEADING NCEU WORKING GROUPS FOR ECONOMIC CHAPTERS**

During 2023, CEP had a pivotal role in the coordination of the [National Convention on EU \(NCEU\)](#) working groups that belong to the framework of Cluster 2 - Internal Market. CEP coordinated the work of working groups for Chapter 1 (Free movement of goods), Chapter 3 (Right of establishment and freedom to provide services), Chapter 4 (Free movement of capital), Chapter 8 (Competition policy), Chapter 9 (Financial services) and Chapter 28 (Consumer and health protection).

The Working Group for Chapter 1 – Free movement of goods – held a special thematic meeting with the Ministry of Economy at the beginning of March 2023, after receiving an invitation from the EC for Serbia to submit its negotiating position. On that occasion, the situation in the negotiation chapter and plans were analysed, primarily in light of the finalisation of the negotiating position and its adoption by the Government. The importance of finalising strategic documents, the adoption of which represents the criteria for opening negotiations in this chapter, was established, namely the completion of strategy and action plans for harmonised and non-harmonized areas, as well as their harmonisation with the remarks of the European Commission, updating the deadlines for the harmonisation of regulations, and the final adoption of those acts at the session of the Government of Serbia. By the end of the reporting period, however, the aforementioned acts had not been adopted. In addition, contacts and cooperation with the Ministry of Economy regarding activities from the content of the negotiation chapter, especially in part related to the changes to the valid Accreditation Act, were carried out continuously. In addition, CEP, as a partner in the project *Quality Infrastructure, Competitiveness Development Factors - Preparatory Activities for Improving the Strategic and Legislative Framework*, and at the same time as the coordinator of the NCEU WG for Chapter 1, ensured that this working group provides a platform on which regular communication and the process of consultation with interested parties are carried out in relation to project activities that are related to the further development of the quality infrastructure system in Serbia.

In the reporting period, the NCEU Working Group for Chapter 3 - Right of establishment and freedom to provide services, continuously monitored the relevant activities that are of importance in this chapter. WG implemented specific activities for the needs of the project “Support to Public Administration Reform in the EU Accession Process” (PAR2EU), which were related to the preparation of the analysis of the state of regulation in the field of handicrafts in Serbia, namely the activities of organising consultations with relevant representatives from this field and competent institutions. The issue of legal regulation of handicrafts in Serbia has been controversial for a long time because a special law in this field does not exist, and there are requests from interested parties for specific regulation in this area and the establishment of a special Chamber of Handicrafts, for the protection and development of particularly traditional crafts. Also, cooperation with the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade, responsible for this chapter, has continued, as well as with the Ministry of Culture and Information in the area of postal traffic. Communication with the Minister for European Integration Mrs. Tanja Mišćević was intensified through thematic meetings where the situation in negotiation clusters and individual chapters was analysed, especially in light of the possibility of opening those clusters/chapters.

The NCEU Working Group for Chapters 4 – Free movement of capital and 9 - Financial services, held four meetings during 2023, where they analysed the current situation in these areas and chapters that were opened in 2019, as well as the consequences of the adoption of new legislation, primarily the Law on the Capital Market in 2021 and the Law on Digital Assets in 2020. At the centre of attention of the Working Group was the question of the possibility of further progress in the mentioned areas, especially in the part regulated by the Law on foreign currency payments. The working group concluded that it is necessary to enable payment transactions in foreign currency in the country in all cases, which is in accordance with the dual foreign currency system and the liberalisation of capital markets, which would contribute to more effective prevention of money laundering because foreign currency transactions, which de facto exist, would be redirected within the framework of the banking system. This and other recommendations were repeated on several occasions and included in the NCEU Book of Recommendations for 2023. In addition, on 30 March 2023, a special thematic meeting of the

members of the Working Group was held with the Ministry of Finance, as the ministry responsible for chapters 4 and 9, during which open issues in the areas from these chapters and the mentioned WG recommendations were jointly analysed and discussed.

