

# SERBIA MADE HUGE EFFORTS



AGREEMENT BETWEEN BELGRADE AND PRIŠTINA HAS SENT A STRONG MESSAGE ACROSS EUROPE ABOUT EUROPEAN ATTITUDE OF BOTH, AND ABOUT THEIR ABILITY TO MOVE BEYOND PAST CONFLICTS

› BY GORDANA RAKOVIĆ › PHOTO MARINA LOPIČIĆ

## INTERVIEW ŠTEFAN FÜLE

EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR ENLARGEMENT AND EUROPEAN NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY

The European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle, in his interview to KGI speaks about the agreement reached between Belgrade and Pristina, the beginning of the EU accession talks and urges the Serbian politicians to be courageous.

› **How do you view the agreement reached between Belgrade and Pristina?**

- It was a major breakthrough in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. This agreement has sent a strong message across Europe about European attitude of both, and about their ability to move beyond past conflicts. It also reflected determination, courage, and willingness to compromise, wisdom and ability to look into the future, well beyond one electoral term. These are all very European virtues. It is a balanced deal that paves the way for a better future of people in both Serbia and Kosovo.

› **Do you think it could have been done previously?**

- This could have been done once both sides were ready to face the issue in this manner, so let's not speculate about the past. Let's focus on implementation of what was agreed.

› **Does Serbia – even without this agreement – deserve to get a date for the start of negotiations?**

- Again, let's not speculate about what would be the situation without

this agreement. The one key priority set by the Member States for Serbia to start the accession negotiations was – visible and sustainable improvement of relations with Kosovo. Our April report concluded that negotiations for EU accession should be opened with Serbia. Agreement between Belgrade and Pristina was a key contribution to it.

› **The Commission has recommended granting a date. Do you think that will eventually happen?**

- This decision is up to the Member States, and I certainly hope that they will be able to follow our recommendation. They will be deciding in June on our

## JUDICIARY FIRST

**Will Serbia first open the chapter on the judiciary?**

- Indeed, resulting from the experience of previous accession negotiations, a new approach to negotiations provides for rule of law issues, including the fight against organized crime and corruption, to be tackled early in the enlargement process, and reaffirms the need for solid track records of reform implementation to be developed throughout the negotiation process, with the aim of ensuring sustainable and lasting reforms. As a consequence, the process of analytical examination of the EU acquis (screening) will begin with the chapters on the judiciary and fundamental rights, and justice, freedom and security,

recommendation to start the accession negotiations, and they will be looking at effective implementation of the agreement between Belgrade and Pristina and also at continuation of efforts in other areas – such as strengthening the rule of law and reforms of the judiciary and the fight against corruption.

› **Information has arrived in Serbia from Germany suggesting that the agreement reached with Pristina is not enough. How would you comment on that?**

- As I explained already – Member States decided that the one key priority for opening of accession negotiations was “visible and sustainable improvement of relations with Kosovo”. Based on the progress made, European Commission recommended to Member States to open the accession negotiations. And the agreement you refer to was reached to be implemented, not to stay on paper.

› **Do you think any countries will oppose the granting of a start date for negotiations?**

- As I said above. For more nuance, you should ask individual Member States.

› **What kind of picture do you think that would give the people of Serbia regarding the EU, especially during this period when interest in joining the EU is falling?**

- Opening of the negotiations would be the strongest possible positive

## SUSTAINABLE PROGRESS

**Which reforms do you believe have been carried out well and which still need work?**

- The Spring Report presented on 22 April showed that Serbia has undertaken to reinvigorate the momentum of reforms in the key areas of the rule of law, particularly judicial reform and anti-corruption policy, independence of key institutions, media freedom, anti-discrimination policy, protection of minorities and business environment. The main task will now be to sustain this progress over time, especially on the rule of law. There is still lot of work to be done in all these important fields.

signal regarding Serbia's future EU membership. Given it would clarify Serbia's future path, it would be a crucial element to convince more investors to come in Serbia and to contribute to its economic development. And negotiation process itself will allow Serbia to better tackle the existing vast challenges in the economy and the functioning of the state and the judiciary.

› **According to your assessment, how will the implementation of the agreement proceed?**

- Let me again avoid speculation and

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just appreciate all the efforts invested by the current Serbian leadership to explain the objectives of the dialogue with Pristina and the merits of this agreement, which includes a set of very solid guarantees for the Serbs living in Kosovo. Implementation of the agreement, thought, is key for its sustainability.

› **What are the next steps Serbia should take on its path to EU integration?**

- If Member States in June decide on opening of accession negotiations with Serbia, European Commission will be invited by the Council to submit a proposal for a framework for negotiations and to carry out the process of analytical examination of the EU acquis (screening). On that basis, we can expect that the first inter-governmental conference would be convened in the course of the second half of 2013.

› **What advice would you give Serbian politicians at this juncture?**

- Courage. Huge efforts have already been made by Serbia, and let me appreciate them here again. Now I would invite Serbian politicians to maintain their full determination towards implementation of the agreement and to pursue reforms. I am fully aware of the extent of their task, but I am also convinced that their full engagement will secure a positive decision at the June Council and that Serbia will turn from a candidate country to a negotiating one. ■