

The *Vox Pop on the Questionnaire* was launched by the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights and the media company B92 for two purposes: to give the man in the street an opportunity to present his views and give his answers to some of the questions in the European Commission's Questionnaire, and to indicate its complexity and the detail involved. The citizens were also given the opportunity to suggest questions that they thought should be included in the Questionnaire.

Our selection of 23 questions from the Questionnaire was guided by the idea to cover both the areas the citizens are aware of and the areas, in which most citizens probably have first-hand experience or knowledge. The citizens had the chance to post their replies to the selected questions on B92's website from 30 December 2010 until 20 January 2011.

The 2301 answers to the 23 questions posted on B92's website indicate major popular interest in Serbia's further progress towards EU membership. The respondents' answers to specific questions also reflect the depth of their concern about the situation in those areas.

Although the respondents pointed out the numerous problems they face and are aware of, very few of them oppose EU integration. They are mostly worried about whether and how Serbia will fulfill all the requirements and complete the accession process. Here are only some of the answers, which, in our view, are a good reflection of the difficulties Serbia has in specific areas.

All 2301 answers (in Serbian) are available at www.b92.net.

1. How is the Parliament exercising its legislative functions? Is there a system of verifying, at Parliament level, the compatibility of new legislation with the 'acquis'?

As the highest legislative body, the National Assembly of Serbia is responsible for the adoption of laws in the Republic of Serbia. Its deficiency is reflected in the absence of detailed checks by the Legislative Committee of the compatibility of the submitted drafts with Serbia's Constitution and other laws, let alone the *acquis*, resulting in frequent amendments of the proposed laws and submissions of revised laws to the parliament.

There is no comprehensive analysis of or a possibility to anticipate the impact the newly-adopted laws will have on the lives of the citizens. Voting in the Serbian Assembly boils down to the say-so of the political party presidents, with the deputies simply heeding the opinions of their party leaders, unquestioningly.

(Pedja, 17 January 2011, 21:12)

The Assembly is a machine for proliferating laws agreed by party apparatchiks. A deputy is a no one, does not have integrity, because toeing the party line, not integrity, was the criterion for nomination. Our deputies are the pawns of their parties and the parties are servants of the party leaders; in conclusion, our democratic system is a simulation and there are no authentic representatives of the voters. This is democrature, the system has a democratic facade but an autocratic background. A camouflaged autocracy. Who is your deputy? Who represents you? No one, their mandates are perverted, distorted and disgraced, they are collectors of per diems, budget beneficiaries in the true sense of the word. The people's response is abstention, which is constantly on the rise, but the authorities do not care, as long as they can pilfer and steal, live well, for there are no external pressures, no one is jeopardising us, just keep on talking about the European future and hitting the pockets of the voter masses. That is the motto of this Government and we will have a future only once they step down.

(Gordan, 30 December 2010 18:28)

Amateurish. The latest example is the incompatibility of the 2011 Budget Act and the VAT Act. Many of the adopted laws and by-laws in Serbia are in mutual collision or not in conformity with the *acquis*. A professional body should be set up within the Assembly to deal with these collisions and compatibility with the EU regulations. This body should not comprise deputies, only experts and non-party figures.

(Laslo Fuks, 13 January 2011 09:27)

2. How many political parties are registered in your country? How many of these are represented in Parliament? What percentage of parliamentarians are (a) women and (b) from ethnic and national minorities?

There are over 200 of them, around 30 have representatives in the Assembly, women account for a very small percentage, 20% or 30%, national minorities account for around 1%. I think that they are extremely underrepresented.

(Dragana, 30 December 2010 16:33)

No one knows how many parties there are. We don't even know how many have deputies in the Assembly because they make clans so that we never know who we are voting for – we only end up disappointed to see some marginal politicians in important state offices after the elections. We know women are discriminated against. Out of the 250 deputies, there are maybe 20 women and 10 persons belonging to minorities.

(All Quiet on the Western Front, 30 December 2010 19:34)

It would all be in vain even if all the standards of representation of men and women, persons with disabilities, minority and majority communities recommended by the most expert European committees were fully abided by. The deputies are not accountable to the electorate. The voters do not know who is representing them, because they voted for parties, not for specific candidates. It is absolutely irrelevant how many parties are registered and how many have seats in the Assembly. The fact that there is not one non-party figure in the Assembly is horrifying. The parties divided up Serbia's territory and resources and are relentlessly ravaging them.

(Dimitrije Logdanov, 12 January 2011 15:07)

3. Please describe the overall framework for party and campaign financing, the rules guaranteeing its transparency and provide details on the monitoring of its implementation.

A small share of party financing comes from the state funds, i.e. the budget, while the powerful *nouveau riche* – tycoons are the main financiers and patrons of nearly all political parties, both those in power and those in the opposition. By investing a lot of money in the political parties in power and in the opposition, the tycoons are practically shaping the whole public and political life of the country. They play a crucial role both in the constitution of the government and appointment of ministers and in the adoption of laws in the Assembly, wherefore they enjoy multiple returns on their investments. The transparency of party financing is second to none - everyone clearly understands the above-mentioned financing model, but you package the answer to this question nicely,

along the following lines: Party financing in Serbia is transparent; the budget and donations are the sources of funding.

