

**Appeal**  
to the  
**Presidency of the  
European Union**  
and the **European Commission**  
on the Occasion of the  
**EU – Western Balkans  
Summit**

May 6, 2020

# The Need for an Active and Offensive EU Engagement

Like all other European countries and the rest of the world, our country is also faced with dramatic humanitarian, economic and political consequences of the pandemic.

The changes occurring during the pandemic, to which we must respond both collectively and individually, are not new. It is a question of the ongoing processes which were only catalyzed by the crisis.

However, the pandemic prompted the whole world to seek new systemic solutions against it.

We welcome the conclusions of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs brought on 20 April. They are encouraging and instill hope in the EU's ability and resoluteness to jointly seek solutions for the European Union and beyond after the initial unavoidable shock. We emphasize the importance that these solutions also include the Western Balkan countries and recommend the continuation of financing the Western Balkans and provision of support to regional cooperation and full-fledged membership of the Western Balkan countries in the European Union.

Amidst the unprecedented global crisis, the European Union decided to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, and appointed Special Envoy for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue. In this way, it confirmed its stance on the Western Balkans' European future and demonstrated its consistency in conducting EU enlargement strategy (*COM(2018) 65 final*).

Like many other countries, Serbia was also unprepared for a pandemic. Due to its largely collapsed health system and the exodus of health professionals, it resorted to the most rigorous isolation measures on the old continent.

Apart from numerous unavoidable consequences accompanying the anti-pandemic fight, one can also detect the growing of a latent threat to democracy, the rule of law and universal human values. The authoritarian potential also showed its face in some other Western Balkan countries, but it is most pronounced in Serbia. The authoritarian state, its nationalist policy and decision-making centralization in the hands of one man demonstrated all their flaws once again. Without questioning the justifiability of necessary measures, there is a danger that the suspension of democracy and human rights during the epidemic becomes reinforced over a long term; this can call into question not only a comprehensive and long-term anti-pandemic fight, but also Serbia's democratic institutions that are only just emerging. This is also corroborated by the fact that during the epidemic Serbia's political leadership openly turned its back on the EU and European orientation, regardless of its delayed and cosmetic excuses sent to Brussels.

Thanks to its support and incentives, the EU enabled some countries in the region to get out of the ruins of war. It is still the main donor, investor and trade partner of all West Balkan countries. The EU granted €7.5 million and Norway alone granted €5 million. The EU also prepared a package worth €93.4 million by allowing the transfer of unspent funds from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and ongoing projects. It also donated 90 tons of medical equipment.

Due to regressive political trends over the years, the situation in Serbia points to the urgency for taking a more resolute step forward. Serbia's pro-European citizens are aware that the opportunity, like the one in early 2000, should not be missed once again; this also requires a more resolute activation of democratic forces in society. Due to the lack of the domestic democratic potential, a step forward is possible only with the consistent, active and offensive engagement of the EU and its members.

Stability, democratization and peace in the region are impossible without stability, democratization and peace in Serbia. Therefore, we plead that, at the forthcoming (online) EU-West Balkans Summit on 6 May, which is devoted to the current and, probably, long-term-pandemic fight, attention is also given to the special circumstances of democratic stagnation in Serbia. We plead with the EU to pay special attention to the following, and once again:

- Supports the demands of pro-European and democratic forces for the return of parliamentarism to Serbia and that the National Parliament regains its function of a supervisor over the executive authority and the president of the republic;
- Strongly supports progressive and reform-oriented forces such as the new class of entrepreneurs, professional associations in the fields of education, culture, science, health, judiciary and environment, pro-European and anti-nationalist forces and efforts, as well as the part of the civil sector that advocates and promotes European values and Serbia's EU membership as its priority;
- Demands respect for media freedom and provides adequate support to all institutions which inform Serbia's citizens about the EU's values and significance for the development of democracy and better life of citizens, so that the public can get an insight into the EU's true values and the country's development potential within its framework;

Does whatever it can to have the Serbian authorities to enable citizens to be professionally and objectively informed about the COVID-19 pandemic and all measures taken by the EU and its member countries, and not only about the quest for finding a cure in fight against pandemic, but also about all new security, economic, communication and other strategies for organizing life and work under the threat of this invisible enemy;

- Supports and empowers all initiatives and institutions that advocate and fight for Serbia's sustainable development and the application of the mechanisms *Clean Planet for all A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy COM/2018/773 final*;
- And, last but not least, invites as often as possible the pro-European structures in Serbia to participate in EU activities (discussions, panel meetings, briefings) in order to provide better information about Serbia and gain insight into the work and functioning of European institutions.

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