

Aleksandra Čavoški

Perceptions of the European Union in Serbia

As a result of its specific political background, Serbia is a country with a very distinct perception of the European Union and there are numerous discussions about alternatives to the EU. The perception of the EU in Serbia significantly changed over time. Serbia experienced a steady decline of support for the EU and the overall impression of the EU deteriorated in the last two years. It will be argued that there is a certain ambivalence in Serbia regarding EU membership, which shows the inconclusiveness about the role the EU plays for Serbia. This is reflected in a continuous and striking fluctuation of support for the EU, a noticeable negative perception of the EU as well as very distinctive debates on possible alternatives to EU membership. Besides the usual explanations involving the lengthy process of negotiation and lack of knowledge about the EU, unresolved political issues as well as political opportunism contribute to this perception.

This is paradoxical given the history of the EU's relationship with the former Yugoslavia. The first cooperation agreements between the EU and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia date from 1970¹. Nevertheless, the former Yugoslav republics, with the exceptions of Slovenia and Croatia, are still on a 'rocky road' to the EU. It was not until 2000 that Serbia revived its relations with the EU with the objective of becoming a Member State. This relationship was formalised with the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between Serbia and the EU² on 29 April 2008. An important point was also the signing of the Agreement on Visa Facilitation³ and the Agreement on Readmission⁴ which significantly contributed to the reopening of Serbia to the EU. Subsequently, the Council of the EU published the document on visa liberalisation with countries of the Western Balkans⁵ and soon after the visa-free regime with the EU came into force. Serbia took a step forward and on 22 December 2009 submitted its application for membership. Following the Commission's positive opinion Serbia was granted a membership candidate status on 1 March 2012 and it is waiting for the start of the negotiations with the EU.

Although the speed of the accession of any candidate country to the EU depends on its individual progress and efforts, the experiences of all countries joining after 2004⁶ confirm that it is a complex and long-term process which places stringent requirements on all candidates. Moreover, as accession is a two way process it also places significant strains on the EU institutions and individual Member States. As a result of this lengthy process and conditions for membership, as well as individual political issues in each candidate country,

¹ See more on

<http://www.mip.gov.me/index.php/Crna-Gora-i-evropske-integracije/hronologija-odnosa-crne-gore-i-eu.html>

² Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia – International Agreements, No. 83/2008

³ Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia – International Agreements, No. 103/2007

⁴ Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia – International Agreements, No. 103/2007

⁵ Council Regulation (EC) No 1244/2009 of 30 November 2009 amending Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement, *Official Journal L 336, 18/12/2009 P. 0001 - 0003*

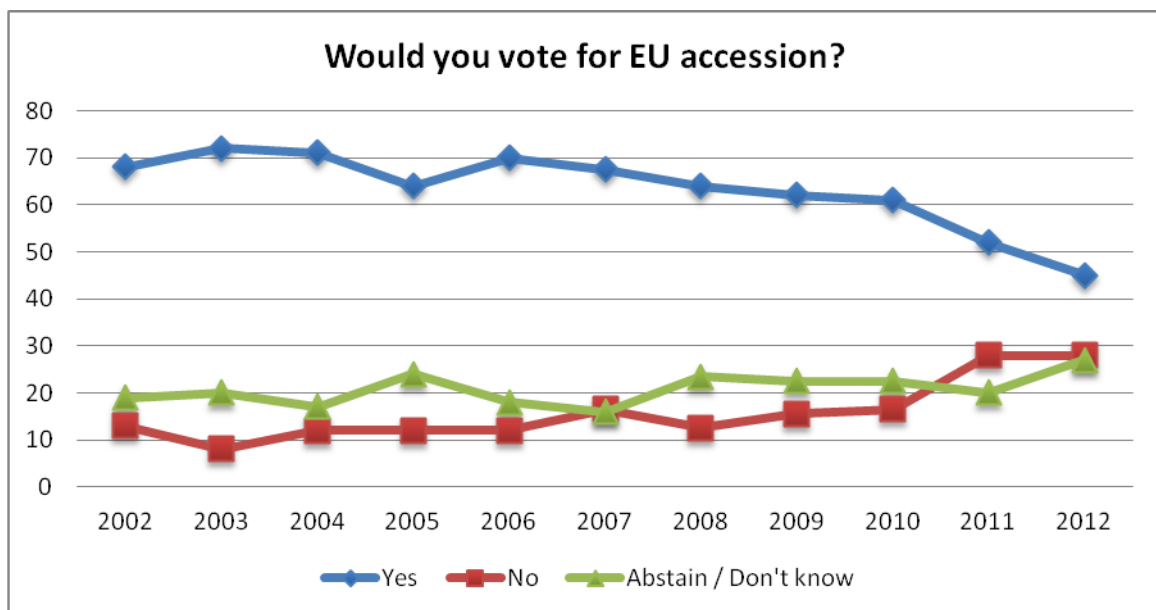
⁶ On average it took 8 years of negotiations for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe from submitting the application for membership to accession. For example, Slovakia and the Baltic countries submitted their application in 1995 and became members in 2004.