(Milan, 30 December 2010 14:45)

Party financing is one of the best kept secrets in this country and one of those areas which ALL political parties, both those in power and in the opposition, both the former, existing and future ones, have reached an absolute 100% consensus on – to keep this matter hermetically sealed off and non-transparent to the citizens of this country, particularly its prosecution authorities. For this reason, the way parties are financed may possibly be one of the three strongest generators of corruption and organised crime at the highest level.

(Engine Driver, 30 December 2010 18:05)

Party financing is non-transparent and can only be speculated about. We presume that parties are being financed by those, who are granted monopolies in specific fields, who win public procurement tenders and have precedence during the privatisation - sale of public companies, when these parties come to power. Another source of income is corruption, appointment of party members to senior offices in public companies, out of which money for financing the party is then drawn in various ways. For instance, by selling jobs or selling off company property, which leads to the devastation of those companies allowing the pre-election financiers to buy them later for a song.

(All Quiet on the Western Front, 30 December 2010 19:43)

4. Are there legal uncertainties in relation to property restitution and what are your plans to solve them?

[...]The allegedly democratic authorities' track record confirms that they are not willing to address this issue, because they do not recognise the right to property as a fundamental human right – which is why they do not abide by international documents, their own Constitution (Articles 58 and 59) or the Act on the Declaration and Registration of Seized Property. The Planning and Construction Act merely further supports the disrespect of private property and the absolute chaos in Serbia's legislation, because it allows persons who had never been entitled to own a specific plot of land to acquire ownership of that land... From the viewpoint of the law, it is justified to ask how the allegedly acquired

rights over another's property can be deemed superior to real ownership rights, substantiated by valid ownership documents - something neither Mr. Ilic¹ nor Mr. Oliver Dulic² ever explained to the citizens of this country. In addition, the citizens never received an explanation why the Act on the Declaration and Registration of Seized Property was even adopted in 2005, when, in 2009, the declared property, which a new law on restitution is to return to the real owners, was absolutely unjustifiably ceded to other persons, who were even granted right of ownership!

The main reason for the non-fulfilment of this extremely important EU accession prerequisite lies in the current authorities' irresponsible attitude towards the citizens who had declared the property seized from them. Those in power are obviously not personally laying claim to that property and they are giving precedence to the satisfaction of the interests of people close to them or the tycoons over the satisfaction of general i.e. public interests. Instead of embracing the best practices of countries that had resolved this issue a long time ago, the authorities are constantly privatising and selling off the declared property, which is why they are, logically, opposed to the natural restitution of property, to avoid their own responsibility for such conduct, which all of Serbia's tax payers will ultimately have to pay for. If the authorities were committed to the satisfaction of justice and protection of private property, they would have prohibited the disposal of the property declared pursuant to the Act on the Declaration and Registration of the Seized Property, or the Government would have enacted a decree to that effect, pending the adoption of a law on its restitution to the real owners or their heirs. Since this has not been done yet, we are still witnessing disposal and alienation of another's property on an everyday basis, while the citizens are totally deprived of their ownership rights - as if we were still living in the former socialist system, not the 21st century, despite the authorities' declarative commitment to EU accession.

Furthermore, talk of property restitution is increasingly boiling down solely to the restitution of nationalised property, although official Directorate for the Property of the Republic of Serbia data show that only 15.8% of all property, declared pursuant to the Act on the Declaration and Registration of Seized Property, had been expropriated[...] The real question is whether EU institutions can even understand the meaning of the concept of so-called socially-owned property, which used to be everyone's and no one's and which should on no account be equated with private property that may be inherited and disposed of freely. Unfortunately, that Draft Denationalisation Act was supported uncritically and without reservation also by some civic associations, which did not take into account all the aspects of the law, the interests of all damaged citizens or the satisfaction of justice...

For all these reasons, I believe that EU institutions have a huge responsibility for resolving this issue, because, unfortunately, our authorities cannot be allowed to

¹ Former Minister for Capital Investments Velimir Ilic

² Current Environment and Spatial Planning Minister

address this problem the way the media are saying they will – because it is detrimental to the interests of citizens of this country, who should not be paying for their irresponsibility tomorrow, when the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg rules in favour of the damaged citizens and orders Serbia to pay them compensation. (Bojana Bukorovoć, 10 January 2011 15:15)

[...]There are many reasons to believe that the above positive views on the need to adopt a law on restitution by all the coalitions in power to date were merely declaratory, that none of them honestly intended to enact such a law, and that the rhetorical support to restitution has been and still is used for self promotion, mostly in election years, with the aim of winning the votes of the citizens whose property had been seized, and keeping the citizens in the belief that the law will be adopted, and simultaneously reassuring the international institutions, which have also pointed out the inevitability of the adoption of this law, that they were addressing the issue.

