



EUROPEAN POLICY CENTRE - CEP

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

August, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| MAIN DEVELOPMENTS | 3 |
| PROGRAMME AREA 1: GOOD GOVERNANCE..... | 7 |
| WeBER3.0 DRIVING EVIDENCE-BASED PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM: KEY MILESTONES IN 2024..... | 7 |
| EMPOWERING CIVIL SOCIETY: STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT IN PAR AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT (WeBER Plus) | 8 |
| CEP SUPPORTS OECD/SIGMA IN THE ASSESSMENT OF PAR PROGRESS IN SERBIA..... | 9 |
| OGP IN SERBIA – CEP SCRUTINISING THE 2023-2027 ACTION PLAN CO-CREATION..... | 9 |
| INTEGRATED HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OF SERBIA | 10 |
| GOOD GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS IN 2024 | 10 |
| PROGRAMME AREA 2: INTERNAL MARKET AND COMPETITIVENESS | 11 |
| PROGRAMME AREA 3: REGIONAL POLICY, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT | 16 |
| REINVENTING CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT | 16 |
| PROGRAMME AREA 4: OUR EUROPE | 17 |
| SUPPORTING DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS..... | 17 |
| NEW HORIZON..... | 18 |
| OTHER RELEVANT WORK..... | 19 |
| PROJECT AND FINANCE TEAM..... | 20 |
| CEP AND THE MEDIA..... | 21 |
| CEP STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE | 22 |
| FINANCIAL DATA AND FUNDING SOURCES | 23 |

MAIN DEVELOPMENTS

In 2024, CEP maintained its dedication and focus on the essential issues outlined in our mission and programme 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 2024, emphasising our successes and the range of ongoing initiatives.

In 2024, CEP started a new cycle of the WeBER PAR monitoring, based on the [revised](#) PAR Monitor methodology. The updated framework introduced a standardised 0–100 scoring system and restructured reporting into six national and one regional report per PAR area. Monitoring under the new methodology began in October 2024, while all *PAR Monitor* reports for all six PAR thematic areas will be published consecutively during 2025 and 2026.

CEP continued to support development of CSOs' expertise in the area of public administration reform. In partnership with key stakeholders – SIGMA/OECD and ReSPA – and with financial support of the SMART Balkans programme of the Kingdom of Norway, CEP organised five capacity-building trainings for CSOs under the WeBER Plus project, covering *Policy Development*, *Public Finance Management*, and *Human Resource Management* in state administration. These sessions, led by SIGMA/OECD and ReSPA experts, equipped 70+ regional participants with tools to monitor reforms and advocate for transparent policymaking.

Through the WeBER's Small Grant Facility, CEP supported five Local PAR Forums, including a December 2024 event in Novi Sad hosted by the Institute for Mediation. These forums showcased prototype solutions (e.g., policy apps, green spaces for vulnerable groups) to address local governance challenges, fostering innovation at the municipal level.

CEP served as SIGMA's local expert hub for Serbia's 2024 PAR assessment, analysing progress across all six thematic PAR areas. CEP's cooperation with SIGMA in 2024 also included a study on *Government Communications in the WB* and research and analytical work for SIGMA papers to be published in 2025. This partnership underscored CEP's role as a bridge between international standards and national reform agendas.

As Serbia's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM), CEP scrutinised the co-creation of the 2023–2027 OGP Action Plan, identifying two "promising commitments" (*Electronic People's Initiative* and *Open Green Data*). The [Action Plan Review](#) highlighted compliance with OGP standards and recommended midterm ambition boosts.

In 2024, CEP, in partnership with CPM Consulting and Ecorys, continued its work on the EU-funded [Integrated Human Resources Management in Public Administration of Serbia](#) project, marking another successful involvement in an IPA-financed technical assistance initiative. The

project aims to develop a competency-based, integrated HR management system for Serbia's public administration, benefiting the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government and the Human Resource Management Service. It focuses on establishing a sustainable HRM monitoring and evaluation system and creating competency-based career models. As a consortium partner, CEP supports project management while taking a leading role in providing expert assistance, with all national experts on the project coming from its team.

CEP published a [policy brief](#) on CSO inclusion in PAR coordination and three sectoral reports assessing PAR alignment in three different areas in Serbia's *Ministry of Environmental Protection* and *Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation*. These products, part of a 15-report regional series, informed November's WeBER Platform meeting in Skopje.

CEP played a central role in developing Serbia's *Quality Infrastructure (QI) Strategy* under the [EU4BE](#) project, funded by the EU and the World Bank. The strategy aims to align Serbia's standards, accreditation, and technical regulations with EU norms, directly benefiting the Ministry of Economy, the Serbian Accreditation Body, and businesses. CEP provided analytical support, including *ex-post* and *ex-ante* analyses, and ensured compliance with Serbia's *Law on the Planning System*.

CEP organised and participated in consultation events at regional Chambers of Commerce (Niš, Kragujevac, Novi Sad, Belgrade) in November 2024, presenting findings from the QI Strategy's analytical groundwork. Workshops at the World Bank and Chamber of Commerce in December 2024 further refined the *Strategy Outline*, engaging QI institutions and private-sector stakeholders.

As coordinator of the National Convention on the EU ([NCEU](#)) working groups for **Cluster 2 (Internal Market)**, CEP facilitated policy dialogue across key chapters:

- **Chapter 1 (Free Movement of Goods):** Supported adoption of updated action plans for harmonised/non-harmonised areas, finalised in October 2024.
- **Chapter 3 (Services & Professional Qualifications):** Advocated for faster EU negotiations after Serbia met opening benchmarks in 2019.
- **Chapters 4 & 9 (Capital & Financial Services):** Pushed for liberalising Serbia's *Foreign Exchange Law* and accelerating SEPA integration.
- **Chapter 8 (Competition Policy):** Monitored state aid controls and merger policies, urging stronger institutional independence.
- **Chapter 28 (Consumer/Health Protection):** Proposed a *Consumer Ombudsperson* and demanded transparency in COVID-19 response evaluations.

In March 2024, CEP filed a formal complaint with Serbia's *Commission for Protection of Competition* against MTS, Yettel, and A1 for synchronised price hikes (10–15.8%) in postpaid packages. Citing EU case law (*Dyestuffs, Wood Pulp*), CEP argued the increases constituted a *restrictive agreement* under Article 10 of Serbia's Competition Law. Despite Montenegro's regulatory body taking action in a similar case, Serbia's Commission dismissed CEP's complaint in July 2024, raising concerns over institutional independence - a recurring issue in EU accession talks.

