



The rule of law as key to European integration

Twelve think tanks from South Eastern European countries applying for EU membership met in Belgrade from 9–13 April to begin the 2014 TRAIN Programme

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Study Groups and Task Forces

Category: South-East Europe, Enlargement Process

Strengthening the rule of law as part of the EU accession process is the topic of this year's TRAIN Programme (Think Tanks Providing Research and Advice through Interaction and Networking). At the opening seminar, think tank representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia discussed their research plans in the area and explored ways actively to feed their ideas into the policy making process.

Since 2011 the European Union has emphasized the rule of law in its Enlargement Strategy as a key factor for political and economic transformation in the membership candidate countries of South East Europe. The rule of law is also the topic of the 2014 TRAIN Programme, which offers training and networking opportunities for independent think tanks in the region. In their policy research, participants deal with central elements in enhancing the rule of law: the fight against corruption, judicial and public administration reform, parliamentary control and a stronger inclusion of civil society.

What is the status of reforms related to the rule of law, both on paper and in practice? What gaps exist between norms and their actual implementation? How can one develop feasible and concrete recommendations in order to overcome remaining deficits – and how can these recommendations find their way into the decision-making process? These questions were at the core of a three-day workshop in which participants developed concepts for the communication and realization of their policy research.

Pierre Mirel, Honorary Director of the European Commission, provided participants with feedback on their research topics as well as first-hand insights into the rule of law in the accession process. Building on many years of experience in the field of enlargement policy, he mapped out the development and significance of the rule of law in the process of European integration, and how these have translated specifically into current conditions for membership.

While the countries of the region might be in different phases of political and economic reforms, they do share a number of problems in the process of gaining membership of the EU; this made the exchange among participants of their experiences in advocating for reforms in the rule of law all the more valuable.

The TRAIN Programme aims at fostering policy dialogue on topics central to European integration. After meeting in Berlin in mid-June to review their research, the participating think tanks will present their results and recommendations in the countries of the region as well as in Brussels later in the year, seeking an exchange with policy makers at the national and EU level.

Responsible Persons

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