

Open letter
to Boris Tadić, President of the Republic of Serbia, Vojislav Koštunica,
Prime Minister, Oliver Dulić, Chairman of the National Assembly,
and to all parliamentary parties

Distinguished gentlemen, elected representatives of the governing institutions of the Republic of Serbia, we are addressing you as representatives of the civil society deeply concerned over the direction that this country has taken in the recent weeks and months.

We would like to express our fears because Serbia is increasingly distancing itself from integration processes in our surroundings. Within this disturbing development we have noticed numerous incidents in relations with our neighbours which runs counter to good neighbourly relations. In recent months Serbia has threatened to withdraw from some of the most important integrational arrangements which have been toilsomely created in the years following democratic changes in our country, when Serbia enjoyed the image of an integration pillar, as boosting development, and as a key factor for stabilisation in this part of Europe.

Recently there were constant political messages which create anti-Western feelings in the country and lead to an obvious change in foreign policy course. We are very much concerned over Serbia unnecessarily deteriorating relations with the European Union, thus putting into question the accomplishment of one of the key priorities of state policy, which has been defined in the programme of the current coalition Government and was approved by the National Assembly, and has been emphasised as a general orientation also in some basic provisions of Serbia's new Constitution.

We must ask ourselves: how does this policy affect the economic, social and political development of Serbia? Can we neglect the fact that, in the period after the democratic changes in 2000, major support for Serbia's stabilisation and its economic and political development actually came from the EU itself? This support included political, organisational, technical and financial assistance to Serbia's consolidation and her inclusion into European and regional institutions, initiatives and integration processes; this support was aimed at helping our country to swiftly overcome the phase of post-war reconstruction, political and economic stabilization, and to take the direction towards essential system changes and European integration. Can Serbia allow itself to simply reject this kind of support, to reject its European perspective and the stable, balanced and proven framework for cooperation of 27 countries, which include almost all of Serbia's economic and political partners and allies? A framework in which Serbia's voice can be heard, in which she has negotiating powers and enjoys institutional protection, in which she does not depend on any individual country or its benevolence, aspirations or malevolence.

We are expressing our greatest concern over the deterioration of the business climate in our country due to the ambiguous direction which Serbia is taking. In the last three months the risk in doing business was increased, the investors are more cautious, industrial production declined, trade deficit is huge, the inflation pressure is growing, and the citizens are extremely worried because the employment rate declined. Without a serious support, cooperation and further European integration, Serbia could soon face a financial crisis and serious problems related to payments of foreign debts. Is there really an essential alternative? Does Serbia really have enough strength and appropriate support to deal with these problems while

marginalising its European perspective? Are the citizens of Serbia ready to face new risks, uncertainties and restoration of some old alliances, which were tested many times and failed?

Public opinion surveys in the last seven years show that around two thirds of Serbia's citizens are opting for European future, above all because of the perspective it is offering to young generations. This does not mean that there is no perception of the ups and downs that Serbia's relations with the EU went through, that they are not aware of the fact that European integration is a complex process which has both its benefits and costs, and that they neglect the necessity to preserve and further develop good relations with some other important partners in the world, first of all with Russia and China.

In addition, it is important to mention that the European Union has frequently underlined Serbia's good administrative capacities not only to conduct negotiations, but also to meet her obligations. In the EU latest report on our region's progress in regard to European integration, Serbia is among countries that lead the way in that respect and promise a quick integration process. However, recent messages coming from our key institutions show that something important is missing. We have the will of Serbia's citizens to follow the European path, we have the administration's ability to successfully take us in this direction, but do we have the necessary political will to lead this process and actively support it? So we openly ask: Who is interested in slowing down and impeding the European integration of Serbia? And why?

As representatives of the civil society, which for years has been advocating the opening of Serbia, her wide international cooperation and integration, and has actively strived to contribute to this process, we want to inform you about all our fears. We are convinced that a clear political will of both Serbia and the European Union, and a convincing action plan in this regard, contribute the stabilisation of Serbia's political scene and consolidate her democratic institutions; that they further strengthen the country's administrative capacities; that they provide for the maintaining and increasing of European technical and financial support; that they send a positive message to our foreign partners regarding the improvement of the investment climate and the general business climate in Serbia; that they help to consolidate the international and regional position of Serbia and contribute to a more successful fulfilment of Serbia's international and regional obligations. We believe that relations with the European Union based on partnership and mutual understanding represent an essential contribution also to finding an acceptable solution for the status of Kosovo and Metohija, which would oblige all sides to follow the European standards.

We are all facing problems which the previous regime has left behind as its political heritage. However, we must know that by further sacrificing Serbia's economic development the current generations would commit serious harm to the future ones, because they shall have to divert all their efforts and energy to overcome poverty and instability into which the state leadership can push them by decisions which are bound to be made in the nearest future.

We would like to use our voice to help your efforts in making Serbia a stable, prosperous and respected country, which would build on an equal footing and by its own political will the position of a successful member state of the European Union, sharing with other members the European values and respecting her own historical heritage.

Belgrade, January 22nd, 2008

European Movement in Serbia

Civic initiatives

Belgrade centre for Human rights

Belgrade centre for European integration

Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence

Open Society Fund

Group 484

Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina

Association of Free and Independent Trade Unions

Centre for Development of Civil Society

Vojvodina Center for Human Rights

Centre for Regionalism

ProConcept

Civic forum

Center for Development of non profit Sector

International security affairs centre (ISAC fund)

Anglo-Serbian Society

Panonija