In December 2024, CEP initiated the project [*Enhancing Consumer Rights through Strengthening Competition Policy*](#) (supported by Belgrade Open School and the EU Resource Centre). The project will: host citizen workshops to identify policy gaps in consumer rights/competition; draft proposals for legal and regulatory improvements; and advocate solutions via thematic meetings with institutions.

CEP launched *Reinventing Engagement through Affirmative Citizen Consultations (REACH)*, a new project funded by the EU's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme, implemented with seven partners from across the EU and the Western Balkans. CEP held local citizen consultations in Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Niš to crowdsource environmental, the rule of law, and EU integration policy recommendations. During three separate events, more than 90 citizens discussed the most burdensome issues, laying the foundation for developing proposals for addressing them. Key issues as part of discussions on environment included air quality and waste management, with citizen proposals to be refined into 2025 policy drafts. Alongside environmental protection, key areas tackled were the rule of law and the EU integration of Serbia, flagging issues and developing recommendations in the anti-corruption area, media freedom landscape, and capacity for absorbing EU funds and completing the EU accession process.

Staged accession remains the basis for CEP's work on EU enlargement and deepening of the gradual integration approach. CEP amplified its *Staged Accession Model* through four [*policy briefs*](#) dissecting the EU's *New Growth Plan* and one exploring realistic ways for candidates' participation in the EU Council. High-level engagements included a COWEB presentation to all 27 EU member states and targeted outreach in 23 capitals, notably influencing Poland's pre-Presidency agenda.

In 2024, CEP continued to provide its contribution in monitoring democracy development in Serbia and the Western Balkan region. CEP's [*Mixed Approach Model*](#) quantified EC reports on democratic institutions, revealing inconsistencies in 2024 assessments. A [*webinar*](#) with DG NEAR and Freedom House experts analysed findings, while podcast episodes explored regional democratic backsliding.

As part of the [*InvigoratEU Project*](#), funded within the framework of Horizon Europe, CEP co-led the research on geopolitical mapping in the WB/EaP and contributed to studies on contested territories and socioeconomic cohesion. The InvigoratEU marks the first CEP's Horizon Europe

project implemented in a consortium led by Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA). Research outputs, including an *External Influence Index*, will debut in 2025.

CEP maintained its tradition of bi-annual reports on Council Presidencies, paired with events co-hosted with the EU Delegation to Serbia. In July, CEP marked the presidency handover from Belgium to Hungary, while the Hungarian-to-Polish transition was marked in December. These events were preceded by publishing [analyses](#) and expectations of the respective presidency programmes in the form of [CEP Insight](#).

Geopolitical and Accession-Focused Dialogues confirmed CEP's leading role when it comes to topics of EU enlargement and the Western Balkan region. A Chatham House Rule discussion with *Le Grand Continent* examined Serbia's geopolitical balancing act, a discussion summarised in the separate [CEP Presents paper](#). Additional research published under the auspices of the *Our Europe* programme area include papers addressing [Serbia's EU progress](#), [Cluster 3 hurdles](#), and [conscription debates](#).

In 2024, the project and finance team remained the backbone of CEP's success, working closely with programme areas to implement 12 projects and deliver high-quality reporting. To support growing operations, CEP expanded its team by hiring a new project assistant, while one communications assistant departed. With dedicated professionals, the project team continues to play a crucial role in ensuring CEP's smooth daily operations and long-term growth.

In 2024, CEP maintained a strong media presence, addressing key global, regional, and national issues while offering both critique and solutions, particularly through its *Our Europe* programme researchers. Cooperation was established with foreign and domestic media outlets, including Politico, The Economist, Le Temps, Radio Television of Montenegro and TVP World from Poland. The organisation was frequently featured in outlets like Euronews, N1, RTS, and Danas, and was recognised as a go-to source on public administration reform, consumer protection, and EU integration. CEP also highlighted problems such as the prolonged appointment of senior civil servants in temporary roles, drawing attention to the impact on public administration progress. Its high-profile events, especially those marking EU Council presidencies, attracted significant media coverage and public engagement. Alongside traditional media, CEP expanded its digital outreach, including a strong presence on TikTok and consistent updates across social media and its website. CEP has increased its presence on existing social media platforms, boasting nearly 4,000 followers on [X](#), 12,000 followers on [Facebook](#), 3,000 followers on [LinkedIn](#), and over 4,000 followers on [Instagram](#).

In 2024, CEP experienced major leadership changes as three team members took over leadership positions. A new Executive Director was appointed through an internal recruitment process. Additionally, in order to support strategic continuity, a new senior leadership position - Chief Strategist - was introduced to oversee the development and monitoring of strategic priorities.

Finally, the Regional Policy, Energy and Environment programme area was reactivated, with a new manager appointed to develop outputs in 2025.

RESEARCH, PROJECTS, AND PROGRAMMES: CEP'S 2024 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.

WebER3.0 DRIVING EVIDENCE-BASED PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM: KEY MILESTONES IN 2024

In 2024, WebER 3.0 researchers focused on a key milestone - the revision of the PAR Monitor methodology following three monitoring cycles in the past PAR Monitor editions. After launching the revision process in September 2023, researchers refined the methodology, finalising indicators by October 2024 when the new monitoring cycle began. The methodology underwent consultation within the research team, with experts of OECD/SIGMA, the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), and the WebER Advisory Council, before being shared with public authorities in the Western Balkans for feedback. The revised [PAR Monitor methodology](#) includes one indicator per PAR area, each with sub-indicators assessing transparency, openness, and inclusiveness of public administrations in the Western Balkans. A standardised scoring system of 0–100 was introduced in each indicator, providing for easier comparability across administrations and clearer communication of the findings.

The first monitoring under the revised methodology began in October 2024, starting with the Strategy for the PAR area. The updated methodology also brought about restructured approach to reporting that will result in separate reports per PAR area - six national reports and one for the Western Balkans. Consequently, the first reports on the Strategy for PAR were drafted by year's end, alongside the launch of monitoring for Service Delivery and Digitalisation in December 2024.