The property, which should have been the object of restitution, has at the same time been intensively, and often unlawfully, alienated from state or social ownership, primarily through privatisation and land ownership transformation, by which illegally acquired property is once again being alienated, to further complicate the legal property relations and ultimately preclude natural restitution, which is the most desirable option for both the former owners, the state and its budget, and the citizens as tax-payers[...]

The current ruling elite is telling the citizens and international community that it, too, is committed to the adoption of a law on restitution, but that it is allegedly still undecided about the model of restitution. It is, however, sending out signals that financial compensation is more realistic, which is absolutely untrue. The ruling coalition is at the same time hurriedly adopting regulations allowing the continuation of the trend. To recall, during the procedure of land ownership transformation, the current governing coalition enacted the PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION ACT (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No.72/09 of 3 September 2009), which came into force on 11 September 2009 – in an attempt to preclude the natural restitution of urban construction land. Fortunately for the citizens, this Act is inapplicable and, thus, cannot achieve the desired aim [...]

If the resolution of this issue is ceded to Serbia, it will not be resolved, because a law on restitution will not be adopted, or, even worse, because the authorities will pass a law on restitution again damaging and humiliating the citizens of Serbia, offering them only crumbs from an already empty table.

(Lawyer Sonja Spasović, Belgrade, 10 January 2011 09:48)

5. Describe the legislative basis for the keeping of animals in zoos. Does a system for inspections and licensing exist for these types of establishments?

The procurement of animals in Serbia is anything but regulated. How would it otherwise be possible to “steal” an alligator from the Belgrade Zoo? Or, would the Jagodina Zoo have acquired a giraffe if it hadn’t been necessary to support a specific political option?
(Aleksandar, 30 December 2010 16:25)

The Zoo is the saddest institution in Belgrade. Animals live in 3 square metres. If there is a system for inspections at all, it must be very sick.
(Barb, 13 January 2011 07:59)

I don’t go to the Zoo because it’s sad to watch those animals in their state of misery...
(Sport Bili, 30 December 2010 16:20)

6. Animal welfare: Please provide information for.., laying hens including information on conditions of production of ... animals during transport.

Gentlemen, a lot of attention is devoted to animals here, much more than to people, so that, perhaps, this question has not been formulated correctly. There are many more hungry people than hungry hens and the number of human casualties in transport is much higher than the number of casualties among hens.
(Željko Negovanović, 12 January 2011 09:41)

You put them in a Wartburg or Passat and drive them....
(Mare, 31 December 2010 12:03)

Conditions of production and transport are regulated in the registered companies, but a large share of this sector is in the “grey zone” because the inspectorates are not doing their job well and are corruption-prone.
(Goran Mijalkovic, 30 December 2010 19:38)

7. How are civil servants and public employees recruited (on national, regional and local level)? Are recruitment and promotion based on merit and competence?

Recruitment of civil servants is primarily based on party affiliation criteria, followed by the recruitment of family, best men, friends. Hardly any of the people hired in this way are really competent and professional. There are numerous examples – from first appointing a party office secretary lacking the required qualifications to the management board of a state company and then appointing her advisor to the mayor.

During her recent appearance in the (political talk show) *Impression of the Week* on TV B92, Prof. Dr. Srbijanka Turajlic said that her friend saw a map of Serbia the Democratic Party has, showing all companies headed by its party members in all regions and towns, with their contact details – to facilitate agreement and control. No matter who is in power – the state is coming under the full control of the ruling parties and coalitions, because they are automatically given all the senior posts in the public institutions (directors, department heads, managing and supervisory board members...). They then hire more of their own men and dismiss some of the workers they “inherited”.

Every election and change of government results in a total change of the senior management staff. No matter how competent someone is, he cannot get a job in a state company unless he is a member of a ruling party and vice versa, those who are competent and are already holding senior posts cannot keep their jobs unless they join a ruling party.

In result, quite a few of the people sitting on the management boards of extremely important state companies either lack the required education or have degrees irrelevant to their positions.

This has for years now been leading to the creation of an unwholesome atmosphere in the country, in which a large number of citizens have decided to join a major political party, not because they want to involve themselves in politics or agree with the party programme, but to secure themselves a job, at any salary.

Furthermore, people recruited in this way – and this is how the vast majority of the state sector staff got their jobs – are not entitled to their own opinion or the freedom to express their views, because if they do, they are immediately threatened with dismissal and replacement by someone else (who is better at toeing the line).

This has gone so far that even cultural institutions are controlled by the ruling political party. The image sent out in this way is that harmony and like-mindedness reign and that everything is in perfect order, which is far from the truth and defies sound logic. All criticism is immediately muffled and manipulating of the illusion of the state’s progress and development continues.