The most significant activity of the NCEU Working Group for Chapter 8 - Competition policy - was a special thematic meeting regarding the analysis of the current situation in the negotiation chapter and the possibility of fulfilment of the remaining opening benchmarks, all of which are related to the area of state aid control. CEP, in the capacity of chapter coordinator, ensured the participation of representatives of the Commission for State Aid Control and the opportunity for WG members to discuss open issues in direct communication with key actors in this field. The president of the State Aid Control Commission, Vladimir Antonijević, participated in the meeting with his associates, and the possibility of meeting the criteria for opening this chapter in the immediate future period was discussed. The focus of the discussion was on benchmarks related to the harmonisation of legislation on the allocation of state aid, operational independence of the Commission, state aid schemes and harmonisation of fiscal schemes of state aid. On that occasion, the peer-review mission of the European Commission was announced by representatives of SAC until the end of 2023, which should evaluate the achieved level of operational independence of the Commission, as one of the main benchmarks in this chapter.

Regarding the situation in Chapter 28 - Consumer and health protection, the NCEU Working Group continuously monitored the relevant activities in these two areas during the reporting period. The most significant activity of the Working Group was the drafting of the *Initiative for Amendments to the Law on Consumer Protection*, which was prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade in September 2023. The initiative contained several options for improving administrative and legal means of consumer protection, namely expanding the competences of the Commission for the Protection of Competition to include the area of consumer protection, introducing an administrative measure for consumer protection, as well as introduction of the new institution, the Consumer Ombudsman. Also, options for improving legal aid and consumer support and out-of-court settlement of disputes through consumer arbitration were proposed for consideration. Particularly important was the proposed option of introducing a collective lawsuit - based on the conclusions from the Special Report on the need to resolve the problem of mass litigation and the possibilities of introducing a collective lawsuit into the legal order of the Republic of Serbia (*Constituencies for Judicial Reform in Serbia*, USAID). The mentioned options were considered and supported at the session of the Working Group of the National Convention on the EU for Chapter 28 Consumer Protection and Health Protection, held on 21 June 2023, with the addition of the need to comply with the current amendments to the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (2005/29/EC) and the Consumer Rights Directive (2011/83/EU) in order to empower consumers for the green transition through better protection against unfair business practices and better information ("Prohibition of built-in defects"), according to the dynamics of further adoption and implementation of EU legislation.

## **QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE, COMPETITIVENESS DEVELOPMENT FACTORS**

CEP began implementation of the assignment [Quality Infrastructure, Competitiveness Development Factors](#) – Preparatory Activities for Improving the Strategic and Legislative Framework, within the EU for Better Business Environment – EU4BE project funded by the EU-World Bank Executed Trust Fund (BETF) early in 2023. That is a consultancy assignment in partnership with the Greek consultancy company, European Profiles, as a lead in this project,

and the Spanish company, UNE. The assignment is to further develop a quality infrastructure system as one of the crucial preconditions for the development of the business environment in Serbia, as it will provide the economy with access to standards and technical regulations harmonised with the EU, a developed network of accredited conformity assessment bodies and effective supervision of compliance with technical regulations. Direct beneficiaries of this assignment are the Ministry of Economy (MoE), the Institute for Standardization of Serbia, and the Accreditation Body of Serbia (ATS), while indirect beneficiaries are all business entities in Serbia.

The activities carried out by CEP representatives as part of this project during 2023 include professional and analytical support with respect to the preparation and development of planned deliverables, as well as the implementation of special analytical tasks. In this period, special focus was on the upcoming amendments to the Law on Accreditation (LoA), and CEP experts in this regard conducted a review and analysis of the current law and related by-laws with regard to possible directions for the changes and MoE's announced beginning of work on new LoA, as well as the review and analysis of possible options and implications for the organisational and financial model for the ATS in connection with the proposals given in the working documents. In the continuation of the implementation of the project, the most important segment is yet to come, support for the preparation of documents and the implementation of the necessary consultation activities in accordance with the methodology of public policy development, related to the development and adoption of a new Strategy for the improvement of the quality infrastructure system in Serbia for the next five years.