the perception of the EU and EU membership was always subject to change as the accession process evolved in time.

The Serbian European Integration Office formally began holding public opinion polls in 2006.⁷ A survey of public opinion was organised once a year until 2009, while from that point data were collected every six months in order to gather more reliable information on the citizens' perception of the EU. These opinion polls offer important guidance in assessing the existing perception of the EU. Besides, this article also reflects on the perception of the EU in academic circles since academia plays a major role in framing the public debate and thus defining political priorities. Discussions about possible alternatives to EU membership EU are commonly initiated by academics and subsequently used by politicians. This contribution likewise analyses the main reasons for the existing perception of the EU which is steadily becoming negative.

1. The Perception of the EU in Serbia

When discussing the perception of the EU in Serbia the main question in the surveys is whether Serbian citizens want to join the EU, which is a good starting point in evaluating the perception. Although the data were officially collected from 2006, the Serbian European Integration Office has some earlier data from 2002. These results show a steady decrease in support from a high point in 2003, with a particularly sharp decrease since 2010.



More worryingly, significant progress milestones in the integration process have had little or no effect on public support for the EU. In 2008 there was a decrease in support compared to the previous year despite the fact that Serbia signed the SAA in that year.⁸ In December 2009 there was a slight increase in support which rose to 65 per cent⁹ which may be due to visa liberalisation. This may have made a greater impression on the general public than signing of the SAA. However, the effect did not last long as from 2010 onwards there has

⁷ Public opinion polls available at <http://www.seio.gov.rs/documents/national-documents.223.html>

⁸ http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/prezentacije/european_perspective_serbia_dec_2008.ppt

⁹ http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/prezentacije/decembar_09_final_english.pdf

been a dramatic fall in support.¹⁰ Thus, in 2010 only 57 per cent of respondents said they would vote yes¹¹; 51 per cent would vote yes in 2011¹², while in 2012 the support collapsed to only 41 per cent¹³. It is difficult to accurately assess how the opening of negotiations as a result of signing the agreement with Kosovo will affect public opinion.

The survey in 2012 also measured the general attitude of citizens towards the EU which is a good indication of the perception of the EU. Regrettably, 30 per cent of respondents have neither a positive nor a negative attitude towards the EU; 29 per cent have a positive perception; 20 per cent a negative image of the EU; 30 per cent neither positive nor negative; 15 per cent very negative image and only 5 per cent a very positive image of the EU.¹⁴ As expected, young and middle-aged people are more receptive to EU membership and have a positive perception of the EU. For example, 37 per cent of respondents between 18-34 years have a positive image of the EU; 9 per cent a very positive one; 28 per cent are neither positive nor negative, while 14 per cent have a negative image and 11 per cent a very negative one.¹⁵

