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**RELATIONSHIP WITH RUSSIA "BIGGEST CHALLENGE FOR SERBIA"**

13.07.2016

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This is according to Nathalie Tocci, an adviser to EU foreign policy and security chief Federica Mogherini, and head of the team behind the new EU Global Strategy.

The EU's new foreign policy and security strategy, envisioning an enlargement into the Western Balkans as a key strategic investment for the future, was presented late last month.

"The future of the Western Balkans fully lies in full EU membership and already today, the EU and Serbia face common challenges that can be solved more easily through joint efforts," Tocci told Tanjug in an exclusive interview.

"The Serbia-EU cooperation on migration, energy, border control and the fight against terrorism and organised crime, as well as dealing with key challenges in the common neighbourhood, can accelerate Serbia's progress towards EU membership," Tocci said.

In the accession process, a country is expected to meet all accession criteria and align itself with common European rules through negotiations, which implies both foreign policy and security, she said.

"In that regard, I see the relationship with Russia as the biggest challenge for Serbia - as it gets closer to EU membership, Serbia will be expected to also get closer to the EU in terms of the position regarding Russia, but that is something that cannot happen overnight," she said.

"It is a gradual process of alignment, which the EU expects from Serbia in the accession talks," Tocci explained.

SOURCE: TANJUG

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