## CONTINUATION OF RESEARCH ON CIRCULAR AND ECONOMIC MIGRATION IN SERBIA

The project „[Circular migration before depopulation!](#)” successfully delivered on its commitment to enhancing Serbian civil society's capacities, credibility, and effectiveness in evidence-based monitoring and advocacy of economic migration policies. This was especially evident in the second project year, 2023, in which several civil society organisations were transformed into regional centres of excellence (ReCeEx) in circular migration. Over several months and upon the completion of the specially tailored training on circular migration and citizens' engagement through the process of citizens' consultations, these organisations effectively applied their newfound skills in conducting research, engaging with diverse stakeholders, communicating, and advocating on various aspects of economic migration, with a particular emphasis on circular migration. Despite challenges posed by the unresponsiveness of national-level decision-makers, ReCeEx successfully developed region-based action plans, serving both as platforms for local-level advocacy and as repositories of evidence-based policy recommendations poised for national-level advocacy once the decision-makers initiate the process of developing the new Action Plan.

Another important activity on the project in 2023 was a completion of the [Gap analysis](#), the focus of which was on assessing the quality of support provided to circular migrants by eGovernance (srb. eUprava) and Returning Point, both significant platforms for the project's target audience. Following an exhaustive analysis and survey responses of 77 circular migrants, recommendations were formulated for the eUprava and Returning Point portals, addressing both content and technical aspects. Upon publication of the comprehensive analysis, the [policy brief](#) was published as well.

The project's final research output was an all-encompassing [document](#), which consists of detailed, evidence-based policy options and recommendations collected via AP assessment, comparative analysis report, gap analysis, reports from round tables and meetings with national-level key stakeholders and relevant institutional representatives, reports from the consultation process, and responses and information received from direct communication with successful circular migrants.

At the end of the year, CEP, together with its project partners, held the event [Circular Migration in Serbia: Connecting Worlds – Building Future](#), as part of the project [Circular Migration before Depopulation!](#) The conference marked the official finalisation of this very successful project. The event attracted extensive media coverage, reflecting the widespread interest and significance.

## CONTINUOUS SUPPORT TO EDUCATION REFORM FOR BETTER ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

As an extension of its efforts within its Second Programme Area to create preconditions for better economic competitiveness in Serbia, CEP continued to support the overall **education policy reform**. As part of these endeavours, since 2019, CEP has been implementing two complementary assignments aimed at [improving evaluation process](#) (external and self-evaluation) of preschool institutions in Serbia within the World Bank [“Early Childhood and Education and Care \(ECEC\)”](#) project implemented by the Ministry of Education (MoEd).

In 2023, CEP implemented the activities under the assignment *Improving preschool institutions self-evaluation process* with the aim to provide support to the MoEd and the Institute for the Education Quality and Evaluation (IEQE) in preparing resources for the full implementation of the system of preschool education quality evaluation based on the revised Preschool Quality Standards. For that purpose, in 2023, CEP successfully provided mentoring support to all the public PIs in the Republic of Serbia in the process of self-evaluation (October 2022-June 2023)

and created the summary report on the mentoring support given and supervised. Simultaneously, under the assignment *Improving the evaluation system of the preschool education in Serbia and monitoring the development goal of the Project in the quality of preschool education and education*, the final evaluation of the quality of work of the preschool institutions sample was conducted, resulting in the data collection on target values of quality standard indicators for the sample of preschool institutions and the production of the target report 2023 on the improvement in quality of work of preschool institutions through the ECEC project.

Improving preschool institutions self-evaluation process assignment is set to continue in 2024 by providing self-evaluation training to additional 1800 representatives of all public PIs.