(Nataša, 9 January 2011 13:10)

Civil servants and public employees at all levels are recruited exclusively by string-pulling, either by bribing a state official or through membership in a specific political party... it’s immaterial! Workers in the Finance Ministry and its institutions are first hired on a fixed-term basis and then recruited on a permanent basis if permanent jobs are advertised; outside candidates are invited to the interviews just to satisfy the formal requirements. As far as the other part of the question is concerned, the opportunities for promotion of permanent job-holders are minimal, not to say abject... I won’t even go into competence ... The main reason lies in the fact that people are appointed to such positions only on fixed-term contracts and that there are, unfortunately, no promotion opportunities for staff with open-ended contracts It should also be noted that

workers with fixed-term contracts are referred for advanced professional training courses... which never used to happen before, but anything is possible with the current authorities...

(Velja80, 30 December 2010 19:24)

Recruitment of civil servants is conducted in two simple steps: Step 1: join a political party (any party); Step 2: Look for a job.

Nothing else matters after that, your small salary is regularly paid out, you pay part of it into the party coffers, and when those "above" summon you, you unquestioningly "get the paperwork done" for a former foreign currency dealer or petrol smuggler, now an eminent local businessman. Every once in a while, you do your relative or a friend a small favour.

(Crazy Milojko, 20 January 2011 09:09)

8. Is there a labour inspectorate responsible for the monitoring of working conditions and the application of labour law?

The labour inspectorate unfortunately exists. It is a service that tries to bring dissatisfied workers into line by carefully chosen words with the consent of/in collusion with the employers. The situation in our companies - the unpaid overtime, the difficult and unhealthy working conditions, etc...I could go on and on - is sufficient testimony of how this service works. The existence of all these problems notwithstanding the existence of this state service leads us to despair, because it demonstrates the extent to which we are unprotected, left to fend for ourselves, how devalued we are under this state.

(Željko Negovanović, 12 January 2011 09:48)

I know for a fact that there are labour inspectorates in every municipality. When you turn to them, if a larger company is at issue, they refer you to the courts and say they will then react, and when you show them the lawsuit you filed, they breathe a sigh of relief and tell you that the court will definitely resolve the problem. They act that way because they were hired as cadres of the party, which the company owner belongs or donates funds to, and they do not dare punish him. The workers usually get the short end of the stick and no protection.

(rassa, 7 January 2011 19:14)

Even if it exists, it is not doing its job well. How else can one explain the cases of exploitation of workers working up to 16 hours a day? They must agree to such working hours because they are threatened with dismissal. Many tycoon-owned companies prohibit their workers from associating in trade unions. This is capitalism at its cruellest and most brutal. No wonder most people are nostalgic for socialism, the good legacies of which have been totally destroyed and anathematised. "Stand up, prisoners of

hunger!"

(Dusanka Pekic, 5 January 2011 01:04)

9. What is the maximum weekly working time?

Well, it depends on the company, but the average is 56 hours.

Most private companies work 60 hours a week on average but declare 40-hour weeks.

(Rodoljub, 20 January 2011 09:20)

State sector – three hours a day effectively, eight hours a day on paper. Saturdays, Sundays, holidays (religious and public), patron saint days, weddings, army send-off parties, baptisms are always non-working days.

Private sector – 10 or more hours a day effectively, eight hours a day on paper. Three days a month off at most (but not every month).

The working week in Serbia is 40 hours, "on paper".

(Director, 18 January 2011 16:41)

Well, this is a purely academic question. Depends where.

If a state institution providing public services is at issue, 2 hours a day or 10 hours a week at most. Even less in case of mayors, ministers, parliamentarians and management board members, because they are too busy running their private media and billboard advertising companies

Health institutions work longer hours, the police, too. But truth be told, the police patrol only those parts of the city and state where they can smack fines and drain money from people the most easily. They don't venture into the parts where organised crime and the mafia are sitting, because the State Security has forbidden them to, plus it can be life-endangering.

If you are employed in a private company, then you don't even ask about all that work exceeding 40 hours a week, it's simply considered bad taste, like asking a lady her age or a minister or tycoon how he earned his "first million".

(Djape 6 October³, 30 December 2010 14:09)

³ Reference to the day that was expected to ensue after the toppling of Milosevic's regime on 5 October 2000. Many are of the view that it never came.

