Press Release:

**Fight against corruption in the European Commission’s 2013 Progress Report**

This year’s EC Progress Report for Serbia focuses greatly on fight against corruption, indicates certain improvements but at the same time emphasizes that there is still a lot to be done in this area. Therefore Transparency – Serbia considers that it could be extremely dangerous to understand occasional praises or statements on already undertaken activities as a sign that everything possible was done in the past year.

Praises, namely, refer mostly to what could be denoted as initial steps on a long road – political message on „zero tolerance towards corruption“, that should be proven in practice, adopting of Anticorruption Strategy and Action Plan, that are supposed to be implemented and opening the investigations (or issuing of indictments) in corruption cases that should be brought to finalization.

The Report, on the other hand, emphasizes necessity to improve law implementation and efficiency of anticorruption institutions, that it is necessary to promote proactive acting of police and prosecution and to expect verdicts in corruption cases, especially in the area of public resources’ abuse. In connecting with that, logical question imposes: is the goal that Government envisaged in the Action Plan (just 30% more finalized corruption verdicts in 2017 compared to 2012) something that might be desirable outcome, regarding sharp and justified critiques of performance in that area in previous years?

EC Report attributes great significance to consideration of independent bodies' reports and solving the problems from those reports, requesting establishing of meritorious employment system and promotion at all levels, concludes that in the large part appointing of medium level managers was non transparent.

These are some of the problems Transparency Serbia indicated to in previous years and months. Employment and promotion problem is actually far greater than stated in the report – contrary to the Law on Civil Servants with direct influence by political parties.

EC properly indicates to areas where strengthening of supervision is necessary (public enterprises, privatization, public expenditures). EC praises moderate progress in public procurement field which is a result of the new Law implementation, but indicates a lack of capacity, especially with Public Procurement Office, as a huge problem.

Report attributes significance to thorough election campaign financing control, investigating of officials' property reports' accuracy, solving conflict of interest and implementing integrity plans. EC also states „possibility of political influence“ during the appointment and dismissal of judiciary officials and indicates insufficient implementation of accountability mechanisms.

Report emphasizes that health and education sector are especially vulnerable to corruption. This list could be even longer, especially related to corruption that hampers business (urban planning, work of inspections etc.)

EC hasn't pointed out all the relevant problems, because of the limited space. Therefore evaluation of current status could be even more strict. In this regard, EC recognizes progress in Parliamentary activities, and in reality Parliamentary oversight of the Government is obviously insufficient. EC asks for the Government to follow-up the recommendations and findings of independent bodies. However, there is no statement on their direct violation.

EC welcomes improvement of Rules of Procedure of the Government. However, these changes didn't initiate promotion of public debates' practice – minimum obligations prescribed in April 2013 is not being respected.

Report states that comprehensive legal framework for protection of whistleblowers still doesn't exist, but there are no comments on process of drafting Whistleblower Protection Law. It is important, namely, to mention that Action Plan for implementing Anticorruption Strategy was amended in Ministry of Justice or in Government, after the text was being approved by working group, and that from final version, in paragraph on protection of whistleblowers, all parts related to protection of whistleblowers in private sectors were cut.

EC properly notices major problems in media sphere – failure to implement media strategy, insufficient transparency of media ownership, texts that endanger court processes and privacy. However, related to transparency of ownership, transparency of data on major funders should be mentioned, while matter of information published in tabloids should be treated in the context of oversight of investigative bodies and vulnerability of criminal investigations and/or human rights.

Transparency Serbia hopes that Belgrade will be more responsive for problems in the anticorruption area, that we and other NGOs, along with independent state organs timely indicate to, and that therefore it won't be necessary for Brussels to react. In that sense, we hope that problems that the EC has been pointing out in years related to anticorruption will be resolved at least nearly efficient as the problem on quota for Croatian cigarettes was resolved.

Transparency – Serbia

Belgrade, 17th October 2013