## **PROGRAMME AREA 3: REGIONAL POLICY, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT**

*This programme area is built around two blocks. On the one side, it focuses on the internal Serbian regional policy, with an emphasis on social development, regional competitiveness, as well as environment, energy and transport as the building blocks of the EU Cohesion Policy. The other block of research is intended to study the same policy areas but from the perspective of their contribution to cohesion between Serbia and the EU, i.e. to closing the existing development gap.*

### **TOWARDS GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT**

During the amendments to the Law on Public Procurement European Policy Centre (CEP) delegated its researchers to multiple events related to green public procurement. Firstly, it participated in the public consultation process regarding the proposed draft Public Procurement Law (PPL) in June 2023. The National Convention for the European Union (NCEU), Working Group for Chapter 5 (Public Procurement), organised the consultations, which resulted in providing a set of comments and proposals from all CSO members of the Working group. Among other topics, green public procurement was one of the main points of the discussion, since it was represented for the first time in the PPL draft. CEP researcher took part in the public debate regarding the proposed PPL in August 2023, organised by the Ministry of Finance and the Public Procurement Office. NCEU WG for Chapter 5 was dissatisfied with how the Ministry of Finance and the PPO handled the proposals of the civil society and sent a letter to the Ministry of European Integration citing a missed opportunity for aligning new PPL with the relevant EU directive. Finally, the CEP representative participated in a meeting of the NCEU Working Group for Chapter 5 in March 2024. The central point of the meeting was a presentation of the Rulebook for Green Public Procurement as part of the newly adopted PPL.

### **FOOD SAFETY IN SERBIA**

In the previous year, CEP published its co-founder's [blog](#) about food safety in Serbia and European standards. With this blog, CEP drew attention to, at that moment, the current problem of returning fruit from Serbia on several occasions from the borders of the EU. In the blog, it was emphasised the importance of food safety, which requires the functioning of an already established system of supervision that includes the entire chain of production, processing, and distribution of food, the implementation of a mechanism that implies the specific roles of many links in that chain, including, but not exclusively depending on inspection supervision at its end. Author pointed out that the formal rewriting of European legislation and the formal establishment of a body, without a real and complete function, is not a solution but represents a masking of the problem.

## PROGRAMME AREA 4: OUR EUROPE

*Within this area, CEP deals with research and analysis of issues and problems within the policy of the European Union and its institutional architecture, as well as the effects that these issues may have on Serbia and its accession to the EU. CEP strives to imagine Serbia as an already existing member of the EU, and thereby encourage reflection on Serbia's position in European institutions and politics.*

### TOWARDS TEMPLATE 2.0 FOR STAGED ACCESSION TO THE EU

Building on the 2021 [Template](#) for Staged Accession to the EU, CEP has continued to refine and operationalise the Model with [support](#) from the Open Society Foundations. In fact, CEP [published](#) 17 new issue papers, analysing different aspects of the model in depth. These publications were the result of a collaborative effort with the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), four partners from the Think for European Network (TEN), and several independent regional experts, marking significant advances in the research. The team produced six national issue papers that analysed the application of the Model to the WB6. Additionally, the research extended to examining the financial and economic impacts of the Staged Accession Model on both EU and acceding countries' budgets, as well as the possibilities for gradual institutional participation of candidate countries in EU bodies. Other key areas of focus included sectoral integration opportunities within the SAA regime, possibilities for enhancing the next pre-accession funding instrument and exploring the legalities of temporarily suspending veto rights for new EU member states. The culmination of these efforts is the creation of [Template 2.0](#) for Staged Accession to the EU. This updated template integrates all the latest findings, tailoring solutions to meet the realistic needs of both candidates and member states effectively.

In parallel with its main efforts, CEP undertook a supplementary project that significantly contributed to the development of Template 2.0. [Supported](#) by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this project aimed to enhance the EU integration process for Western Balkan countries by improving the tracking of reforms in the Fundamental's subarea "Functioning of Democratic Institutions" (FoDI). The initiative was a response to feedback from member states, which highlighted a considerable mistrust in the European Commission's (EC) monitoring and assessment practices. Civil society organisations from the region also pressed for more objective, precise, and regionally comparable EC findings. Focusing on FoDI, CEP's project resulted in papers that aimed to [increase the consistency](#) of EC assessments, create a [methodology for quantification](#) to measure the preparedness in democratic functions and [deepen and expand the scope](#) of reporting. These efforts were in line with the Staged Accession Model's focus on improving EC reports and emphasising the Fundamentals.