When in 2006 respondents were asked when they would expect Serbia to join the EU, 34.5 per cent expected that to happen between 2010 and 2014; 23.8 per cent expected it would be between 2015 and 2019; 23.4 per cent after 2020 and 17.3 per cent of respondents said by 2009.¹⁶ Citizens were also asked what would be the desired year of EU membership and 33.9 per cent hoped that it would be between 2008 and 2010 and 21.2 per cent in 2011 and after.¹⁷ This statistical data again demonstrates the high expectations of citizens a few years ago which speaks in favour of an unawareness of the lengthy and difficult accession process each potential or candidate country faces. Similar data were collected by the Balkan monitor in its survey where respondents in Serbia indicated 2015 as the most likely year to become a member of the EU.¹⁸

Serbia is also characteristic with its low European identification unlike some other Western Balkans countries such as Macedonia and Albania.¹⁹ This probably is a significant factor in the citizens' negative perception of the EU. Slightly better figures were confirmed in the survey organised by the Serbian European Integration Office. When asked how strongly you identify with Europe, around 40 per cent of respondents in 2009 confirmed their European identification.²⁰ There are no data for 2012 but it could be expected that the support would be significantly lower. Respondents also indicated benefits and rights they associate with citizenship of the Union. In 2010, around 71 per cent of respondents mentioned the right to

¹⁰ http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/prezentacije/opinion_poll_december_2010.ppt

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹²

http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/istrazivanja_javnog_mnjenja/opinion_poll_december_2011.pdf

¹³

http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/istrazivanja_javnog_mnjenja/opinion_poll_13.pdf

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ <http://www.seio.gov.rs/dokumenta/nacionalna-dokumenta.200.html>

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See Perceptions of the EU in the Western Balkans, Balkan Monitor at 3

http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/files/Gallup_Balkan_Monitor-Focus_On_EU_Perceptions.pdf

¹⁹ *Ibid.* at 2

²⁰ *Supra note 9*

work in any EU Member State while 51 per cent mentioned the right to reside anywhere within the EU.²¹

In assessing the perception of the EU it is also important to understand what the benefits and disadvantages from joining the EU are. Here again there is a steady fall in the public's perception of benefits that Serbia would accrue from membership. In 2012, only 10 per cent of respondents saw significant benefits, 22 per cent saw some benefits from membership, 14 per cent thought it would mean as much harm as benefit; 14 per cent thought it would mean more harm than benefit, while 33 per cent saw no benefits at all from EU membership.²² In regard to the concrete benefits, a majority of citizens answered that joining the EU will represent a way to build a better future for young people (51 per cent in 2008 and 54 per cent in 2009²³). More job opportunities are also one of the key benefits from joining the EU, which include both job opportunities in Serbia and elsewhere in the EU and an improvement of the quality of life. For young people it is also the opportunity to study in any EU Member State. Joining the EU is also seen as a way of providing peace and stability in the region, as well as a way to protect citizens' rights. This is a good indication of the role the EU actually has in the region. Only in the last two years have citizens identified access to certain EU funds as one of the benefits from joining (27 per cent in 2012²⁴).

When asked what the main disadvantages of joining the EU are, Serbian citizens specified reasons which are shared by all Eurosceptics in EU Member States. These sentiments would also affect any future referendum on EU membership. Loss of national and cultural identity is the greatest concern for Serbian citizens. There are also discussions about the possibility of the Serbian language not becoming an official language in the EU once Serbia joins which demonstrate again the misunderstanding about the EU or a misapprehension about the decline in the use of the Serbian language. In 2012 several other important concerns were specified in the survey. These apprehensions were of an economic nature; 52 per cent believed that accession will cost Serbia too much money, while 47 per cent believed that it will create more problems for domestic farmers.²⁵ Greater unemployment is stated in recent surveys as an additional disadvantage. Furthermore, in 2012 citizens the EU is even seen as an enemy and citizens are invoking events from the past such as the NATO bombing but also experiences of other countries which already joined the EU.²⁶ Loss of sovereignty and the potential for Serbia to become a colony, although cited a small percentage still is present as a reason against the EU.

