

The Republic of Serbia started the European integration process in January 2014 and has since opened 18 of the 35 chapters, while two chapters have been temporarily closed. Croatia ended its presidency on June 30, during which time Serbia did not open any chapters, and five member states did not agree to open Chapter 2 on freedom of movement for workers. Minister of European Integration Jadranka Joksimović told Insider that Serbia understood that message, and that it was a political decision at a time when Serbia has five chapters ready to open.

Europe understands that processes against European principles are taking place in Serbia, but that despite that, the current government in Serbia tolerates it because it believes that it can and must solve the problem of Kosovo.

Former Provincial Secretary for Interregional Cooperation and Local Self-Government Branislav Bugarski warns for VOICE that the European integration process is very complex, influenced by many factors, but he believes that the process has not been stopped, but that the focus of EU member states and Serbian government is on fighting against the coronavirus virus pandemic. According to Bugarski, the pandemic painted a dilemma in which direction the EU itself will develop and to what extent it will move towards further integration.

He also estimates that the process itself, regardless of the change in the methodology of joining, is complicated and that it is difficult to recognize the social elite that is determined in the fight for Serbia in the EU. Bugarski also says that the process of European integration is not only a matter of official policy, but also of the professional public, non-governmental organizations, and the media.

Bugarski also reminded that the Croatian presidency should have had its focus in the Balkan region, but that in the pandemic, EU members decided on national solutions, which made the Croatian presidency much more complex, so there was no room for the Balkans.

On the other hand, political analyst from Croatia Krešimir Macan for VOICE points out that the process of European integration in Serbia still exists thanks to the Croatian presidency of the EU, which has made enlargement to the Western Balkans one of its priorities. He reminds that the enlargement of the EU was previously put on hold, and that it is now unblocked in the cases of Albania and Northern Macedonia, which, he says, is good for Serbia as well.

He also believes that recent events have spoiled the image of Serbia in the international arena, although not Vučić's image.

Aleksandar Popov from the Center for Regionalism for VOICE estimates that the statements of high state officials about their commitment to European integration only feign

commitment, while in fact their actions show the real state of the European integration process. According to him, that is best seen in the demolition of institutions commanded by Aleksandar Vučić.

He believes that in this way, Europe is trying to force Vučić to do at least one thing - to dedicate himself to solving the problem of Kosovo, because according to the EU, it is entering the end of solving the Kosovo problem.

"Vucic is very aware of that and he knows that as long as he is the main or one of the main players in solving the Kosovo conundrum, he will be seen through his fingers and will not be exposed to other pressures than the pressure to solve the Kosovo problem," Popov said.

Vučić uses the justification in front of the domestic public that he must negotiate on Kosovo because he must not negotiate with great powers like Germany and France.

Branislav Bugarski thinks that looking through his fingers will be quite difficult, because it is certain that the EU, led by Germany and France, wants to close the topic of the conflicts in the Balkans as a whole, in which the relationship between Belgrade and Pristina plays a big role.

He warned that in this area, generations are very easily and quite insanely spent because we are dealing with mythology.

"At the same time, we cannot arrange hospitals in Serbia to be worthy of a human being or cover the roads in Banat with new asphalt. And then, the greatest patriots do not see this as a problem, but discuss myths. For me, patriotism is when it comes to goals such as freedom of expression, democracy, diversity of opinion, modern schools and hospitals, roads that are flat and without holes, modern agriculture, industry and science. Everything else is a distraction from life to fairy tales ", states Bugarski.

Macan points out that Vučić is aware of how difficult the decision on Kosovo is, and that he will try to trade because of that, which he has done well so far.

"It could go in that direction to try to weaken some conditions, but the problem is that every EU member can, if it is dissatisfied with something, put pressure on the situation, despite Kosovo, to be brought to order, like justice." I will say one prognostic sentence for Serbia, and what happened in Croatia, therefore - Croatia entered the European Union when it arrested the Prime Minister ", Macan pointed out.

Our interlocutors do not believe that Serbia could find an alternative to the EU in China and Russia, but they agree that Vučić will try to do everything to continue balancing between Brussels, Beijing and Moscow. Bugarski points out that the suspension of European integration will not happen as long as Serbia is seriously committed to EU membership and working on the reform of society, reminding that Serbian economy and society largely

depend on the EU.

Krešimir Macan calls the balancing between the EU, China and Russia Vučić's pragmatism, in accordance with the saying that two mothers suckle a sweet lamb, with Vučić trying three.

Macan expects that Serbia, ie Vučić, will "continue to dance" among several interested parties in order to get as much as possible from everyone, since he is aware that joining the EU will not be so fast.

Alexander Popov says that international relations are complex and that it is not easy to say "I do not want the EU, I want China". He believes that Vučić is now under pressure and that he is reacting nervously both domestically and internationally, and that he will be in even bigger trouble if he does not receive economic support from Europe for the rehabilitation of the economy after the corona virus.

"In September, a large package of economic assistance to the countries of the Western Balkans will be promoted, which will be conditioned by two things, namely reforms at the domestic level that go in the direction of the rule of law, combating corruption and so on, and another condition is regional cooperation and relations. with the neighbors ", Popov points out, warning that in case there is no money, it will not be crucial for the citizens whether there are media freedoms but whether there is bread.

"And then the 'brothers' Russians can't help. If you look at how much our economy depends on Russia, and how much on the European Union, it is clear that Russia is negligible in that respect. When you're hungry, then you have to turn to the one who has money and who can help you ", Popov points out.

Source: voice.org.rs