### FROM RESEARCH TO ADVOCACY

Following the completion of Template 2.0, CEP launched a comprehensive advocacy campaign [supported](#) by the Open Society Foundations. Over a span of three months, the team visited seven member states: Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Denmark, and Sweden. This period was strategically important as Belgium and Spain were preparing for and holding the EU Council Presidency, respectively. In addition, while in Germany, the team participated in a ministerial conference on the Future of Europe and enlargement. This advocacy push coincided with a critical phase for the EU, as institutions and member states discussed how to respond to the European Council's 2022 call for gradual integration and considered the benefits of the Commission's New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans.

Recognising the crucial timing, member states expressed strong support for the Model, acknowledging it as one of the most comprehensive efforts to operationalise the concept of



gradual integration. The advocacy missions undertaken by CEP covered a broad spectrum of activities, which included both individual and group meetings with key stakeholders across three primary areas: 1) ministries responsible for foreign and European affairs, including the Offices of the Prime Minister; 2) National Assemblies and their EU Affairs Committees; and 3) civil society, involving prominent think tanks such as The Clingendael from the Netherlands, Elcano Royal Institute from Spain, and Think Europa from Denmark. These interactions allowed CEP to disseminate information about Template 2.0, receive feedback, and address any concerns. Moreover, this facilitated the building of robust networks that could allow CEP to continue influencing future policymaking within each member state.

## **HORIZON PROJECT ON THE HORIZON**

In 2023, CEP significantly advanced its standing in the European research and innovation community as a member of the winning consortium for a project [InvigoratEU: Preparing Europe for its future](#) under [Horizon Europe](#), the EU's premier funding programme. Joining forces with 17 diverse partners from countries including Germany, Georgia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine, Belgium, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland<sup>5</sup>, CEP celebrated this milestone as its first successful Horizon application. Set to commence in 2024, this three-year project is dedicated to exploring strategies for the future of the EU's enlargement policies. The core objective is to address how the EU can revitalise its enlargement policy to bolster Europe's resilience in the context of increased external actor influence. The success of this application is expected to greatly enhance CEP's visibility and reputation across the continent, marking a pivotal expansion of its influence.

## **OTHER RELEVANT WORK**

Continuing its tradition, CEP maintained its bi-annual analysis of the priorities of the Council Presidencies throughout 2023. It published papers analysing the priorities of the [Swedish Presidency](#) in the first half of the year and of the [Spanish Presidency](#) in the latter half. In parallel, the beginning of each Presidency was marked by an event organised by CEP in collaboration with the Delegation of the EU in Serbia. The handover of the Presidency [from Sweden to Spain](#) was commemorated in July, while the handover [from Spain to Belgium](#) was marked in December. Additionally, CEP closely monitored Serbia's progress toward EU membership by [quantifying the 2023 annual report](#) and presenting key findings of the 2023 Enlargement Package. This package was the centrepiece of a [webinar](#) titled 'Discussing the 2023 Enlargement Package and the Functioning of Democratic Institutions in the Western Balkans,' which brought together regional partners from the Think for Europe Network (TEN). The webinar featured significant contributions from H.E. Luca Gori, the Ambassador of Italy to Serbia, and Mr. Gert Jan Koopman, the Director-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations.

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<sup>5</sup> Germany: Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP); Belgium: Trans European Policy Studies Association (Tepsa), Carnegie Europe; Finland: FIIA Finnish Institute of International Affairs; Georgia: PMC Research Center; Italy: Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI); Latvia: Latvian Institute of International Affairs (LIIA); Lithuania: Vilniaus Universitetas; Republic of North Macedonia: Ss. Cyril and Methodius University; Moldova: Institutul pentru Inițiative Strategice (IPIS); Montenegro: University of Montenegro; Netherlands: Maastricht University; Poland: Jagiellonian University Krakow (JUK); Spain; CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs); Switzerland: ETH Zürich; Ukraine: Razumkov Centre.