10. In what way is the payment of wages and salaries guaranteed?

These issues are impeccably regulated by the law. But, things are entirely different in practice. The essence of the problem in the private sector lies in the collective agreement, which was composed to the detriment of the workers, because the salary is fixed at the legal minimum to reduce the contributions the employer must pay the state and the rest of the salary is paid out in cash. As the part of the salary paid out in cash is not subject to the contract, the employer does not have to abide by the payroll deadlines laid down in the contract and the cash payments depend on his good will, the amount of money on the company account, etc. This practice is the most widespread in the services sector, where the workers themselves agree to a contract fixing the salary at the legal minimum. In their view, even this is better than not being registered at all, because they at least have health insurance. The direst negative repercussions of this salary payment system are felt when the worker, who had worked under such a contract, fulfils the retirement eligibility criteria, because his pension is calculated on the basis of the employer's contributions to the Pension and Disability Insurance Fund, i.e. the average gross salary, which is extremely low and the worker, consequently, will be getting a lower pension. The same rules apply to overtime and days off, because the contract provisions are totally disregarded and the worker is powerless and dare not fight for his rights, because his only goal is to keep his job as he has no other options. The State is not the only one to blame for this situation. Another issue arising here regards the power of the trade union as the key factor that should stand up in the defence of workers' rights. The trade unions in Serbia are still insufficiently organised and they are instrumentalised by some interest groups, which is why they cannot act as the mainstay of workers' rights. The State must react by prescribing greater oversight by/of the labour inspectorate. Unfortunately, only workers, who have already been dismissed or quit their jobs, are willing to give statements that would be valid for punishing employers acting in this way, while those who still have jobs are unwilling to testify against them in fear of losing their jobs.

(Dalibor, 31 December 2010 09:41)

A private lawsuit filed by the worker is the only real guarantee. Of course, when it comes to that, he can kiss his current job goodbye. And, he will have trouble finding a job elsewhere, because there is quite a lot of mutual solidarity among employers when workers are at issue.

(Sandžaklija, 3 January 2011 23:16)

Well, they are, it's not like they aren't guaranteed. For instance, when I started working, my boss told me "I've never owed a cent to anyone". When I asked him for the meal allowance, he said "Feel free to bring something from home, we'll install a hotplate here so you can warm it up", when I asked him for the monthly bus pass, he replied... "Please don't tell me you actually pay the fare"....)))

(vladica, 30 December 2010 23:01)

11. Have there been important strikes, demonstrations or conflicts in recent years?

Strikes are sporadic, poorly organised and, thus, ineffective. Trade union leaders are corrupt and the workers are left to fend for themselves. As far as demonstrations are concerned, they have recently been organised by clerical-fascist organisations supported by like-minded parties, to defend war criminals. The last conflicts that broke out were over the gay parade.

(Dusanka Pekic, 5 January 2011 01:37)

There are strikes occasionally. There have been conflicts. These conflicts are organised by rightist (nationalist) parties opposing Serbia's EU accession, who want to send Serbia back to the dark 1990s.

(Nevenka Petkovic, 20 January 2011 11:56)

Our trade unions are partners of the government and their only role is to cushion the fury of the workers and prevent the escalation of dissatisfaction. Strikes are staged only by those, who no longer have anything to eat, and they then declare that a hunger strike...

(Željko Negovanović, 12 January 2011 09:54)

12. Are there pension finance projections for the future?

There are projections – that there will be no pensions. People who have worked for years are now afraid that they will not be getting even the current pittance. The money in the pension fund was “lent out” for years and inevitably had to come to an end. It wouldn't be that horrible if the economy could cover that shortfall, but, unfortunately...

(Tatjana, 20 January 2011 10:03)

There are projections – my generation (born around 1970) will not get a single pension. We will either die before that or there will not be a dinar left in the funds by the time

we reach retirement. This is why the ministers are advising us to opt for private pension and health schemes. But those of us, who heed their advice, will not be getting our gross salaries and will have to pay double – the state will be taking what it needs from the gross salaries and we will be paying for the private funds so that we can have at least some health care and a pension before we croak. I am sorry, I was unable to find a more suitable word than croak – my generation of recruits was the first since WWII to be given a gun to shoot from and the last to get jobs. I presume we will also be the first not to get pensions. It is written in our stars:).

(Peđa, 30 December 2010 20:31)

Serbia is a unique country in the world that has pensioners in power. We have a pensioner holding the office of Deputy Prime Minister, and his son, also a pensioner, who is the Deputy Mayor of Belgrade (I think that both are receiving their pensions in addition to the state salaries). This is unprecedented and cannot even be found in STRADIJA by Radoje Domanovic⁴. These pensioners are looking after pensions very well, even at the expense of women on pregnancy and maternity leave (see their recent proposal). This is why Serbia's already poor birth rate has further dropped in the past few years, because the state protects the pensioners and not the young. Pensioners get their pensions regularly and have a lot of benefits, which is why they have an easier time getting bank loans. On the other hand, the young have great difficulties finding a job, and those who have jobs are not paid their salaries or get them with a delay, which is why they have a hard time getting bank loans and starting a family.
(Goran, 31 December 2010 22:05)

13. What are the main challenges for the old-age security of your country in the future?

The financing of the pension and health systems. I doubt the pension and health systems will be sustainable -- the current worker to pensioner ratio is 1:1 and is likely to continue shrinking.

(Jasmina Miljkovic, 20 January 2011 08:34)

⁴ Famous Serbian 19th century satirist.

There is no doubt that the main challenge is to provide adequate protection to the elderly not living in larger towns and cities and exposed to social exclusion and isolation in every sense of the word.

