

Chancellor Merkel in the Balkans: congratulations for Croatia and conditions for Serbia

Angela Merkel made official visits to Croatia and Serbia on 22–23 August. The main subject was the two countries' EU integration and the intensification of economic co-operation with Germany. The German chancellor emphasised that concessions towards Kosovo were a condition for Serbia to be granted EU candidate status.

Chancellor Merkel congratulated Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor on the finalisation of Croatia's accession negotiations with the EU in June this year and emphasised that Berlin had always supported Croatia's integration with the EU. At the same time, Merkel however made a remark that the numerous problems encountered by German entrepreneurs on the Croatian market proved that the reform process needed to be continued.

The main subject of the talks in Belgrade was on Serbia's prospects for being granted candidate status and the commencement of accession negotiations with the EU. Chancellor Merkel expressed her support for Belgrade's aspirations to join the EU but also put tough conditions to the Serbian government: the negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo must continue and lead to a resolution of disputed issues and the normalisation of relations between the two countries. This will require major concessions from Serbia. Germany also insists that the Serbian government should stop financing the Serb administration and enable the EU's mission, EULEX, to operate in Northern Kosovo, which is inhabited by ethnic Serbs, which in practice would lead to control of this area being taken over by the government in Pristina.

EU member states have not developed a uniform stance on making the granting of the candidate status to Serbia dependent on its co-operation with Pristina. The way Merkel's visit was held indicates that Germany will be headstrong on this issue. This is putting the Serbian government in a difficult situation as it hoped that the arrests of the two last war criminals wanted by the Hague Tribunal would be enough to be granted EU candidate status. Germany has made it clear that the Serbian government will have to change its policy and agree to make more concessions to Kosovo. <MarSz>