Moreover, marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Thessaloniki Summit, CEP collaborated with the French Jacques Delors Institute to publish a call-to-action paper in [Le Monde](#). This was complemented by an article drafted by CEP that suggested ways the [European Council conclusions](#) could be utilised by member states to leverage the newly created momentum in EU affairs. In anticipation of the European Parliament elections, CEP conducted an analysis of the [rise of right-wing politics](#) across Europe. As geopolitical tensions escalated due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, CEP also published a trilogy of papers examining the [war's impact](#) on the EU. Additionally, recognising the evolving role of technology in geopolitics, CEP explored the potential [implications of artificial intelligence](#), specifically ChatGPT. This comprehensive approach to a range of topics highlights CEP's ongoing commitment to deepening the understanding of shared challenges among both EU and domestic audiences.

CEP's commitment to fostering practical expertise continued with its internship program for excellence, which yielded several relevant publications. For instance, the intern from Russia, Anna Khan delved into [Russia's propaganda tactics](#), specifically analysing the rhetoric and statistics used in the Black Sea Grain Initiative. A French intern, Gabrielle Danis, explored the [dynamics of democracy and protest in France](#) amid large-scale public demonstrations, while a Slovak intern, Romana Burianová, investigated [challenges to media freedom in Slovakia](#), particularly in the context of the assassination of journalist Ján Kuciak. These endeavours highlighted CEP's role in addressing contemporary European issues through diverse international perspectives.

## **VISIBILITY OF EXPERTISE**

In 2023, CEP enhanced its standing as a leading think tank renowned for its innovative and creative contributions to EU enlargement discussions. The development and promotion of the Staged Accession Model played a crucial role in elevating CEP's visibility. This concept has not only become a hallmark of CEP in media circles and among EU experts and think tanks but has also seamlessly woven into the standard lexicon and official policy documents of the EU. Evidence of its influence is apparent, with CEP's research indicating that at least 12 EU documents were directly or indirectly influenced by the Model. Furthermore, more than 100 papers from civil society organisations in 28 countries have discussed, referenced, or cited the Model, underscoring its significant impact and recognition across the EU policy landscape.

Alongside regular media appearances by Milena Mihajlović, Srđan Majstorović, and Strahinja Subotić on topics related to EU and enlargement, researchers Miloš Pavković and Sava Mitrović have also emerged as recognisable faces in the media, frequently discussing EU integration and other related policies. Adding to these efforts, Junior Researcher Đorđe Dimitrov has gradually taken on more responsibilities in representing CEP publicly. This approach aligns with CEP's strategy to engage younger staff members in high-visibility roles, with plans to continue expanding these opportunities to more team members in the future. This proactive involvement in the media helps to amplify CEP's voice and influence public discourse on EU matters.

## **EXPANDING THE STAFF**

The fourth program area at CEP was significantly bolstered by the addition of a new staff member, Marko Todorović. Leveraging his substantial prior experience in the public sector, Marko directly assumed the role of a Researcher. This seamless integration was facilitated by CEP's retention of its entire programme staff in 2023, enabling Marko to effectively collaborate and share insights with his new colleagues. Additionally, the team structure evolved with Miloš Pavković and Sava Mitrović advancing from junior researchers to researchers, reflecting the projects' expanding

scope and complexity and their acquired experience and autonomy in work. The team's progression and expansion are anticipated to serve as a foundation for further achievements in the coming year.

