



Center for
Cultural
Decontamination



Lawyers Committee
for Human Rights –
YUCOM



Belgrade Center for
Human Rights



Civic Initiatives



Helsinki
Committee for
Human Rights in
Serbia

To all EU member-states' governments
European Parliament
EU Commission
Embassies of EU member-states in Belgrade

Belgrade, 2 February 2009

Your Excellencies,

This is to appeal for your reconsideration of the current situation in Serbia and region, because, in our view, new international circumstances that additionally affect the fragility of the Western Balkans and its European prospects call for a fresh approach in the EU's strategy for the region. Fully aware of all the problems emerging from those new circumstances, we would appreciate your taking them into account while charting the relations with Serbia.

Under the aforementioned circumstances the EU policy for the Western Balkans necessitates a fresh approach. In our opinion, constant postponement of EU candidate status for West Balkan countries – Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo in the first place – is counterproductive as it undermines their anyway poor democratic potential. The policy of conditioning, as evidenced in the cases of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, generated regressive trends that take those countries away from the European option. War devastation in Bosnia followed by inadequate post-war management, as well as the political situation in Serbia incapable of leaving behind its recent, belligerent past wear out capacities and potentials of those societies. Façade democracies in those countries obviously do not imply that transition in itself has brought about a fundamental change in the perception of democratic processes.

Only once the EU grants Bosnia-Herzegovina candidate status for EU membership Belgrade will be forced to end its policy of blackmail. This is the only way to curb instability and ease the tension between the two entities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia.

Though it obtained a clear-cut mandate from citizens for the European option, Serbia's new government has failed to keep up with their expectations so far. Despite some head-ways, no fundamental progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration was made in 2008. To all appearances, this process is blocked. At the same time, Belgrade is working with Moscow on strengthening Serb autonomy in North Kosovo. Serbia's overall foreign policy in 2008 was focused on "the protection of constitutional order and territorial integrity," which practically confronted it with the EU.

In the present situation, the EU should make it possible for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia to accede to its membership as soon as possible without any conditioning. Speaking of Serbia, unfreezing of Stabilization and Association Agreement signed in April 2008 should be the first step in that process. Besides, apart from the government, the EU should rely more on citizens of Serbia, who unambiguously cast their vote for an European future.

Serbia's inability to give the upper hand to the pro-Europe orientation leads to the conclusion that Serbia needs assistance, primarily from the EU. Brussels's ongoing financial support keeps Serbia at existential minimum but also nourishes its territorial pretensions. A candidate status for EU membership would reverse those negative trends in Serbia. Not only political elites but also local self-governments and citizens need to harness their energy for reaching a consensus on Serbia's indisputable European course.

It is of utmost importance to send Serbia's citizens a clear signal that EU policies are aimed at upholding their real-life interests. One step in this direction would definitely have a positive echo in all walks of life: speeding up the abolishment of visa regime – following a concerted effort to help the country to fulfill the technical requirements (introduce appropriate legislation, adequate travel documents, etc) rather than wait for it to do so – would considerably add to EU's image in Serbia.

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