Besides the focus on the monitoring and production of reports, a policy brief on a red flag issue raised by CSOs in Serbia was also produced and published, titled [PAR Monitoring and Coordination: What space for civil society to influence?](#). Additionally, CSOs members of the WebER Platform produced three sectoral mainstreaming reports, assessing the PAR developments in three sectors: [Organisation, Accountability & Oversight in Ministry of Environmental Protection](#), [Policy development and coordination in the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation](#), and [Policy development and coordination in the Ministry of Environmental Protection](#). The findings from these and reports from other WB countries were presented during the second WebER Platform meeting within WebER 3.0, organised on 5-6 November in Skopje. The meeting brought together WebER Platform members,

project associate state institutions, representatives from the North Macedonian government, Advisory Council members, members of the region-wide National Working Groups for PAR and national-level media.

Additionally, as part of WeBER 3.0's Small Grant Facility, Local PAR Forums, organised by grant recipients, focused on presenting prototype solutions to municipal PAR issues tackled by their initiatives. These events provided a platform for participants to explore potential solutions tailored to specific challenges. Depending on the issue at hand, these solutions took various forms, such as policy papers, policy proposals, mobile applications, websites, or dedicated spaces for vulnerable groups. In December 2024, such as Local PAR Forum was organised in Novi Sad by the Institute for Mediation, Negotiation and Public Policies.

Finally, on the margins of the WeBER Platform meeting in Skopje, [the first TEN TV show](#) was recorded with Peter Vagi, SIGMA/OECD's Coordinator for the Western Balkans and Turkey. The discussion revolved around the new cycle of SIGMA monitoring of PAR in the Western Balkans. In total, four WeBER podcast episodes were recorded in 2024:

1. The [first episode](#) was recorded with Nikola Rajić and Deniz Hoti, design thinking experts who discussed how the concept may be applied to public services, and how it allows civil society organisations in the Western Balkans to contribute to better governance.
2. The [second episode](#) was recorded with Nicola Pontara, the World Bank Country Manager for Serbia. The main topic of discussion was the economic growth of the Western Balkan countries, its challenges, and its ties with administrative reforms.
3. The [third episode](#) was recorded with Dimitar Vrglevski from the Centre for Change Management to discuss the public administration reform in North Macedonia.
4. The [fourth episode](#) was recorded with Peter Vagi, Senior Policy Advisor at SIGMA/OECD.

EMPOWERING CIVIL SOCIETY: STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT IN PAR AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT (WeBER Plus)

In 2024, a set of national and regional training courses for CSOs was conducted within the WeBER Plus project. Through practical knowledge and tools shared by the trainers, training sessions improved CSOs capacities to monitor PAR and participate in the development of public policies, ensuring more transparent and inclusive policymaking.

The first one was held on September 30th and October 1st, covering the topic of Policy Development and Coordination, gathering 28 participants from CSOs across the region. Led by Egle Rimkute, Senior Policy Advisor at OECD/SIGMA, participants gained practical knowledge on the essential aspects of policy planning and coordination at the centre of government, with a focus on evidence-based policy development and the role of stakeholders in this process. In addition, Jelena Mrdak, Programme Manager at the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), delved into the intricacies of integrated planning systems used by Western Balkan administrations, providing participants comparative insights into regional policy planning practices. The second regional training, organised on 18-19th November 2024 and led by experienced SIGMA/OECD experts Peter Vagi and Lech Marcinkowski, equipped 22 training participants with a practical skillset on different aspects of Organisation, accountability and oversight area of PAR.

At the national level, the first training session in Serbia, held on 11-12th July 2024, was dedicated to the Public Service and Human Resources Management. More than 20 participants gained

knowledge on the purpose of HR management, key aspects of the recruitment process in state administration and local self-government, with emphasis on the role of civil society in ensuring transparency and legality. In addition, participants were introduced to the legal framework and practice of employee evaluation, professional training, and career development in the Serbian civil service, which equipped them to closely monitor these human resource management functions. The second national training, gathering 21 participants, was organised on 10-11th of October on the topic of Policy development and coordination, covering key aspects of Serbia's new planning system. Participants were introduced to the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of public policy documents and regulations, focusing on the Law on the Planning System, its alignment with EU integration, and evidence-based policymaking. In addition, participants were provided with detailed insights into data use in the performance of ex-ante and ex-post analyses, emphasising transparent and participatory processes involving all stakeholders. Finally, the third training for Serbian CSOs, held on 25th-26th November, was dedicated to public finance management. Jelena Žarković, professor of public sector economics at the University of Belgrade, trained 21 participants on the budget cycle, its phases, and related documentation, highlighting how CSOs and other stakeholders can participate. It explored differences in budgetary structures (administrative, economic, functional, and programmatic) and emphasised the importance of Citizen's Budget and final budget accounts for enhancing transparency.

CEP SUPPORTS OECD/SIGMA IN THE ASSESSMENT OF PAR PROGRESS IN SERBIA

Throughout 2024, CEP continued to actively contribute to multiple OECD/SIGMA project activities, delivering high-quality expertise and in-depth analysis in key areas of public administration reform.

Notably, in 2024 CEP was once again the local expert hub for SIGMA's PAR assessment in Serbia, done in line with the [revised framework of the Principles of Public Administration](#), reaffirming the trust and recognition that CEP experts have gained through their continuous support to SIGMA since 2014. CEP experts played a pivotal role in providing comprehensive insights across all six thematic areas of SIGMA's assessment framework, offering valuable analytical input for assessing PAR progress and identifying challenges, and supporting essentially the alignment of national reform initiatives with the EU accession priorities. Additionally, CEP served as a bridge between SIGMA and Serbia's public administration, facilitating smooth and effective communication. SIGMA published monitoring report [Public Administration in Serbia 2024](#), in early 2025.

Furthermore, CEP contributed to the development of the SIGMA study *Public Communications in the Western Balkans, Moldova and Ukraine*. Our experts contributed by providing analysis and data on government communication in Serbia, highlighting key trends and challenges.

Building on this successful collaboration, in 2025, CEP will continue our engagement with SIGMA through the development of new policy papers, further strengthening our joint efforts to support evidence-based policymaking and enhance public administration reform in Serbia and the broader region.

OGP IN SERBIA – CEP SCRUTINISING THE 2023-2027 ACTION PLAN CO-CREATION

In 2024, CEP continued to perform actively as the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) in Serbia. Since the Government of Serbia adopted a new OGP National Action Plan (NAP) 2023-2027 in December 2023, CEP started active monitoring of the NAP's implementation. In the first

half of 2024, CEP interviewed 14 stakeholders, members of the Special Inter-Ministerial Working Group, from civil society and state institutions. Following the fieldwork, CEP conducted desk research and drafted [the Action Plan Review: Serbia 2023-2027](#), a document that scrutinised the process of NAP adoption against the OGP standards: transparency, inclusive participation, accountability, innovation, and ambition. During August and September, the document was available to the general public for commenting, which received two comments in the form of recommendations, and was published in Serbian and English in September 2024.