In recent years the eurozone crisis and the institutional instability of the EU itself has also impacted on the perception of the EU in Serbia. Moreover, scepticism about the EU has been steadily rising from 2010, which coincides with the economic crisis in the EU.²⁷ A majority of citizens believe that there is no prospect for the EU and that it is only a question of time when the EU will dissolve. Very often, even in academic circles, the UK is mentioned as likely to leave in the near future. The less pessimistic view is that the EU will overcome its current problems but it will be more reluctant in the face further enlargement. A similar view

²¹ *Supra note 10*

²² *Supra note 13*

²³ *See supra notes 8 and 9*

²⁴ *Supra note 13*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Supra note 10*

is that the EU will deal with the problems but the future membership will not involve the same benefits for the accession countries, which means that potential membership is a less attractive option for Serbia.

Conditions for membership play an important role in creating opinions about the EU in Serbia. They are mostly discussed at times when issues of significant political importance are on the agenda for the political coalition in government. In 2008 and 2009, 86 and 76 per cent of citizens respectively identified cooperation with The Hague and the extradition of war criminals as the main condition for membership.²⁸ In 2011, 70 per cent believed that Kosovo was the main condition for membership.²⁹ Fighting corruption and the reform of judiciary were identified as two other important membership criteria, while economic reforms or approximation of national laws with the EU *acquis* were not perceived as very important.³⁰ Pertaining to membership criteria is the perception that the EU has double standards when it comes to Serbia and that the politics of conditionality is evident towards Serbia. From 2008 until the last survey in 2012 around 50 per cent of citizens reiterate the EU's continuous conditionality politics and blackmailing of Serbia as a major impediment to joining the EU in the future.³¹ What is even more disconcerting is that a significant proportion of respondents in the survey strongly believe that the EU will constantly impose new requirements for Serbia (from 2008 percentages are constantly rising; for example in 2010 it was 61 per cent³²). This view is presented in the media and often argued by academics. A smaller percentage of respondents blame politicians for the lengthy accession process, while very few think it is due to objective reasons (lack of reforms in specified policy areas).

On a more optimistic note accession to the EU raised citizens' awareness of the need to carry out reforms within the context of preparation for EU membership. Both in the media and in surveys three areas are continuously identified as main areas for reform: the fight against corruption, reform of judiciary and reform of the health sector. These goals are concurrent as corruption is especially present in the latter two areas.³³ What is also important is that reforms in these policy areas are not seen as required with the accession process but citizens strongly believe that action is needed irrespective of the EU conditions of membership. For example 66 per cent in 2012 indicated that the reforms should be carried out even if they were not laid down as accession criteria.³⁴ No less important is the perception of the need for citizens to change their own personal and working practices in order to join the EU. Although the majority is not ready to change a significant proportion showed willingness for a change. Another question was related to the readiness of citizens to re-qualify or specialise in some area as a result of EU membership, almost 50 per cent in 2012 gave a negative answer.³⁵

2. Alternatives to the EU

²⁸ See *supra* notes 8 and 9

²⁹ *Supra* note 12

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Supra* note 7

³² *Supra* note 10

³³ See more in the latest UNDP "Public Opinion Study – December 2012", available on <http://www.undp.org.rs/?event=public.publications>

³⁴ *Supra* note 13

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Although it may be argued that “there is little or no alternative for candidates”³⁶ discussions about the alternatives to the EU are very common amongst academics in Serbia and to a lesser extent amongst politicians. Academics usually raise other possibilities for Serbia due to concerns about the loss of sovereignty as a result of EU membership. Politicians often discuss alternatives at times when there is a burning political issue that may affect and possibly undermine the accession process for Serbia. Not less important is that these debates demonstrate that even a great proportion of the political elites have a negative perception of the EU. Moreover, these discourses frequently demonstrate a misinterpretation of the EU, its functioning, as well as the costs and benefits of joining. These discussions are in line with the general impression citizens have of the EU. Additionally, if initiated by politicians they often are motivated by a partisan interest under the guise of the general interest of the nation. Debates on alternatives are not uncommon in other candidate countries or in countries which recently became EU members. A good illustration is Slovenia where those debates were only theoretical “as the EU is the best strategy for Slovenia as a small country since the costs of the alternatives are higher”.³⁷ In other countries such as Poland there were some negligible discussions about the cooperation with the Central European Free Trade (hereinafter: the CEFTA) but it was not a viable alternative to accession to the EU.³⁸ Nevertheless, these debates are common and intense in Serbia and unlike other Western Balkans countries include strengthening with relations with Russia as an alternative to EU membership. Lastly, continuous emphases on possible alternatives foster the negative perception of Serbia.

