



## Atlantic Treaty Association - Association du Traité Atlantique

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- NOTE -

Re. 1/2013  
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### Serbia Preparing for EU Accession Talks

This is a report from a public conference entitled “Serbia preparing for EU accession talks”, sponsored by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung at the European Parliament, with former President of Serbia Boris Tadić.

#### OVERALL OUTCOMES

- President Tadić firmly asserted his desire for Serbia to enter into EU accession talks in the near future. He also highlighted the progress that Serbia has made in reaching EU benchmarks.
- The general sentiment of the panel was that Serbia is on track to enter into accession talks, although the panelists gave different indications on when this should occur.
- The biggest issues facing Serbia’s accession to the EU involve judicial and economic reform; its engagements in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina; and its overall relations with its neighbors.

#### THE PANEL

**Boris Tadić**, former President of the Republic of Serbia, stressed the reforms that Serbia has made over its thirteen years of democracy as it has strived to modernize and become a more active partner in Europe, noting that much of the debate within Serbian politics today still remains about Serbia’s future on the continent. Critical to this future is the process of reconciliation across the Balkan region. Reconciliation, as Tadić noted, is not just a broad-reaching phenomenon, but rather an individualized process. To do his part as president, Tadić went to Srebrenica in Bosnia to apologize for the atrocities committed there during the Yugoslav war, and also worked with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to find and arrest wartime figures such as Gen. Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić. As a result of this reconciliation and increased cooperation internally, regionally and within Europe, Serbia has been able to tackle organized crime and reform its judiciary. All of these reforms have greatly reduced the risk of violence in the Balkans, and Serbia has acted as a mediator in Bosnia and sought a peaceful means to reach a compromise with Kosovo through Tadić’s four-point plan. Despite these reforms, Serbian accession talks have been continually delayed. At a summit in 2003 in Thessaloniki, the EU promised eventual accession to all western Balkan states; however, while Serbia is economically and historically a viable member, it is often subjected to what Tadić called “unfair and artificial delays.” Often, as Serbia reaches the end of one phase of development, the EU prohibits it from moving on and instead assigns another area for reform. According to Tadić, this adversely affects the EU itself, since it needs to integrate more to recover and complete its enlargement to make Europe whole.



**Maria Eleni Koppa MEP**, Rapporteur on Enlargement of the European Parliament, stressed the importance of Serbian accession to the EU and some of the obstacles still complicating the process. Throughout Europe, contradictions have been made over Serbian membership in both the EU member states and the Balkans, causing a decrease in public support for further enlargement, particularly in Serbia. Rather than continuing to complicate the process, the conditionality of Serbian membership should be strict, but fair and credible. Serbia has proven to be a success for enlargement and its new government has shown concrete signs that it is addressing reform, although it still has many areas of policy to work on before it can be a serious candidate. Serbia must improve its minority rights record for groups like the Roma and LGBT communities, as well as address serious economic problems of unemployment and a lack of trade unions. As a result of President Tadić's success in making Serbia look at itself and atone for past grievances, Serbia will find its way to a common future through EU accession.

**Joost Korte**, Deputy General Director of the Directorate-General of Enlargement, European Commission, stressed the good signs that Serbia has shown as a result of the Tadić administration. Reforms such as the increased dialogue with Kosovo have sent positive signals to the Commission that Serbia is continuing the process of change. Consequently, Serbia's candidacy is significant, particularly in the current environment of enlargement fatigue. Korte noted that, while many polls indicate this fatigue, they are often inaccurate, and the conditions and promises of Serbian accession have not changed since Serbia began the process. The EU has remained active in the Balkans, particularly as High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton has mediated talks between Serbia and Kosovo over sovereignty for the northern parts of Kosovo, a critical component of the peace process between the two entities that has major implications for Serbia's accession. Other issues impacting the eventual accession of Serbia include judicial reform; anti-corruption reform; public administration reform; and public procurement. All of these must be addressed as the process moves forward.

#### THE DISCUSSION

- **Tadić** was asked about the impact of reform on the business community in Serbia, to which he replied that the government in his administration and the new government have sought ways to prepare new business programs to help cope with a reforming economy.
- **Tadić** was asked about the continuing fragility in Bosnia and his administration's work there. He replied that Bosnia is critical for the region and that his political vision for the country is in accordance with Bosnian integrity. Tadić stressed that Bosnia needs integration, but it must be done by the Bosnians themselves, and that only a whole Bosnia could bring stability to the Balkans.
- **Tadić** was asked about some of the political rhetoric coming from Albania in regards to Kosovo. Tadić stated that he opposes any plan for a Greater Albania, not to mention a Greater Serbia or Croatia, since the ethnic populations are so spread out and mixed.
- **Tadić** was asked about the progress Serbia has made and whether or not Serbians are aware of the changes that are necessary for its accession. Tadić responded that there have been serious efforts on the part of the Serbian government to address issues like judicial reform and



corruption. During his administration, a major issue for judicial reform was how to handle Milosevic-era judges. Additionally, Tadić noted the importance of fighting organized crime as a means to combat corruption, which the new government has continued with since taking office.

- **Tadić** was asked about the growing presence of Russian, Chinese, Turkish, and Emirati investments in the Balkans. Tadić said that Serbia has looked for investment partnerships with the US and EU as well, but to no avail. Tadić noted that Serbia is now completing its infrastructure reforms as a result of investments like this, and that they would improve the entire region.