



At the third EU-Serbia Intergovernmental Conference held in Brussels on 18 July 2016, the Republic of Serbia opened negotiating chapters 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (justice, freedom and security).

The opening of the two aforementioned chapters represents a crucial step in the Republic of Serbia's European integration process, because the aim of these chapters is alignment with the *acquis* in the rule of law domain. Following the approach adopted by the EU, in view of their importance, chapters 23 and 24 are opened at the very beginning and closed at the very end of the EU accession negotiations. These are two key chapters, as they encompass the core values the European Union stands for.

The opening of negotiating chapters 23 and 24 implies that the Republic of Serbia would embark with greater intensity on the process of essential alignment with European values and standards in the areas of key relevance for every society and our citizens as well, namely the judiciary, anti-corruption, respect for fundamental and minority rights, freedom of the media, as well as security, primarily with regard to combating organized crime, terrorism, migration, asylum policy, visa policy and cooperation in many areas. The continuation of the accession process sends a strong signal to investors, being an indicator that the Republic of Serbia has made significant progress in these areas, enhancing the security of invested capital, facilitating business operations, and providing guarantees to the business sector as a state governed by the rule of law. Finally, it should be pointed out that the opening of chapters 23 and 24 leads to the conditions being created for the Republic of Serbia to open other reform chapters during the Slovak Presidency of the EU Council, as well as to continue its accession talks, increasing considerably the dynamics of the process.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia is deeply committed to the reform process in the three key areas: rule of law, public administration reform and strengthening of economy. The more we progress in the negotiating process with the EU, the deeper we go into the reform process which also includes implementation of measures having the specific political weight and legitimacy. By opening the essential talks within the key reform and political chapters 23 and 24, the Republic of Serbia has made a major step towards achieving the priority of its foreign policy – full membership of the European Union.