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Serbia's EU accession talks will be a long and difficult process: the chief negotiator should pick her battles sparingly

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As of January 2014, Serbia has officially embarked on its path towards European integration. What would be the best words of advice for Tanja Mišćević, Serbia's Chief Negotiator? [Dr James Ker-Lindsay](#), LSEE Senior Research Fellow, gives his opinion.

The start of talks between Serbia and the EU is a momentous occasion. However, it marks just the start of what will be a very long and difficult process. Of course, the question of Kosovo is going to be a vital element of the overall accession process and there will need to be important talks about how this will be managed. But it is also important to bear in mind that it will be just one of a whole range of touch problems that Serbia will face.

In the years ahead, almost every aspect of life in Serbia will be affected as hundreds of new laws will have to be passed to ensure that Serbia meets the conditions of membership. While the vast majority of these laws will eventually lead to significant improvements in the day-to-day life of Serbian citizens, many of the measures will not be popular. The government will need to be prepared for this. Likewise, although the process is often referred to as a negotiation, this is not correct. The reality is that there is very little to negotiate. Countries that want to join the EU have to accept the conditions. The only room for manoeuvre really concerns when the laws must be enacted. In some cases there is room for delays. However, it is extremely rare that a full exemption is given.

As someone who has watched previous enlargements closely, the best advice would be for the chief negotiator to pick her battles carefully and sparingly. For the most part, it is better to concentrate on getting the job done as quickly as possible in order to gain the benefits of full membership. In overall terms, the government needs to be honest with the people about the accession process and commit itself to making painful reforms as quickly as possible without playing politics.

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