

Serbia: 2018 country report

In November 2018, the European Parliament is due to vote on a motion for a resolution on Serbia's 2018 country report. The report acknowledges Serbia's progress in its accession process, but points to rule of law and freedom of expression as significant obstacles. Relations with Kosovo, another key issue, are also still a major challenge.

Background

In 2014, Serbia formally started accession talks with the EU. Out of a total 35 [negotiation chapters](#), 14 chapters have been opened for negotiations, of which two have already been provisionally closed. Chapter 35, which includes the [normalisation of relations](#) with Kosovo, is one of the most difficult; Serbia refuses to recognise Kosovo, and inside Kosovo, the status of the Serb-majority north remains [unresolved](#). One possible step forward might be a [land swap](#), trading northern Kosovo for Albanian-majority areas in Serbia. The proposed deal is backed by both countries' presidents, but is highly controversial; there is opposition in [Kosovo](#) to giving away land, and in Serbia to anything that might lead towards recognition of Kosovo. EU High Representative Federica Mogherini has expressed cautious [openness](#) to the idea, but [Germany](#) is among several EU countries worried about the implications of re-opening border issues for countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the absence of progress on issues such as northern Kosovo, the [EU-mediated dialogue](#) between Belgrade and Pristina came to a standstill in September 2018, with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic [refusing](#) to talk to his Kosovar counterpart Hashim Thaci in Brussels. Nevertheless, meetings resumed in November.

2018 European Commission report

The Commission's [report](#) notes that the country's April 2017 presidential **elections** offered voters a genuine choice of candidates, but that parliamentary oversight of the executive was poor. Alongside Kosovo, **rule of law** remains one of the main challenges. Courts have made efforts to clear a backlog of old cases, but there is still too much political interference on the judiciary. **Corruption** remains prevalent; anti-corruption legislation has improved, but a new and urgently needed law to strengthen the powers of the Anti-Corruption Agency has been on hold since 2016. Organisational changes have strengthened police capacity to fight **organised crime**, but the number of convictions is still low and there is little progress on tackling financial crime. Lack of progress on **freedom of expression** is a particular concern, with journalists facing threats and intimidation. The **economy** performed well, and public finances improved considerably, with a large budget deficit turning into a surplus. On **foreign policy**, Serbia has not aligned itself with EU Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia. Overall, the report notes progress in nearly all areas, but the level of preparation has not improved anywhere compared to the levels in the 2016 report.

Serbia 2018 report, main areas: [\(European Commission\)](#)

	Progress	Level of preparation
Judiciary	Some	Some
Fight Against Corruption	Some	Some
Organised Crime	Some	Some
Economic Criteria	Good	Moderate
Freedom of Expression	None	Some
Public administration	Some	Moderate

European Parliament position

In its motion for a resolution on the 2018 report, the EP's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) welcomes Serbia's continued commitment to EU accession, and reiterates the areas of concern set out in the Commission's report. Serbia and Kosovo need to normalise their relations based on a legally binding agreement. A land swap would only be acceptable if it were compatible with international law and regional stability.

Own-initiative report [2018/2146\(INI\)](#); Committee responsible: AFET; Rapporteur: David McAllister (EPP, Germany).

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PE 630.302 – November 2018



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