(Anja, 9 January 2011 23:56)

The failure of big companies with big workforces to declare the real incomes of their workers. They declare lower salaries and pay contributions on them and pay the rest out in cash, which is why there will be less and less money in the pension fund.

(Katjusa, 31 December 2010 00:18)

14. What is your estimation of your grey economy and how do you calculate it?

A major evil. I estimate it at around 70%. The leading tycoons have companies registered abroad and thus avoid paying taxes in Serbia. There are no laws to prevent this. The authorities are doing nothing, while honest companies are imposed huge levies to fill the budget. If this were regulated by law, we would not have a deficit in the budget. Serbia is a rich country but has the misfortune of having a bad government. I am, above all, referring to the ministries of economy, trade.... Many are not paying taxes; one of them is the Serbian Orthodox Church, which is running its own estates and companies (where do you, priests, think are you living and which hell will you go to?).

(Dusanka Pekic, 5 January 2011 02:10)

It is impossible to establish how much of Serbia's economy is in the grey area, but there is no doubt that Serbia ranks supreme in Europe. Only a small part of business operations is conducted legally. In my last job, 50% of my salary was being paid on my bank account and that part was declared as my official salary on which my employer paid contributions. I was getting the other 50% in cash, i.e. grey money. From 2005 to 2007, I worked in a company that had not registered me, which means that I was 100% in the grey economy. I was dismissed three months ago and the freelance jobs I have since been doing to make ends meet are not registered, i.e. they are grey economy jobs. The state has neither the power nor the will to resolve the problem of grey economy. No one can estimate or control the flow of grey off-shore money into and from Serbia, but there is much more of such money around than the official bank balances show.

(vladimir, 16 January 2011 17:21)

The grey economy was artificially created by the authorities and has been preserved and nurtured for many years now to maintain social peace. As far as its estimation is concerned, only those who created it in the first place can estimate it.

(Zika Peric, 11 January 2011 14:54)

15. Please provide Internet access rates for schools and households.

The Internet access rate in Serbia averages at around 45% (it stands at 85% in Belgrade, at 50% in the metropolitan areas and at 8% in the non-metropolitan areas i.e. most of the country), we have the lowest Internet speed and the highest Internet prices in the region.

The household internet access rate is higher.

High schools have classrooms with PCs in them, but these classrooms are usually locked because the PCs have Internet access. There is no Internet access in primary schools. Colleges and universities have Internet access and use it.

(Zoki, 30 December 2010 20:17)

Ha, ha, ha, we had Internet access in school but we weren't allowed to use it. Our teacher told us that the Ministry had not laid work on the Internet down in the curriculum...

(Jovan, 9 January 2011 23:58)

The Internet access rate would be higher in Serbia if there were no monopolies. For example, in neighbouring Bulgaria, an ADSL 20Mbps/1Mbps package costs around 700 dinars a month, while we in Serbia have to pay twice as much, 1400 dinars, for the 1Mbps/0.128Mbps package. This means that Bulgarians get a 20 times faster Internet connection speed for half the money. Monopoly is the chief obstacle to higher Internet access rates – the abolition of the monopoly will result in cheaper and better quality Internet and a higher number of Internet users
(Dragan Gligorijevic, 16 January 2011 15:00)

16. Please provide information on how, and to what extent, the right to education is guaranteed in legislative and practical terms.

I believe that it is guaranteed in legislative but not in practical terms. There are definitely many families, particularly Roma families, which do not send their children to school. The community should engage itself much more on that issue.
(Milan Dukić, 3 January 2011 19:50)

It is guaranteed by the Constitution but it is accessible mostly to better-off families because it requires a lot of money, which fewer and fewer citizens can allocate.
(Goran Mijalkovic, 30 December 2010 19:15)

Buying a college diploma in Serbia has never been easier, because our minister is the co-owner of the leading manufacturer of university diplomas in Serbia – Megatrend.
(The people, 20 January 2011 10:43)

17. What are in your view the particular challenges/priorities for Serbia's economic policy, including in the context of the global post-crisis recovery, and how do you intend to tackle them?

THINK UP AN EXCUSE TO TAKE ANOTHER LOAN ☹ The state has to stop being an employer, it is the sole employer now. It has to listen to the businessmen and the citizens, create prerequisites ensuring that as many people as possible work, without interference from the state. Over 200,000 private companies, most of them small, were opened since private business was allowed. Everything has been devastated and the few enterprises still working will have to shut down. Trade monopolies, mishandled privatisations, severed links between SMEs and big companies, inability to export goods, import liberalisation, implementation of the SAA, huge debts to the economy and manufacturers or overly long recovery deadlines, corruption, high levies – all these hinder economic development. So does planning based on statistical data rather than on the real situation on the ground, the unrealistic projections of inflation compared to real inflation, blurring the real situation. The man in the street sees and knows more than the state policy makers. All this shows what the state should do.