The *Action Plan Review: Serbia 2023-2027* was presented to the Special Inter-Ministerial Working Group in an open meeting held in October 2024. It was pointed out that the NAP has fulfilled all OGP minimal standards, and that out of 10 commitments, 2 have been recognised by IRM as the so-called ‘promising commitments’ – a set of measures and actions in certain policy area which significantly contributes to implementation of reforms based on OGP standards and substantially changes practices of public administration in the observed area. Electronic People’s Initiative and Open “Green” Data were recognised as promising commitments, meaning that their implementation is observed with particular focus. IRM assessed that the successful implementation of these two commitments can make a substantial change in transparency and inclusive participation and suggested a couple of recommendations for relevant bodies in charge of implementing these commitments.

This is the fifth NAP adopted by the Serbian Government. Overall, the level of ambition of Serbia’s NAP 2023-2027 was assessed by IRM as similar to the previous NAP. The key novelty is that for the first time, a four-year action plan was adopted, while IRM recommended that the Government use the midterm refresh process to strengthen the commitments’ ambition. As part of IRM, CEP will continue to monitor implementation and report on the 2023-2027 NAP, in collaboration with the OGP secretariat in Washington, DC.

INTEGRATED HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OF SERBIA

As part of a consortium with CPM Consulting and Ecorys, in 2024, CEP continued implementing the *Integrated Human Resources Management in Public Administration of the Republic of Serbia* project. Funded by the European Union, this initiative represents CEP’s first engagement in an IPA-financed technical assistance project as a consortium member.

The project’s key beneficiaries are the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government and the Human Resource Management Service. Its primary goal is to establish a competency-based, integrated human resources management system within public administration. The project is structured around two main components: 1) A sustainable and comprehensive system for monitoring and evaluating all HRM functions; and 2) Competency-based career models for state administration.

CEP’s role in the project is twofold. As a consortium partner, it contributes to project management alongside its partners, ensuring effective coordination and implementation. However, CEP’s key role lies in providing expert support to beneficiary institutions — an area where CEP plays a leading role, as all national experts in the project are part of the CEP team.

GOOD GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS IN 2024

As a result of the WeBER initiative, brand-new policy products were published in 2024, including a policy brief, and three monitoring reports. The policy brief titled [PAR Monitoring and Coordination: What space for civil society to influence?](#), unravels how the PAR monitoring and coordination bodies in Serbia utilise CSO potential and expertise, focusing on three factors

relevant for substantive CSO involvement - regularity of the meetings of these bodies, the extent of involvement of CSOs in administrative and political levels of coordination and monitoring, and recognition of the importance of civil society contributions. These three factors are prerequisites for meaningful inclusion of CSOs – without meeting them, the potential of CSOs to contribute to the PAR monitoring and coordination cannot be utilised to the full extent.

Additionally, following the successful pilot in the WeBER 2.0 project, fifteen CSOs in the Western Balkans, members of the WeBER Platform, were selected to perform research and produce monitoring reports on mainstreaming PAR Principles in sectoral policies, culminating in 15 reports on sectoral mainstreaming for the entire Western Balkan region. For Serbia, three monitoring reports were published, assessing the practices of Serbian authorities in conforming to the PAR standards:

- 1) [Organisation, Accountability & Oversight in Ministry of Environmental Protection,](#)
- 2) [Policy development and coordination in the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation,](#)
- 3) [Policy development and coordination in the Ministry of Environmental Protection.](#)

All CEP policy products published in the Good Governance programme area can be accessed at the CEP website, [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.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY FOR SERBIA 2025-2030

The most significant activity in the area of Internal Market and Competitiveness was further implementation of the project *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) in early 2023. This consultancy assignment, implemented under the lead of the European Profiles, is to further develop a quality infrastructure system in Serbia 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, the Institute for Standardisation of Serbia, and the Accreditation Body of Serbia, while indirect beneficiaries are all business entities in Serbia.

The focus of the project activities during 2024 was development and preparation of the new Quality Infrastructure Strategy for Serbia for the period 2025-2030. The activities carried out by CEP representatives as part of this project during 2024 include professional and analytical support to key experts on the project in the preparation and development of strategy document, as well as the implementation of special analytical tasks. These activities include development

and preparation of the ex-Post Analysis related to the preparation of the QI Strategy document, as well as contributions and integration of the ex-Ante Analysis. Very important role of CEP was to provide continuous monitoring and support to the project in terms of the implementation of the requirements of the methodology for the development of policy documents, according to the current Law on the Planning System and the Regulation on the methodology of public policy management.

CEP was involved in development of the concept and preparation for consultation events that are envisaged in the methodology procedure during the stage of development of the analytical bases for the Strategy. CEP representatives also had active participation in the consultation events itself at the regional Chamber of Commerce offices in Niš, Kragujevac, Novi Sad and Belgrade during November, presenting the findings of the Ex-post and Ex-ante analysis and having discussions with stakeholders. Active participation in the development of the strategy document included participation of CEP in workshops at the World Bank, that included participation of the Ministry of Economy and QI institutions, and at the Chamber of Commerce, presenting the Strategy Outline to the representatives of QI stakeholders, in December 2024.

HEADING NCEU WORKING GROUPS FOR ECONOMIC CHAPTERS

During 2024, as in previous years, CEP had a pivotal role in coordination of the National Convention on EU (NCEU) working groups that belong to the framework of Cluster 2 - Internal Market. CEP organised the work of the Working Groups for Chapters 1 and 3, coordinated by Dušan Protić, CEP programme manager for the internal market and competitiveness, WG for Chapters 4 and 9, coordinated by CEP associate Vida Uzelac, WG for Chapter 8, coordinated by Ranka Miljenović, CEP executive director, and WG for Chapter 28, coordinated by Nebojša Lazarević, CEP founder.