## **PROJECT AND FINANCE TEAM**

During 2023, similarly as in previous years, the project and finance team represented the real driving force behind CEP's achievements. Project and finance worked in synergy with four programme areas in developing project proposals, smoothly implementing 23 different projects, and producing regular, timely and high-quality financial and narrative reporting to donors. In January 2023, CEP strengthened its project team by hiring two persons: Pavle Janošević as project assistant and Emilija Nenadović as communications assistant. These hirings represented a continuation of CEP's participation in the "My First Salary" programme of the Government of Serbia, which CEP exploited in 2022 for the first time. Bringing young and motivated professionals to the team is seen by the management and the rest of the team as a continuation of good tradition and an opportunity for both CEP and new colleagues.

The project and finance team counts 12 full-time employed professionals, including project managers, coordinators and assistants, communications, events and financial management staff diligently fulfilling tasks that enable the smooth day-to-day functioning of the organisation. Following ambitious goals set by four programme areas for 2024, one of the key goals for the project team is its expansion in order to continue the uninterrupted operations of CEP. Additionally, bearing in mind the increased number of implemented projects and general workload, CEP recognised the need to strengthen the financial management part of the project team in 2024.

## **CEP AND THE MEDIA**

In 2023, CEP continued to make its presence in public felt, using media to address some of the most significant global, regional, and national issues of interest in Serbia and the Western Balkans. Maintaining its commitment to independence and consistency in the commentary, CEP not only offered critiques but also proposed active solutions. Throughout the year, CEP was one of the key commentators in the media when it comes to the topics related to its programme areas. Leading these media engagements were CEP researchers from *Our Europe* programme area.

CEP remained active in various media outlets, appearing on multiple occasions on [Euronews](#), [K1](#), [Blic TV](#), [N1](#), Politika (printed edition), [Tanjug](#), and [Radio Television of Serbia](#). CEP remained recognised as the leading organisation for media inquiries on topics such as public administration reform, consumer protection, and all the topics related to Serbia's EU integration. CEP's efforts to highlight the challenges citizens face in consumer protection and to call attention to unfair practices by the authorities and the professional public, as well as its expertise when it comes to the country's road towards the EU, have solidified CEP's reputation as the go-to source for expert commentary and analysis in these areas. [WeBER 3.0](#) project and the topic of public administration were also very present in CEP media appearances. CEP continued to alert the region about the state of public administration services. We addressed the issue of senior civil servants holding temporary positions, the prolonged duration of this practice, and its detrimental impact on the progress of public administration.

Over the past year, CEP dedicated significant efforts to the topic of circular migration. By hosting well-attended media breakfasts and consistently establishing its presence in this field, CEP has become the foremost organisation recognised for its expertise in circular migration in Serbia. CEP's ongoing commitment to this issue has solidified our reputation as the leading authority in this area.

CEP's reach extended to regional media as well, including [Hrvatska riječ](#), Radio Television of Republika Srpska, [TV 24 North Macedonia](#), [CoRD](#) and [Al Jazeera](#).

Furthermore, CEP's insights were shared across Europe, with its management and researchers commenting on major events and significant shifts for outlets like [Politico](#), [Le Monde](#), [BBC](#), [Agenda Publica](#), and [MIA](#). CEP gained particular recognition on the subject of Russian refugees in Serbia in the light of the war of Russia with Ukraine, as well as how the migration surge affected the life of Serbia's citizens and the Serbian economy. Among other media outlets, CEP intern talked about this for the UK's [BBC](#) radio.

CEP's dedication to informing the public has been seen in the constant efforts of sharing its activities and its dedication to draw the media attention. Notable events that gathered significant media attention are conferences such as [Tackling State Capture in Southeast Europe: Delivering on the European Rule of Law Promise](#) and [Follow the Money: Tracking Illicit Financial Flows and Countering Sanctions' Evasion Schemes](#).

In collaboration with the Delegation of the EU in Serbia, CEP continued to host biannual events to commemorate the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU. These events consistently garnered extensive media attention, reflecting both their significance and the impact they have on raising public awareness of EU-related issues.

