

The Republic of Serbia signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union on 29 April 2008, and the SAA came into force on 1 September 2013.

By means of this Agreement, the Republic of Serbia and the European Union have entered for the first time a stage of relations regulated by an all-embracing agreement, whereby Serbian EU membership prospects have been reaffirmed.

The Republic of Serbia applied for EU membership on 22 December 2009. The European Council passed a decision to grant Serbia the candidate status for EU membership on 1 March 2012, while on 28 June 2013 it decided to open the accession negotiations with the Republic of Serbia.

Course of Accession Negotiations

The Common Position of the European Union (EU) on the accession negotiations with the Republic of Serbia consists of two documents: introductory remarks of the EU at the First Serbia-EU Inter-Governmental Conference and the Negotiating Framework for Serbia's EU accession.

The Negotiating Framework embodies principles, the essence and procedures of the overall negotiating process. The emphasis is laid on the conditions in which a candidate country will embrace and execute the EU *acquis communautaire*, divided into 35 thematic chapters. The EU expects the Republic of Serbia to ensure full implementation of the key reforms and legislation, particularly in judicial reform, the fight against corruption and organized crime, public administration reform, independence of institutions, media reform, non-discrimination and protection of minorities. Particular importance is attached to the harmonization of the dynamic of the negotiating process, i.e. a uniform progress on all chapters. This particularly refers to Chapter 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights) and Chapter 24 (Justice, freedom and security) where progress must follow the dynamic of other chapters. The above-stated procedure will also apply to issues within Chapter 35.

An initial step preceding the opening of each of the 35 chapters, other than Chapter 34 (Institutions) to which it, as a rule, does not apply, is the so-called screening or scanning and analytical review of the relevant legislation in force in the Republic of Serbia and that applicable in the EU.

The analytical review stage of legislation begins with the so-called explanatory screening within which the European Commission presents to the candidate country the EU *acquis communautaire* divided into negotiating chapters, while the level of conformity of the candidate country's legal system with the legal system of the EU is assessed through the so-called bilateral screening. Then, the discrepancies between the two legal systems and measures designed to overcome them are being identified, on the basis of which an implementation Action Plan is being drafted and its timescale defined.

Following the completion of bilateral screening meetings, the European Commission presents its Screening Report to the Member States, containing recommendations on the opening of negotiations for a particular chapter, and, possibly opening benchmarks.

The screening process for the Republic of Serbia lasted from September 2013 to late March 2015. Representatives of the European Commission have underlined that they are pleased with the screenings, for they demonstrated a high level of preparedness and commitment of the Serbian administration to the entire process, and to reforms.

Inter-Governmental Conferences

EU accession negotiations with Serbia formally commenced on 21 January 2014 in Brussels by holding the First Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) on Serbia's EU accession, where representatives of the EU and Serbia exchanged views, and presented the EU Negotiating Framework and the Opening Statement of the Republic of Serbia. IGC may meet in the political format, or at the technical or expert level.

So far, in the course of the negotiating process between the Republic of Serbia and the European Union a total of seven Inter-Governmental Conferences have been held, opening twelve negotiating chapters, of which two were provisionally closed at the same time.

Serbia-EU Inter-Governmental Accession Conferences

1st - 21 January 2014 - Presentation of the EU Negotiating Framework and the Opening Statement of the Republic of Serbia

2nd - 14 December 2015 - Opening of Chapter 32 – Financial control and Chapter 35 – Other issues

3rd - 18 July 2016 - Opening of Chapter 23 - Judiciary and fundamental rights and Chapter 24 - Justice, freedom and security

4th - 13 December 2016 - Chapter 5 – Public procurement was opened, while Chapter 25 – Science and research was opened and provisionally closed at the same time.

5th - 27 February 2017 - Chapter 20 - Enterprise and industrial policy was opened, while Chapter 26 – Education and culture was opened and provisionally closed at the same time.

6th - 20 June 2017 - Opening of Chapter 7 - Intellectual property law and Chapter 29 - Customs union.

7th - 11 December 2017 - Opening of Chapter 6 - Company Law and Chapter 30 – External Relations.

For its part, the Republic of Serbia has intensified its efforts and undertaken all necessary measures and activities to meet the basic requirements to prepare the remaining chapters for opening as soon as possible.

Participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the EU integration process

Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs take an active part in the work of

governmental bodies during the EU integration process.

The First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs is a member of the Coordination Body, charged with discussing major issues and coordinating tasks within the field of responsibility of public administrative authorities throughout the European integration process. **The Coordination Body Council deals with the current issues that arise in the integration process**

, and its membership on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs includes the State Secretary, as Chairperson of the Negotiating Group on Ch.31.

In addition to carrying out the activities in Negotiating Group 31- Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also participates in the work of the following negotiating groups concerning Serbia-EU accession negotiations: Negotiating Group 23 - judiciary and fundamental rights; Negotiating Group 24 – justice, freedom and security; and Negotiating Group 30 – external economic relations.

The State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a member of the Serbian Negotiating Team, and is in charge of conducting negotiations on all chapters and in all stages of negotiations. Moreover, representatives from the Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the EU, serving as the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of the Inter-Governmental Conference, play an active role in the accession process and negotiations.