The focus of the Working Group for chapter 1 was implementation of the principle of free movement of goods, as one of the basic principles on which the functioning of the EU single market is based. In a practical sense, this principle implies trade without unnecessary technical obstacles while respecting the prescribed requirements regarding the quality and safety of products placed on the market. In this way, equal treatment is ensured for all products, which increases competition and the availability of products to customers throughout the EU. In the reporting period, the development of action plans for the harmonised and non-harmonised areas, which are aligned with the remarks of the European Commission, was completed, and the deadlines for the harmonisation of regulations were updated. These planning documents were adopted by the Serbian Government in October 2024. The NCEU Working Group for Chapter 1 stated that, in this way, after several years, the activity of preparing and passing documents that represent criteria for opening negotiations in this chapter has finally been completed.

Negotiating chapter 3 covers areas related to the right of business establishment and freedom to provide services, the area of mutual recognition of professional qualifications, as well as the area of postal services. The right of business establishment means the right to start and carry out activities in any member state. In this chapter, there was an opening benchmark, which required the adoption of a comprehensive and detailed strategy for alignment with the EU acquis in the field of professional qualifications. Given that this document was adopted and the criterion for opening the chapter was met, the Government of Serbia, in November 2019, adopted the Negotiating Position of the Republic of Serbia in this chapter and thereby expressed its readiness to start negotiations. The NCEU Working Group for Chapter 3 discussed this situation and requested speeding up the procedure within the EC regarding the opening of this chapter. At the

same time, it was noted that there were no significant changes regarding this chapter in 2024, except for the adoption of the Law on Services in November.

The NCEU Working Group for Chapters 4 – Free movement of capital and 9 - Financial services, held several meetings during 2024, where they analysed the current situation in these areas and chapters that were opened in 2019. The recommendations of the Working Group for Chapter 4 and Chapter 9 include, among other things, further liberalization of the Foreign Exchange Law, the request to enable payment transactions in foreign currency in the country in all cases, in accordance with the dual currency system, as well as a new recommendation adopted in 2024, that it is necessary to finalise activities for the introduction of SEPA (Single Euro Payment Area) and the harmonisation of legislation with the *Acquis Communautaire* in this area.

Chapter 8 - Competition policy is one of the most important policies in the process of EU accession negotiations, because the protection of competition is within its very foundation. Competition has such importance because the implementation of EU *acquis* in this area contributes to the level playing field for all market participants, and therefore to the improvement of the economy, the growth and development of economic entities, and consumers have a more favourable offer, a wider choice and better quality of products at lower prices. This chapter consists of three parts: competition policy in the narrower sense (Anti-Monopoly and merger control), policy of control of state aid and liberalisation of state enterprises. In the reporting period, the cooperation between the NCEU Working Group for Chapter 8 and institutions of the Republic of Serbia included in this chapter continued. Constant channels of communication were maintained with the Commission for Control of State Aid, exchange of information and consultation. Thematic session of the NCEU Working Group for Chapter 8 was held on April 9, 2024, with representatives of the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade and the Commission for Control of State Aid, where government representatives presented the activities in the past period, as well as plans for the next period in the field of competition protection policy, primarily related to fulfilment of opening benchmarks for this negotiation chapter.

In the process of accession negotiations, Chapter 28 consists of two parts related to the policy of consumer protection and public health protection. In that respect, this chapter includes the *acquis* in the field of consumer protection, which regulates the safety of consumer goods and the protection of economic interests of consumers in numerous individual sectors, as well as regulations relevant from the aspect of public health. In its work during 2024, the NCEU Working Group paid special attention to monitoring the implementation of the Law on Consumer Protection, adopted in 2021, especially with regard to the challenges that continue to arise in the implementation of consumer protection instruments, in addition to the introduction of a novelty in the form of mediation of consumer disputes. The working group demanded that institutional development in this area should be continued, which would include new institutional forms. In this regard, the earlier initiative for the introduction of the Consumer Ombudsperson was highlighted. The Consumer Ombudsperson would function as a "missing link" in the realisation of consumer rights, between the submission of a complaint to the trader and legal court protection, as an efficient mechanism and procedure without too much formality, procedurally and organisationally based on comparable European models and on the experience of domestic ombudsman institutions (Commissioner of Citizens, Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Protection of Personal Data, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality). In the area of health protection, the NCEU Working Group for Chapter 28 once again repeated the request that the Institute for Public Health of Serbia, as a key national institution for the monitoring and control of infectious diseases, prepare and publish a special thematic report on

the COVID-19 epidemic. This report should contain data on the results of epidemiological surveillance and an evaluation of the effects of the epidemiological measures taken, in order to provide an evidence base for public discussion of the measures taken, the responsibility of the authorities for the success of the implementation of the protection of the population from this infectious disease and the creation of a public health protection policy in this area. Although this request was submitted several years ago and despite then Prime Minister Ana Brnabić promised that it would be fulfilled, it has not been fulfilled until now, and the problem of complete non-transparency of the effects of government measures and activities implemented during the COVID-19 epidemic and the state of emergency remains.

COMPETITION – THE CASE OF MOBILE OPERATORS

During 2024, CEP assumed the role of a leading organisation regarding the protection of consumer interests and the protection of competition related to actions of mobile operators, on the occasion of their concerted price increase for users in early 2024. CEP submitted to the Commission for the Protection of Competition on March 21, 2024 an official initiative to launch the investigation of competition violations in the case of all three participants in the mobile telephony market, MTS-Telekom Srbija, Yettel and A1, who simultaneously increased the prices of tariff postpaid packages for users from the category of natural persons. In the short period between 30. January and 29. February 2024, these operators implemented changes in the prices of tariff packages.

In this particular case, all three operators, meaning all participants in the market of mobile telephony services in Serbia, increased prices in the range of an average increase in the price of the service between 10 and 15,8%, and this was done by the fact that two operators simultaneously announced a change in the price list, and the third did so immediately after them (a month later). The time frame for the entry into force of the new prices is the same (one month). In the initiative, it was indicated that precisely the circumstances of a similar range of price increases for services of several participants in the relevant market and the time synchronicity of that increase are usually considered reliable indicators of the occurrence of a violation of competition in cases of restrictive agreements through concerted practice (Dyestuffs case, C-48/69 ECJ). The well-founded assumption of the existence of a violation of competition in this case is also indicated by the impossibility of finding another rational explanation for the mentioned parallel and synchronised behavior of market participants, which by applying the standard of "the only plausible explanation" defined in the European Union's case law (Wood Pulp test, C-89/85 ECJ Ahlström Osakeyhtiö) confirms the probable existence of a restrictive agreement of participants in the mobile telephony market through coordinated practice.