The conference titled: [Circular Migration in Serbia: Connecting Worlds – Building Future](#) was one of the most visited events CEP organised in 2023, with outstanding press attention. The event attracted extensive media coverage, reflecting the widespread interest and significance. The robust media presence and coverage (for example, [Politika](#) and [Tanjug](#)) amplified the event's impact, ensuring that its insights and implications reached a broad audience.

In addition to traditional media, CEP has continued to promote its activities on social media platforms. As of 2023, CEP have expanded its communication efforts to TikTok, where its videos have garnered significant attention and a large number of views. On other social media platforms, CEP has increased its presence, boasting nearly 4,000 followers on [X](#), 12,000 followers on [Facebook](#), 2,500 followers on [LinkedIn](#), and over 3,500 followers on [Instagram](#).

CEP's main hub, the website [www.cep.org.rs](http://www.cep.org.rs), has remained a crucial resource, offering reliable, detailed, and transparent information to the public. In 2023, CEP's website underwent an overhaul, featuring a new modern design, easier navigation, and access to CEP's publications, research, and other relevant information. Over the past year, the site attracted over 25,000 visitors, underscoring its role as a key platform for timely and insightful content.

## **CEP STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

In December 2023, CEP organised a three-day-long strategic planning workshop where all employees discussed key accomplishments and challenges of that year. CEP management, in consultation and open process with the rest of the team, has set ambitious yet realistic objectives for 2024. CEP's short-term planning is based on two crucial principles: nurturing

state-of-the-art policy products and keeping the quality and reputation in areas CEP has already proven experience, and expanding and deepening its expertise and portfolio in a selected number of policy areas that CEP has recognised as its long-term areas of interest. An important point of discussion was future planning and setting key objectives for 2024 across four programme areas and project teams.

Some of the key successes during 2023 were:

- the approval of the first IPA project;
- the first Horizon Europe project implementation started;
- increased human resources capacity in all areas and teams, including the communications department, which needed it the most;
- CEP started getting unsolicited invitations from other big organisations and companies to join their consortia for project application and implementation;
- CEP marked the highest number of media appearances, confirming high media visibility;
- CEP signed the first analytical contract with a multinational corporation;
- CEP became a member of the National Council for Creating and Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development.

When it comes to setting objectives for 2024, the CEP team has formulated sets of targets for every programme area and cross-cutting targets covering the team as a whole. In the Good Governance programme area, three goals were set:

- 1) expand monitoring of the public administration in local governance units;
- 2) deepen the knowledge and expertise on the topic of anti-corruption policies and measures;
- 3) reduce fluctuation within the WeBER team.

In the second programme area, Internal Market and Competitiveness, two goals were formulated:

- 1) to increase the visibility of this programme area, and;
- 2) put focus on CEP products as part of this programme area.

CEP's third programme area, Regional Policy, Energy and Environment, remained largely inactive in 2023, so the key objective is related to bringing this programme area to life in 2024 by producing policy products and developing new project proposals.

Finally, the fourth programme area, Our Europe, the most active programme area in 2023 in terms of developing project proposals and expanding CEP's portfolio, set forth three objectives for 2024:

- 1) continue the development and advocacy of the Staged Accession Model and secure long-term project financing for CEP's flagship initiative;
- 2) continue deepening and expanding the expertise in the area of democracy and secure new projects in this area;
- 3) maintain and improve its professional internship programme and expand the network of potential associates of CEP through the alumni network.

## FINANCIAL DATA AND FUNDING SOURCES

In recent years, CEP's finances have been stable, with the budget for 2023 remaining nearly the same as the previous year, at EUR 985,000.00.

In 2023, CEP was working on implementation of 23 projects.

CEP's main sources of funding in 2023 were the following:

- The European Union
- Organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD), through SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management), joint initiative with EU
- World Bank
- The Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE)
- The Open Government Partnership (OGP)
- EEA and Norway grants fund
- The Kingdom of Norway, through the SMART Balkans programme
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Italy
- Mitsubishi Corporation

In 2023, CEP did not implement projects financed from the budget of the Republic of Serbia.