(Lili, 30 December 2010 18:46)

There are many challenges/priorities (but few opportunities). The following needs to be done for Serbia to pull out of the crisis:

1. Abolish monopolies
2. Eradicate bribery and corruption, Serbia's sorest spot!
3. Downsize the hugely oversized administrative apparatus and lay off surplus labour in public companies
4. Recruit young, smart and educated people for the key posts and dismiss the semi-literate party yes-sayers
5. Fine every politician if it turns out that the promise he made during the election campaign was a lie

6. Increase public safety in the streets
7. Work more with aggressive school-children
8. Put killers and criminals behind bars instead of setting them free, even on account of their past "merits"
9. Investigate the origin of the tycoons' property
10. Investigate former false privatisations and large-scale money laundering
11. Finally build the roads promised us already a hundred times and investigate the money laundering linked to their construction
12. Investigate all those protecting criminals and punish them in accordance with EU standards
13. Prevent one person from sitting on two or three management boards at a time
14. Invest more in the education of the young, not only in theoretical but in practical education as well
15. Eradicate the drug mafia, the silent killers of our children
16. Tax the untouchables such as church communities (all of them) and casinos
17. Boost the employment of both the young and the older
18. Cut real estate taxes and ensure that the other half of Serbia pays them as well, instead of constantly increasing the taxes paid by us, who have been paying them for years
19. Laws should apply to everyone, there should be no untouchables
20. Appoint courageous and unbending judges instead of those who "do not want antagonise anyone"
21. Raise the general culture via the media
22. Fight against prejudice, such as xenophobia, et al.
23. Introduce uniform pensions like nearly all EU countries have, to replace the current ones, ranging from around 8,500 to 75,000 dinars.
24. Investigate abuses in the awardance of national retirement allowances to exceptional artists.
25. Change deputies every four years to replace the "current" ones with "life tenure"

The rest will ensue naturally...

(Man in the street, 5 January 2011 14:35)

We do not have a long-term development strategy in hardly any walk of life. We live from one day to another, both as a state and, consequently, as individuals. Agriculture is our chance but it seems to me that we are ashamed of being an agricultural country.
(Verica, 30 December 2010 18:51)

18. To what extent is it possible to complete administrative procedures electronically?

Ha, ha, good joke. The real question is to what extent it is possible to complete them in any way. Explain to the EU that here you have to take the bus to the village you were born in to get your birth certificate, and then wait for the local clerk to come back from the pub and issue you the certificate. You have to go to the place you got married in to get your marriage certificate, no matter where you're living now, etc. You have to spend hours, days, waiting in line for your passport, ID, driver's licence... You have to wait in line at the post office to pay the administrative taxes and then go back and wait in line for the document. And you may actually be lucky and get your document if all the clerks are in a good mood and haven't caught you glowering at them for returning late from their break or for smudging your documents with their fingers greasy from the pastry they are eating. Definitely electronic.
(Kole, 30 December 2010 14:22)

Many administrative procedures cannot be completed even by personal contact, let alone electronically, because the employed clerks are either uninformed or "will not work for the miserly salary they are paid".

(Bojana, 3 January 2011 16:27)

With the exception of a few municipalities with websites allowing online applications (but we must also call them up afterwards to confirm receipt of our application?????) - nothing else can be completed electronically. Even the so-called digitalisation of personal documents necessitates in us submitting the paper certificates, which the MIA staff then scans (?????) and files in its records. Therefore, they were unable even to agree on the exchange of information with the municipal registries The only thing at issue here is the administration's fear of losing power: I have the information, I charge the taxes, therefore I am.

The Pristina birth/death/marriage registers are the most blatant example. There are only paper copies of these certificates and you can obtain them personally or by post, but it

takes them at least three weeks to arrive by post and, after three follow-up calls at that.

None of the other administrative procedures - regarding companies, entrepreneurs, work - can be completed electronically. Nor will this option be available any time soon, not at this rate.
(Ivan, 8 January 2011 15:39)

19. What is the average duration of (a) a civil case, (b) a penal case and (c) administrative law cases?

The duration of court cases is, indeed, a major problem of the judiciary, but not all the blame should be laid on the judge. The duration of the cases also depends a lot on the parties to the proceedings, the applicable law, and the other authorities acting on court orders (police, court experts, lawyers, social care centres, etc). Efficiency does not depend on the efficiency of the judge, a judge must adjudicate by applying the procedure laid down in the law and judges do not adopt the laws. Unfortunately, no one asks them what they think of the laws before they are submitted for adoption, which is a big mistake, because the judges and prosecutors applying the laws are best able to identify their shortcomings, loopholes and ambiguities.

(Sladjana, 30 December 2010 22:23)

The problem sometimes does not lie in the duration of the lawsuit or in the court judgement, but in the state's lack of means to enforce those judgements. Civil and criminal judgements are difficult to enforce although I happen to know that some past judgements were politically motivated and that obviously guilty people were acquitted, probably because they would have publicly revealed information about some individuals had they been convicted, information that would have greatly damaged those individuals, as well as the state, because they were in senior state positions.