Several alternatives have been discussed in recent years which, inter alia, included several options for Serbia – strengthening ties with Russia, not joining any group, establishing privileged partnership with the EU and joining the European Economic Area.³⁹ The latest initiative that comes more from the academic circles considers the advantage of joining the European Economic Areas (EEA).⁴⁰ It is argued that this alternative only involves the economic, which is more appropriate for Serbia as there are still unresolved political issues. Furthermore, by acceding to the EEA, Serbia has full access to the internal market and the exercise of the four main freedoms. It will also allow Serbia to maintain its membership in the CEFTA. Finally, it is argued that it costs less since Serbia does not have to approximate the *acquis* in all chapters which are negotiated when joining the EU.⁴¹ Without analysing this alternative in depth, this view ignores that accession to the EU involves, *inter alia*, the negotiations in two main chapters (chapters 23 and 24⁴²) which requires Serbia to undertake significant reforms in the judiciary and justice and home affairs.

³⁶ Helen Wallace (2002), ‘Enlarging the European Union: reflections on the challenge of analysis’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 9:4,658-665 at 661

³⁷ Irena Brinar & Marjan Svetlicic (1999), ‘Enlargement of the European Union: the case of Slovenia’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 6:5, 802-821 at 802.

³⁸ See more in Renata Stawarska (1999), ‘EU enlargement from the Polish perspective’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 6:5, 822-838 at 824

³⁹ Except the alternative regarding Russia, all of them can be applied to other countries of Western Balkans. If we look at the former candidate countries there was another alternative discussed and it involved joining the Central European Free Trade Area (See more in *supra* note 37 at 806).

⁴⁰ This debate was recently launched by the Centre for Liberal-Democratic Studies; available at <http://www.clds.rs/newsite/naslovna.html>

⁴¹ The costs of approximation of the environmental *acquis* are often cited in the media as an example of a policy area that is excluded for members of the EEA. This is a wrong conclusion since certain environmental *acquis* refers to safety of products and does form part of the internal market *acquis*.

⁴² Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Human Rights and Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom and Security

The reforms in these policy areas are essential for Serbia to move forward. Not less important is the fact that agriculture is excluded from the EEA although Serbia has a great potential in this area. Furthermore, the EEA is still of minor importance for the Serbian export⁴³. Lastly, being a part of the EEA, Serbia is not participating in the decision-making process, which is an important feature for small countries in order to have their voice heard.

Strengthening relations with Russia is considered by many as the most attractive alternative for Serbia. This tactic is often cited in the daily political debate, especially when the conditionality politics of the EU is viewed as unacceptable. In 2012 this view was justified by economic reasons whereby Russia was invited to invest significantly in Serbia, while in the past it was mostly used when Serbia was facing important political decisions such as the cooperation with the ICTY. Similarly, historical and cultural motives are identified for Russia being a more natural partner for Serbia.

A privileged partnership with the EU was also discussed in the past, although this alternative was never offered to Serbia. Finally, a 'going it alone strategy' is occasionally put forward by those opposing the membership to the EU as a way of preserving the sovereignty and conditionality politics of the EU. Although, there are some arguments to support this view, this is not a feasible option for Serbia. As it was demonstrated on the Slovenian case, "a country following such a strategy must have even more liberal trade policy than if it were member of a regional integration"⁴⁴ and it will anyhow need to undergo political and economic reforms to become competitive on the market. Moreover, the country would need to align its national legislation with the EU *acquis*, without having any input.

3. What explains the negative image of the EU in Serbia?

In the last year there is an increasingly negative perception of the EU in Serbia against a background of persistent ambivalence about the EU membership. This is the result of recent political history in the country. Now and again, various alternatives to the EU are discussed which demonstrates that there is no clear consensus in favour of EU membership. Nonetheless, the EU is still perceived as a main option by the political elite, even with the negative implications connected with EU membership.

