Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 1.12.2010 www.osw.waw.pl

Serbia wants to obtain EU membership candidate status during the Polish presidency

Serbia received a membership questionnaire from the European Commission on 24 November. The Serbian government wants to be granted candidate status in the second half of 2011. For this reason it has announced that it will return the completed questionnaire by 1 February 2011 so that the Commission can quickly develop an opinion on the basis of this document regarding Serbia's application for EU membership. However, it may be difficult for Serbia to obtain EU candidate status within this timeline due to its unresolved problems in relations with Kosovo and insufficient co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

The Commission, acting upon the Council's request, on 25 October started preparing an opinion on Serbia's application for membership. The first stage in this process requires the completion of the questionnaire which the EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle presented to the Serbian government in Belgrade. The document includes over 2,400 questions from 33 areas which correspond to negotiation chapters. The answers to be provided by the Serbian government will be used as a basis for the EC's opinion (avis) on Serbia's accession application and later for the EU Council's decision on granting official candidate status to Serbia. It will be a great challenge for Serbia to prepare answers to the questions asked in the questionnaire, considering the scope they cover. Belgrade by undertaking to complete the questionnaire so quickly is emphasising its determination to join the EU and wants to prove that the Serbian administration is efficient and will live up to the requirements of the European integration process.

The completion of the questionnaire alone requires a comprehensive review of the law and state institutions, which will make it easier for the Serbian government to plan further reforms and to accelerate the state's adjustment to EU standards. However, to obtain candidate status, Serbia must prove its engagement in the process of normalising relations with Kosovo and an improvement of co-operation with the ICTY. Furthermore, the general unwillingness for EU enlargement as demonstrated by some member states may also affect the process of granting candidate status to Serbia. <MarSz>