It is particularly significant that this seemingly synchronised increase in the prices of existing users' packages means that the right of the service user to terminate the contract with the operator within 30 days of the notification of the new prices, in accordance with the applicable rules on the termination of the subscriber's postpaid contract based on regulations on electronic communications and the protection of consumer rights, has been rendered meaningless, given that all other operators on the market have simultaneously increased the service cost. The consequence of such behaviour is that the users are practically "locked" to the existing operators and are obliged to suffer increased prices, considering that they cannot use the only instrument of influence on the market behaviour of the participants, which is the replacement of the operator, which makes it impossible to substitute the demand in the mobile telephony market.

The initiative states that in the specific case there is a well-founded assumption of the existence of a violation of competition, namely a restrictive agreement by means of an express or tacit agreement, or a concerted practice, with the aim or consequence of significantly limiting, disrupting or preventing competition on the relevant market of mobile telephony services (Article 10 of the Law on the Protection of Competition). In the more recent practice of the Commission for the Protection of Competition, the position that a well-founded assumption of the existence of a violation of competition can be established already on the basis of the publicly available data on the movement of prices that indicates the possible existence of a restrictive agreement of the participants in that market (conclusions on the initiation of the investigation of the violation of competition ex officio to determine a restrictive agreement in the cases of Gigatron et al., no. 4/0-01-177/2021-03, and Tehnomanija et al., no. 4/0-01-177/2021-03, both dated February 5, 2023). CEP believes that the described key facts and circumstances, which are notorious and with data that are publicly available, undoubtedly fall into the same category of relevance and quality of suspected competition infringement.

Unfortunately, the Commission for the Protection of Competition failed to react in this case and thus prove that the institutional framework in the field of competition protection is functioning. In its notice published on the Commission's website on July 9, 2024, it was stated that the established facts were not sufficient for the Commission to reliably assume behaviour that would indicate the existence of a violation of competition, to the extent that it enables the fulfilment of the legal standard for initiating proceedings ex officio - the existence of a reasonable assumption from Article 35 of the Law that a violation of competition has been committed. It is indicative that the Agency for the Protection of Competition of Montenegro, with almost identical facts and circumstances in the case of three mobile telephony operators on their market, initiated proceedings in April 2024 (after this CEP initiative), conducted an investigation and issued a decision on November 18, 2024, which established the existence of a restrictive agreement and determined appropriate measures.

The existence of the Commission's track record and its independence are continuously in focus of the EC in the context of Chapter 8 - Competition Policy, and cause insufficient trust in its work. The failure of the Commission to act upon CEP's initiative exposed the lack of institutional capacity to face the challenges of competition protection and independent action, and re-actualised the issue of strengthening professional capacity and independence from political factors in the decision-making of the national competition protection body.

CONSUMER PROTECTION – IMPROVING THE POSITION OF CONSUMERS THROUGH STRENGTHENING COMPETITION POLICY

In December 2024, CEP began implementation of the project [*Enhancing Consumer Rights through Strengthening Competition Policy*](#), with the support of the Belgrade Open School (BOŠ) and the EU Resource Centre for Civil Society in Serbia. The project aims to involve citizens and civil society in the process of identifying and addressing key issues for the development of public policies and the regulatory framework in the areas of consumer protection and competition, with a focus on an integrated approach that connects these two segments. The active involvement of civil society and citizens in reforms that support Serbia's EU accession process will be key to establishing more effective mechanisms for dialogue and public advocacy. Accordingly, the overall objective of the project is to strengthen the active participation of citizens and civil society in the inclusive and transparent development of public policies in the areas of consumer rights and competition policy, in line with Serbia's EU accession process.

The project, among other things, includes the activities of two consultative workshops with citizens, the preparation of a document with public policy options in the area of consumer rights protection and competition protection, a document containing proposals for improving the existing legal framework, as well as a special thematic meetings for the advocacy of proposed solutions with representatives of competent institutions.

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.

REINVENTING CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, THE RULE OF LAW AND THE EU

CEP started the implementation of the project *Reinventing Engagement through Affirmative Citizen Consultations (REACH)* in July 2024, funded by the EU's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme. The Project aims to enhance citizen engagement (including women and youth) in European policy issues through citizens' consultations, which are structured events where individuals gather to discuss and provide input on policy issues, ensuring their voices and perspectives are included in the decision-making process. REACH covers three interconnected areas: the environment, the rule of law and the EU integration. Citizens' consultations are of great importance since they enhance democratic participation, foster transparency, and ensure that policies reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of the community. Throughout the project, a dynamic social media campaign will highlight key activities and outcomes, including local, national, and transnational events, as well as publications.

The project is implemented in four stages, starting with local consultations, over national consultations, transnational events and the final conference. It is implemented in 8 WB and EU countries, with CEP being the leading partner. A significant component of this project is environmental protection. Together with the rule of law and the EU integration/enlargement, environmental protection represents an area to be covered by citizens and experts during all consultative meetings. The project aims to enhance citizen engagement (including women and youth) in European policy issues through citizens' consultations, which are structured events where individuals gather to discuss and provide input on policy issues, ensuring their voices and perspectives are included in the decision-making process. The output of the project is to provide a set of concrete policy proposals for decision-makers in national governments and the EU in the area of environment, rule of law and EU integration/enlargement.

During 2024, CEP organised three local citizen consultations in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš, as part of the REACH project. All three events showed high levels of awareness among citizens for environmental topics, who, with the help of experts and facilitators, identified key challenges in Serbia, including air quality, waste management, transition to green, energy efficiency, afforestation, and infrastructure gaps. Not only were citizens able to map the most critical problems, but they also proactively brainstormed and provided potential recommendations for local and central governments in addressing these issues. CEP will continue to work on these recommendations in 2025 to shape them into concrete policy proposals.

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.