This negative perception of the EU in Serbia is primarily due to a misunderstanding or ignorance of the EU and its policies. The lack of information about the EU and Serbia's accession process to the EU is evident from all surveys carried out by the Serbian European Integration Office and other media surveys. For example in 2010, 52 per cent of respondents felt that they are not informed about the country's accession; 30 per cent are neither informed nor uninformed and 19 per cent feel they are informed about the EU.⁴⁵ An average citizen "does not have 'first-hand experience' of the EU, but fully depends on mass media" and government information campaigns.⁴⁶ This is a common problem even in EU Member States, which was especially evident during the various referendums related to the EU. However, as Serbia carries the legacy of conflict and dictatorship, media coverage should

⁴³ Only 0.9 per cent of exports goes to EFTA countries, while 61.9 per cent goes to the EU market; see more on the Republic Statistical Bureau of Serbia web site, available at <http://webrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/00/97/50/st11032013.pdf>

⁴⁴ *Supra note 37* at 807

⁴⁵ *Supra note 10*

⁴⁶ Jürgen Maier and Berthold Rittberger, (2008), 'Shifting Europe's Boundaries: Mass Media, Public Opinion and the Enlargement of the EU', *European Union Politics*, Volume 9 (2): 243–267 at 245

“have a strong impact on citizens’ attitudes to EU enlargement” and may make them more receptive to EU accession.⁴⁷ Moreover, as the Polish experience demonstrated, over time “Polish society became increasingly more rational and less biased to the issues of European integration which was a clear sign of more knowledge about the integrating and pluralistic Europe”.⁴⁸

Likewise, the attitude of successive governments is often unhelpful and fosters a wrong image of the EU and its impact on Serbia. Two main problems should be mentioned in regard to this. Firstly, it seems that every reform taken in almost any policy area is justified by the need to approximate the national legislation and standards with the EU *acquis* and standards. On the other hand, it is always easier for national governments to ‘blame Brussels’ for unpopular or costly measures. Even in areas which fall within the supporting, coordinating or supplementary action competences⁴⁹ and where harmonisation of Member States’ laws is not possible, the government was often justifying its action by referring to the EU integration process.

A particularly peculiar illustration was the decision of the Republic Agency for Postal Services to change all post boxes in residential and business premises in order to ‘implement relevant EU rules’ in 2011, which was much criticised in the media.⁵⁰ It is true that there are voluntary CEN standards regarding apertures of private letter boxes⁵¹ which should help in removing obstacles to free trade, nevertheless the government still has to judge which measures are essential in this phase of accession process to the EU as well as the costs of each measure for citizens. Any reform which requires from the state bodies to organise a procurement of goods, as it would be the case with post boxes, immediately raises suspicion about possible corruption and abuse of official positions for personal gain. This certainly adds to the negative impression about the EU, especially if all new standards mean additional spending for an average citizen at the moment when living standards are low and wages are stagnant. Finally, after reading government statements and speeches in the media one has the impression that Serbia is undertaken reforms due to the pressure from the EU and not because those reforms should be taken anyway as an overall effort of Serbia to go forward.

Secondly, the government often portrays the EU as a source of money and not as an organisation which would help to bring peace and prosperity to the country. It may be often heard in media and stated by politicians that the one of the main reasons to join are the EU structural and cohesion funds. Even in surveys organised by the European Integration Office there is a strong emphasis on EU funds and citizens are aware of EU funds.⁵² Naturally, the Office had to use surveys to inform the citizens on all benefits coming from membership. Moreover, there is no public discourse regarding the future obligations and potential costs of membership. Undoubtedly, the funds are extremely significant for countries such as Serbia where there are large differences in prosperity levels between regions. Nevertheless, this

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* at 261

⁴⁸ *Supra note* 38 at 835

⁴⁹ For example in education

⁵⁰ http://www.b92.net/biz/fokus/analiza.php?yyyy=2011&mm=03&nav_id=503273

⁵¹ See EN 13724:2002 Postal services - Apertures of private letter boxes and letter plates - Requirements and test methods, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/european-standards/harmonised-standards/postal-services/>

⁵² See public opinion poll from 2012, *supra note* 13

approach may be problematic for two reasons. The EU should not be regarded as a 'cash machine'. Moreover, the high expectations of citizens may be put under question if the regional policy is reformed in the meantime as a result of a more stringent EU budget. In addition, citizens have to be aware that integration is a costly process and those costs should be compared with the cost of not joining the EU.