(Radoslav Maric, 30 December 2010 17:14)

The duration of a case depends on the strings you can pull and your party affiliation.

(Dragana, 30 December 2010 17:00)

20. Are there any areas where corruption is more prominent?

This question should be reformulated in the following way: "Are there any areas where corruption is less prominent?"

(Ivica, 30 December 2010 14:26)

Yes, in the following areas:

Government and ministries

Parliament/National Assembly

State administration

State organisations

State agencies

Municipalities

Local community offices

Intelligence agency

Police

Army

Health system

Economy

State and private factories, companies, etc.

Sports

This is the short list.

The real list is 200 pages long.

(Pancevo resident, 30 December 2010 21:24)

Corruption is not more prominent in any area. All areas are equally and amply corrupt, from the grocery store, where you have to grease the attendant to stash milk for you under the counter, to corruption at the very top, among ministers, deputies, those authorised to organise tenders, public procurement and the like. Long live the thrifty Serbian authorities!

(Radasin, 30 December 2010 14:10)

21. Are there any specific policies, programmes, strategies, etc. tackling racism and xenophobia?

Yes, deputy mandates and government positions go to the most intransigent extremists, acutely qualified as such and nominated for them by the security services. Yes, there are: when you in the EU wag your finger at us, then all the local politicians pretend to rise in the protection of the jeopardised minorities.

(Aleksandar, 30 December 2010 16:46)

There are programmes, but only formally. For the newspapers and for Europe. But, who really cares about broad horizons? The people are wretched and stupid. Where there is no bread, national feelings grow stronger, three fingers are raised in salute, the Chetnik anthem is sung and the Serbs are said to be the most ancient, the chosen people ... blah, blah, blah... We thought that this had passed after the Milosevic era - BUT IT HAS NOT - YOUNG PEOPLE NOW GOING TO COLLEGE HAVE VERY NARROW HORIZONS AND ALL THIS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE FAMILY. WOE to us if our top priority is to have SERBS rank first on world tennis player lists, although they have nothing to eat. The RTS⁵ and the politicians are among the main manipulators and beneficiaries of total chaos.

(Ladislav, 3 January 2011 19:28)

There are institutions encouraging these processes instead of tackling them.
(A.N. Other, 30 December 2010 15:57)

22. Is there civilian control over the security forces, including intelligence services, and how is it exercised?

Institutional oversight mechanisms in Serbia are extremely weak, not only with respect to oversight of the army and intelligence services, but of other institutions as well. No one heeds the reports of the Access to Information Commissioner, the Anti-Corruption Agency, the State Audit Institution. All these and other regulatory institutions were established *pro forma* and have hardly any effect on the work of the state institutions!

(Sergio, 31 December 2010 00:21)

There is a law regulating this area but there is no one to enforce it, just as there is no one to apply other laws regulating other matters, and control is exercised by the very people

⁵ Public service broadcaster Radio Television Serbia

who should be subjected to control. The “if you don’t touch me, I won’t touch you” code.

(Fedja, 9 January 2011 12:01)

There is only party control, like in all other areas. If we view political parties as civilian organisations, then you could say that there is civilian control. The problem is that the party and intelligence structures in the state are deeply permeated by corruption and criminalised.

(Stop Corruption, 30 December 2010 19:21)

23. What is the public sector's share in the economy? What sectors are still controlled and/or owned by the state and to what extent?

All sectors of the economy bringing in lots of money are controlled by the state i.e. the people in power who perceive all this as a chance to gain personal benefits. Control is exercised either directly or through players willing to do the dirty work in exchange for some power, glory or money, and who later become protected witnesses and are provided with adequate security by the state. DISGRACE!

(Predrag Bojovic, 20 January 2011 09:46)

The State is by far the most indebted entity in Serbia. All State programmes for reviving the economy and boosting economic development are several times smaller than its debts to that very economy. Economic recovery would be facilitated if the Government strategically committed itself to the repayment of state debts. Explanation: the design and implementation of the so-called recovery programme through various subsidies, grants, development credits... entails huge administrative costs swallowing up a large share of the funds that never reach the end beneficiaries. There is, of course, also the problem of favouring politically suitable business mediators (political donors). These costs, too, are, of course, borne by the tax payers. The state is in this way merely furthering the devastation of the economy, covering it up by small concessions. In the long term, the economy will recover if the State imposes upon itself the same obligations it imposes upon its tax payers.

(Ratko, 30 December 2010 19:45)

The public sector or the real name by which it should be called: vermin!!!!
All loss-making companies with thousands of surplus workers, above-average salaries and incompetent and unqualified staff managing the Public Sector!!!

The only important thing is that they toe the party line or, maybe, that they are family!!!!

Not owned or controlled by the State, but by the parties that "got" them pursuant to the post-election agreement on which party gets which public sector!!! The power-generating industry - Srbijagas and the Serbian Electricity Company - is the most drastic example... But all others are following close behind!!!
(Ljudevit Kolar, 30 December 2010 17:49)