STAGED ACCESSION MODEL – STILL IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The Staged Accession Model continued to be the central pillar of *Our Europe's* research efforts in 2024. Building upon previous efforts, CEP produced five policy briefs in 2024 alone that further analyse the Model and its applicability. This work became particularly important in the context of the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, which was operationalised through the Regulation on the Reform and Growth Facility, adopted in Spring 2024 by the European Parliament and the EU Council. In this context, CEP analysed the following:

- [Setting the Stage for Enlargement: The Integration of the Model for Staged Accession to the EU into the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans](#)
- [The Great Gap: Assessing the New Growth Plan's Potential to Address Socioeconomic Disparity](#)
- [The New Growth Plan: Assessing the Value of the Proposed Early Integration Incentives](#)
- [From Bystanders to Contributors: A Realistic Way Towards Candidates' Participation in the EU Council](#)
- [The Role of Civil Society in Re-shaping EU Enlargement Policy in the Context of Geopolitical Changes: The Model for Staged Accession to the EU as a Case Study](#)

The research activities were accompanied, as always, by extensive advocacy. By the end of 2024, CEP had managed to reach 23 capitals, having directly engaged with their officials on the matter. The visits were structured to cover relevant ministries (European/EU/foreign affairs), national parliaments, and relevant CSOs dealing with the EU affairs. The feedback that researchers got during the missions was predominantly positive, with plenty of constructive criticism which was used to further improve the Stage accession model. The visit to Poland stood out, as it allowed CEP to contribute to their thinking on enlargement while they were preparing to assume the EU Council Presidency. The peak of activities came during the summer of 2024, when CEP was invited to present the Model and its findings related to the New Growth Plan at the Working Party on the Western Balkans Region (COWEB), where all 27 member states were present.

Many of the achievements on this front were made possible thanks to the longstanding support of the Open Society Foundations Western Balkans. This included the project [Building a Consensus on the Initiative for Staged Accession to the EU](#), which lasted until April 2024, as well as [All in on EU Enlargement – Making Gradual Integration Work](#), which began in December 2024, paving the way for a productive year in 2025.

SUPPORTING DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

In 2024, CEP successfully implemented a project titled [Towards Better Monitoring of Democracy in the Western Balkans](#), supported by the Kalevi Sorsa Foundation from Finland and the Progress Institute from North Macedonia through the Think Tank Grant Program. The project's goal was to enhance the European Commission's capacity to effectively monitor and report on reforms in the

functioning of democratic institutions in the Western Balkans. Supporting and monitoring democracy in the Western Balkan region was recognised by CEP as of particular importance in the context of EU accession and authoritarian trends in Europe and worldwide.

As part of the project, CEP published the discussion paper titled: [*Towards Better Monitoring in the Western Balkans: Improving Functioning of Democratic Institutions as a Key Instrument in EC's Reports*](#). The discussion paper quantified the EC's reports in the area of political criteria (functioning of democratic institutions) using the in-house developed methodology – [*Mixed Approach Model*](#). The political criteria is the only part of the fundamentals cluster which had not received a quantifiable assessment by the European Commission before 2024, which represents a primary reason for this analysis. The study also tracked consistency in EC's reporting since 2022 and revealed lower levels of consistency in the area on average compared to the previous year. Finally, work done by CEP in researching and advocating in this area resulted in the Commission finally providing some kind of quantifiable assessment in its 2024 Enlargement Package.

Alongside the discussion paper, CEP organised a Webinar [*Discussing the 2024 Enlargement Package and the Functioning of Democratic Institutions in the Western Balkans*](#), where representatives of the European Commission (DG NEAR), together with experts from all six Western Balkan countries, discussed the latest country reports published by the EC. The Webinar gathered more than 200 participants and was used to present the discussion paper with its recommendations for the EC on how to improve its reporting in the area of functioning of democratic institutions. This event represents a continuation of the practice established by CEP in 2021.

Finally, CEP recorded two podcast episodes as part of its European Talks podcast series, interviewing recognised experts locally and globally in the area of democracy. In the first episode, [*Democracy Under Review: North Macedonia and the EU's 2024 Enlargement Package*](#), an expert on North Macedonia provided his assessment and overview on the state of democracy in North Macedonia and the EC's report in this segment. In the second episode, [*Democracy Under Pressure: Insights from Freedom House's Nations in Transit and EC Enlargement Package in the Western Balkans*](#), authors of the *Nations in Transit*, one of the most widely recognised democracy reports globally, talked about democracy in Serbia and the other Western Balkan countries, comparing them within the region and globally. They pointed out the continued negative democratic trend in Serbia and discussed the unique regional dynamics observed in the Western Balkans, where issues like weakening independent media, compromised judicial systems, and rampant corruption have led to stagnant or regressive democratic outcomes.

NEW HORIZON

In 2024, [*the InvigoratEU project*](#), a research project funded under the Horizon Europe programme, officially kicked off with a high-level conference in Tbilisi, Georgia, bringing together 18 partner organisations from across Europe and the EU neighbourhood. Throughout the year, CEP played a leading role in research on the geopolitical mapping in the WB/EaP which it co-leads with Italy's Istituto Affari Internazionali. It focused on mapping the geopolitical ambitions of Russia, China, and Turkey in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership regions. CEP coordinated the development of a robust analytical framework and an original External Influence

Index, while managing collaboration with four partner organisations¹ who conducted desk research and expert interviews for six countries. CEP itself carried out desk research for Serbia, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. All major research outputs within this project are scheduled for publication in 2025.

In addition, CEP participated as a partner developing innovative perspectives on democratisation in contexts of contested territories. CEP contributed to the development of the methodological approach and conducted desk research that led to the first draft of a Serbia case study, embedded in the project's dual focus on modernisation and geopolitical logics. While investigating the socioeconomic dimension of enlargement, CEP provided input for the methodological framework and initiated data collection for a case study on Serbia, with a focus on the relationship between EU accession and social cohesion - emphasising both objective (e.g. inequality, access to education, access to technology etc.) and subjective indicators (such as trust, inclusion, and solidarity).

OTHER RELEVANT WORK

Continuing its longstanding tradition, CEP maintained its bi-annual analysis of the priorities of the Council Presidencies throughout 2024. It published papers analysing the priorities of the [Belgian Presidency](#) in the first half of the year and the [Hungarian Presidency](#) in the latter half. In parallel, the start of each Presidency was marked by an event organised by CEP in collaboration with the Delegation of the EU to Serbia. The handover of the Presidency from [Belgium to Hungary](#) was commemorated in July, while the transition [from Hungary to Poland](#) was marked in December. Additionally, CEP closely monitored Serbia's progress toward EU membership by [quantifying the 2024 annual report](#) and presenting key findings of the 2024 Enlargement Package. This package was the centrepiece of a [webinar](#) titled 'Discussing the 2024 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 Gert Jan Koopman, the Director-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations and Miia Lahti, Director of the Unit for South-Eastern Europe and EU Enlargement, Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Following the webinar, CEP published a [CEP Presents paper](#) summarising the key insights from the discussion.