Unlike most member states where a largely pro-European consensus exists amongst the business elite, there is little support for deepening EU integration in the Serbian private sector. This is partly due to the fact that the Serbian economy is not competitive even in areas where it should have a comparative advantage such as agriculture. More significantly the Serbian private sector is dominated by firms that are in essence politically well-connected rent seekers who have no interest or incentive in having a more competitive or liberalised market.

There is another related problem which contributes to the negative image of the EU or lack of sufficient commitment of the EU to the region. As a result of various discussions on alternatives to the EU, certain countries such as Russia are often perceived to be more committed to helping Serbia than the EU, especially in providing financial assistance for various purposes. This view widely shared by citizens is evident from the surveys collected by the European Integration Office. For example, in the survey organised in 2012 citizens were asked to identify countries from the list which were the biggest donors from 2000. The countries were arranged in the following manner: 35 per cent of respondents identified Russia as a biggest donor; 34 per cent identified the EU; 27 per cent stated it was Japan; 18 per cent for China; 13 per cent for USA and 12 per cent for Norway.⁵³ Regrettably, the data are very different and demonstrate that the EU and individual Member States are unquestionably the biggest donors in the last thirteen years. Just as an illustration 78.59 per cent of aid⁵⁴ was provided by the EU and individual member states; 38.48 per cent came from IPA and other EU programmes⁵⁵; 19.16 per cent was provided by Germany; 10.97 per cent by USA; 4.77 per cent by Italy; 3.62 per cent by Sweden; 3.17 per cent by Norway; 2.31 per cent by Switzerland and 1.68 per cent by Japan.⁵⁶ The official data show that Russia does not give any aid to Serbia.

In addition, politicians who do not support Serbian accession to the EU often make a comparison with countries which are already members of the EU in order to show that the conditions for membership and the readiness of the country is not of key importance for a country to become a member. This confirms the view that the EU has double standards for Serbia and that there is no real importance to implementing reforms. Besides, this approach also harms the diplomatic relations with countries such as Bulgaria and Romania as being two countries often cited in this discourse.

Finally, the long and drawn-out process of accession contributes to fall of support to the EU and the negative perception of the EU. This occurred in all candidate countries as the membership process moved forward and the obligations from the membership became more

⁵³ *Supra note 13*

⁵⁴ It is 4.5 million euros

⁵⁵ It is 2.2 million euros

⁵⁶ *Supra note 13*

real.⁵⁷ Citizens in Serbia feel discouraged by the accession process that lies ahead and fear that Serbia will never join the EU. Equally, the attitudes of certain EU Member States raise concerns amongst Serbian citizens and contribute to the negative perception of the EU. Those who have more knowledge of the EU are worried about enlargement fatigue and readiness of EU Member States to accept new members. The statistical data show a declining trend of the support for enlargement in all of the 27 EU Member States, especially when it involves other former Yugoslav republics.⁵⁸ Finally, the impact of the economic crisis on the future of the EU appears to be another concern which affects the support for the membership to the EU.

Aleksandra Čavoški teaches at the Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham. Previously she was a Vice Dean and Professor at Union University School of Law in Belgrade, Serbia and a Visiting Professor at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia and at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Belgrade. She has worked in the Ministry of Justice in Serbia and as a consultant for the World Bank, European Commission and the OSCE.



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⁵⁷ In the last year, the percentage of advocates of immediate accession has declined (by 5 percentage points), while the proportion of those against joining at all rose (by 4 percentage points). See *supra* note 38 at 834;

⁵⁸ See more in *Who Wants More? Attitudes Towards EU Enlargement in Time of Crisis*, EUDO Spotlight 2012/04 • October 2012, available at <http://eudo-publicopinion.eui.eu>