
REFORMS, REGIONAL COOPERATION KEY FOR SERBIA'S EU MEMBERSHIP: OFFICIALS

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Serbia needs more rule of law, media freedom and wider regional cooperation in the Western Balkans in its pursuit of European Union (EU) membership, Serbian leaders agreed with EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini during her Thursday's visit.

Mogherini arrived in Belgrade in the afternoon, for the last stop on her Balkan tour, after Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro.

She met Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Prime Minister Ana Brnabic to talk about the recently-presented report of the European Commission on Serbia's progress in the European integrations.

At the press conference after the meeting, Vucic said he regarded the report as partly positive one, as it recognized Serbia's dedication to the accession talks and the EU membership.

"We are ready to work with dedication on improving the area of the rule of law and to hear and implement suggestions of the European Commission in that regard. We feel that this is an important task for our country in order to build a better legal environment, legal certainty, which is good for attracting investors," Vucic said.

He expressed special satisfaction with the Serbia's effort and success in the area of economy, noting that the EU had a significant share in it, as 68 percent of Serbian exports goes to the EU.

Vucic expressed his worries to Mogherini because of the situation in Kosovo and Metohija, Serbia's southern province that unilaterally seceded in 2008. Serbia rejects it and considers Kosovo its own province.

He said Serbia has a different view over the position, compared to most of the EU member countries and Pristina authorities over this issue.

He expressed hope that Mogherini will assist in "evading all difficulties, dangers and obstacles on the path" of normalization of relations with authorities in the province, which is also an obligation within Serbia's EU agenda, contained in the Chapter 35 of the EU acquis.

Mogherini said that it is the high time for the full implementation of agreements already signed between representatives of Belgrade and Pristina, especially the establishment of the Association of Serbian municipalities in Kosovo that is part of the Brussels agreement.

She reminded that Serbia so far opened 12 out of 35 chapters of the EU acquis and estimated that

"prospects are good that opening of new chapters will follow during the Bulgarian chairmanship over the EU".

In 2017, Serbia received 1.5 billion euros (1.85 billion U.S. dollars) of foreign direct investments from the EU member countries, Mogherini said, explaining that it represents 80 percent of total foreign direct investments in Serbia.

She estimated that these numbers "are the spine, and the basis of the road along which the EU and Serbia walk, side by side".

Brnabic and Mogherini at another meeting also discussed the report, and agreed that despite its positive tone, Serbia has to work a lot more in the area of the rule of law and the freedom of the media.

Mogherini said that "the dedication to political and economic cooperation in the region" is of key importance for making faster progress along the EU path.

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