Amidst the challenges facing Serbia in 2024, CEP and [Le Grand Continent](#) organised a closed discussion titled “Political Priorities of Serbia and the Balkans between Trans-Atlantic, Sino-American, and EU-China Relations in Times of Global Changes”. Held under the Chatham House Rule, the event brought together over 20 experts from civil society, academia, and the private sector to exchange insights and perspectives on Serbia's evolving geopolitical position. Following the discussion, CEP published a [CEP Presents paper](#) summarising the key takeaways. Additionally, earlier in the year, CEP released a [paper](#) analysing the EU's and Serbia's positions on Israel and Palestine, with a particular focus on Serbia's stance on the issue.

¹ Institut für Europäische Politik (Germany), PMC Research Centre (Georgia), SS Cyril and Methodius University (North Macedonia), and Institute for Strategic Initiatives (Moldova)

CEP remained actively engaged in monitoring Serbia's EU accession process throughout 2024. As the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans took shape, CEP co-authored a [paper](#) with [Institut Jacques Delors](#) analysis exploring the Plan's key innovations and the link between funding and reforms. Furthermore, CEP examined the [factors](#) behind Serbia's slow progress towards EU membership, emphasising the need for reforms. Moreover, one blog post delved into three major [challenges](#) and provided recommendations for overcoming them. In addition, CEP assessed Serbia's efforts to open [Cluster 3](#)—a central issue in its accession process in 2024—and outlined the necessary steps for further advancement. Lastly, in light of renewed discussions on the reintroduction of [conscription](#) across Europe, CEP published an insight paper analysing the issue through the lens of remilitarisation in both the EU and Serbia.

CEP's commitment to fostering practical expertise continued through its *Internship Programme for Excellence*, which contributed to several insightful publications. For instance, Russian intern Anna Khan analysed the [Russian Telegram network in Serbia](#), examining its role as a tool of Russian propaganda. Meanwhile, Luxembourgish-Irish intern Paul O'Brien explored the large-scale [farmers' protests](#) across Europe and their impact on the Union, as well as authored a [blog](#) comparing the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue with the Good Friday Agreement. These contributions underscored CEP's role in addressing contemporary European challenges through diverse international perspectives.

PROJECT AND FINANCE TEAM

During 2024, similarly to 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 12 different projects, and producing regular, timely and high-quality financial and narrative reporting to donors. In the final quarter of 2024, the project team introduced an informal division between the project planning and development unit and the project management and implementation unit. This comes as a result of the internal analysis for improving coordination and working on diversification of funding sources.

The project and finance team includes 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, one of the key objectives of the project team is to secure uninterrupted implementation of projects and expanding CEP's project portfolio. 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. During 2024, CEP strengthened its project team by hiring new project assistant. These hirings signal a determination to strengthen the project team for the future. Bringing young and motivated professionals to the team is seen by the management and the rest of the team as a continuation of a good tradition and an opportunity for both CEP and new colleagues. One person, a communications assistant, left the team in September 2024.

CEP AND THE MEDIA

In 2024, 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 the *Our Europe* programme area.

CEP remained active in various media outlets, appearing on multiple occasions on [Euronews](#), [N1](#), [Danas](#), Politika (printed edition), [NIN](#), [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.

CEP's reach extended to regional and European media as well, including [Politico](#), [The Economist](#), [Le Temps](#), [Deutsche Welle](#), [Al Jazeera Balkans](#), [Radio Television of Montenegro](#) and [TVP World](#) from Poland. Normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina and related developments were often commented on by CEP for [RTS](#), [Kosovo Online](#), [Nova S](#), [N1](#), and [RTK](#). 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 [From Belgium to Hungary: New opportunities for further enlargement process acceleration](#) and [From Hungary to Poland: New Institutional Cycle, Renewed Ambitions](#). 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: [From Hungary to Poland: New Institutional Cycle, Renewed Ambitions](#) was one of the most visited events CEP organised in 2024, with outstanding press attention.

In addition to traditional media, CEP has continued to promote its activities on social media platforms. 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](#), 3,000 followers on [LinkedIn](#), and over 4,000 followers on [Instagram](#).

CEP's main hub, the website www.cep.org.rs, has remained a crucial resource, offering reliable, detailed, and transparent information to the public. Additionally, CEP renewed the work of the [MladiRini](#) website – a platform for youth voices from the Western Balkan region. Furthermore, CEP's specialised website for monitoring public administration reform – [PAR Monitor](#) – as part of the WeBER project is maintained and updated regularly.

CEP STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

During 2024, CEP experienced a leadership change as the long-serving Executive Director left the post in August 2024, prompting CEP to search for a new Executive Director. The decision was made to appoint a new Executive Director through an internal recruitment process, with an open call extended to all eligible employees.

In order to mitigate the negative consequences of leadership change and skipping the strategic planning workshop, CEP opted for establishing a new position within the senior leadership – Chief Strategist/Director of Strategy. Key tasks of the Chief Strategist cover: assisting in developing strategic priorities; working on constant improvement of the internal structure of governance and decision-making; monitoring implementation of Strategic Goals and making proposals for amending CEP's vision and mission; proposing and developing key performance indicators (KPIs) and other metrics to track progress on strategic priorities. CEP's experienced researcher has been named Chief Strategist for a period of four years.

Given the fact that CEP's annual strategic workshop was postponed until 2025, the strategic objectives set in 2023 remained in place. 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, increased activities compared to being largely inactive in 2023. The strategic decision was made in the final quarter of 2024 to appoint a new programme manager for this area. The key objective of bringing this programme area to life in 2025 by producing policy products and developing new project proposals remains valid.

Finally, the fourth programme area, Our Europe, was very active in 2024 in terms of developing project proposals and expanding CEP's portfolio. The objectives for 2024 remain valid in 2025 as well:

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

CEP finances continued to be stable in 2024, with the overall budget slightly decreased compared to 2023, at EUR 956,000.00.

In 2024, CEP started or continued implementing 12 projects.

CEP's main sources of funding in 2024 were the following:

- European Union;
- European Education and Culture Executive Agency;
- United Nations Office for Project Services;
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), through SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management), joint initiative with the EU;
- World Bank;
- Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE);
- Open Government Partnership (OGP);
- The Kingdom of Norway, through the SMART Balkans Programme;
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Italy;
- International Visegrad Fund;
- Kalevi Sorsa Foundation.

In 2024, CEP did not implement projects financed from the budget of the Republic of Serbia.