

The rule of law is the fundamental value on which the European Union has been based and as such it is in the focus of the accession process. In its 2012 Strategy and Major Challenges, the EU highlighted the rule of law as the first pillar of its new enlargement policy as well as the need for prospective Member States to demonstrate a proper level of implementation of the regulations and standards in this field during their accession talks. In other words, a country that aspires to join the EU is expected to establish and promote, at an early stage, the proper functioning of key institutions ensuring the rule of law which is crucial for a stable business environment. The European Commission noted certain positive shifts in the rule of law field in Serbia.

Considering that the harmonization with the European standards in the fields of justice and fundamental rights, i.e. justice, freedom and security, which are part of negotiating chapters 23 and 24, is the initial step on that road, the Republic of Serbia attaches great importance to it. Already in late 2013, Serbia completed the screening process (analytical review and assessment of harmonization of the regulations of the Republic of Serbia with the EU acquis and its implementation) for these chapters. Following the adoption of the screening reports by the EU, on 24 July 2014, and invitation to the Republic of Serbia to draft proper action plans, the latter were delivered to the EC in early September 2014.

The European Union will supervise the harmonization and implementation progress of the Republic of Serbia throughout the negotiating process. The progress achieved in the two negotiating chapters will be among the key factors when making a decision on Serbia's admission to EU membership. In line with the EU's new enlargement policy, chapters 23 and 24 will be opened at stage one of the negotiating process, and will be closed at the end, with a view to giving maximum time required for the implementation of reforms in these fields and securing the irreversibility of the reform process.

Chapter 23 covers four thematic units: justice reform, anti-corruption policy, fundamental rights, EU citizens' rights. For more information go to: <http://www.mpravde.gov.rs/tekst/2986/pregovor-i-sa-eu-poglavlja-23-i-24>.
[mpravde.gov.rs](http://www.mpravde.gov.rs) php and <http://www.mpravde.gov.rs>

Chapter 24 covers eleven thematic units: external borders and Schengen system, migration, asylum, visas, police cooperation, combating organized crime and trafficking in people, fight against terrorism and narcotics, judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters and customs cooperation. The EU thereby devotes special attention to the issues of migration, asylum, visa policy and Schengen external borders.

Under the EU Council's decision visas were abolished for the travel of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia to the Schengen Area countries, with effect from 19 December 2009.

However, the use of visa-free regime benefits has presented some challenges already in the initial phase. To a surging number of asylum seekers from the Western Balkan countries, the EU responded four years on by issuing Regulation 1289/2013 amending Regulation 539/2001 and by establishing the mechanism for temporary suspension of visa liberalization with third countries.

Pursuant to provisions of Regulation 1289/2013, endorsed on 11 December 2013 and coming into force on 9 January 2014, any EU Member State may request temporary suspension of visa liberalization regime if it faces, during a six-month period, significant and abrupt increase in the number of irregular migrants, unfounded asylum applications or refused readmission requests by a third country.

A six-month period is being compared with the same period in the previous year or with the six-month period prior the visa liberalization. In the case of Serbia, comparisons with the six-month period prior visa liberalization will be made till 19 December 2016.

The Republic of Serbia submits regular reports to the EC on post-visa liberalization monitoring.

For further information visit: <http://www.mup.gov.rs>