



TEXTS ADOPTED

P9_TA(2021)0115

2019-2020 Reports on Serbia

European Parliament resolution of 25 March 2021 on the 2019-2020 Commission reports on Serbia (2019/2175(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Communities and their Member States of the one part, and the Republic of Serbia, of the other part, which entered into force on 1 September 2013,
- having regard to Serbia's application for membership of the European Union of 19 December 2009,
- having regard to the Commission opinion of 12 October 2011 on Serbia's application for membership of the European Union (COM(2011)0668), the European Council's decision of 1 March 2012 to grant Serbia candidate status and the European Council's decision of 27-28 June 2013 to open EU accession negotiations with Serbia,
- having regard to the Presidency conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council meeting of 19-20 June 2003,
- having regard to the Sofia declaration of the EU-Western Balkans summit of 17 May 2018 and the Sofia priority agenda, annexed thereto,
- having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999, to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion of 22 July 2010 on the accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo, and to UN General Assembly Resolution 64/298 of 9 September 2010, which acknowledged the content of the ICJ opinion and welcomed the EU's readiness to facilitate dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo,
- having regard to the first agreement on principles governing the normalisation of relations between the Governments of Serbia and Kosovo of 19 April 2013 and the agreements of 25 August 2015, and to the ongoing EU-facilitated dialogue for the normalisation of relations,
- having regard to the Berlin Process launched on 28 August 2014,
- having regard to its resolution of 29 November 2018 on the 2018 Commission Report

on Serbia¹,

- having regard to the declaration and recommendations adopted at the eleventh EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) meeting of 30-31 October 2019,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 February 2020 entitled ‘Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2020)0057),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 5 June 2020 on enhancing cooperation with Western Balkans partners in the field of migration and security,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 29 May 2019 entitled ‘2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy’ (COM(2019)0260), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled ‘Serbia 2019 Report’ (SWD(2019)0219),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 6 October 2020 entitled ‘2020 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy’ (COM(2020)0660), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled ‘Serbia 2020 Report’ (SWD(2020)0352),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 6 October 2020 entitled ‘Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2020)0641), and the Commission staff working document entitled ‘Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans’ (SWD(2020)0223),
- having regard to the joint communication of 8 April 2020 of the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy entitled ‘Communication on the Global EU response to COVID-19’ (JOIN(2020)0011),
- having regard to the Commission assessment of 21 April 2020 of the Serbia 2020-2022 Economic Reform Programme (SWD(2020)0064) and to the joint conclusions of the Economic and Financial Dialogue between the EU and the Western Balkans and Turkey, adopted by the Council on 19 May 2020,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 29 April 2020 entitled ‘Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery’ (COM(2020)0315),
- having regard to the eleventh meeting of the Accession Conference with Serbia at Ministerial level, which took place on 10 December 2019 and where negotiations on Chapter 4, ‘Free movement of capital’ were opened,
- having regard to the conclusions of the first phase of the Inter-Party Dialogue on Improving the Conditions for Holding Parliamentary Elections, facilitated by the European Parliament,
- having regard to the final report of the OSCE/ODIHR special election assessment mission on the parliamentary elections of 21 June 2020 in Serbia, published on

¹ OJ C 363, 28.10.2020, p. 119.

7 October 2020,

- having regard to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights experts’ press statement on concerns about the misuse of the law on prevention of money laundering and the financing of terrorism to target and curb the work of NGOs, published on 11 November 2020,
 - having regard to the second compliance report on Serbia by the Group of European States against Corruption (GRECO) on corruption prevention in respect of members of parliament, judges and prosecutors, published on 26 November 2020 as part of the Fourth Evaluation Round,
 - having regard to the Baseline Evaluation Report on Serbia by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) of 22 January 2020,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on the country,
 - having regard to its recommendation of 19 June 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans, following the 2020 summit¹,
 - having regard to the joint declaration of the European Parliament – Western Balkans Speakers’ Summit of 28 January 2020, convened by the President of the European Parliament with the leaders of the Western Balkan parliaments,
 - having regard to the Zagreb Declaration agreed during the EU-Western Balkans summit that took place via video conference on 6 May 2020,
 - having regard to the EU-Western Balkans summit in the framework of the Berlin Process of 10 November 2020,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0032/2021),
- A. whereas Serbia must be judged, as any country aspiring to become a Member State of the EU, on its own merits in terms of fulfilment, implementation and compliance with the set of criteria and common values required for accession and whereas the quality of and dedication to the necessary reforms determine the timetable and progression of accession;
- B. whereas democracy, human rights and rule of law are fundamental values on which the EU is founded and are at the heart of enlargement and stabilisation and association processes; whereas sustainable reforms are needed to tackle the significant challenges that remain in these areas;
- C. whereas Serbia needs to develop an irreversible track record in adhering to, upholding and defending the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality,

¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0168.

the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national and other minorities, domestically and in its international relations;

- D. whereas since the opening of negotiations with Serbia, eighteen chapters have been opened, two of which have been provisionally closed; whereas Serbia has decided to accept the new EU enlargement methodology;
- E. whereas a sustainable track record of achievements is yet to emerge in the areas of the judiciary and fundamental rights (chapter 23) and justice, freedom and security (chapter 24); whereas the Council has decided not to open more chapters with Serbia yet;
- F. whereas GRECO considers the situation in Serbia to be ‘globally unsatisfactory’ and Serbia has been found not to be in compliance with GRECO recommendations with regard to the prevention of corruption in respect of members of parliament, judges and prosecutors;
- G. whereas the EU’s commitment to fostering the rule of law extends to Serbia, where the EU should continue its cooperation with the Council of Europe to support Serbia in carrying out essential reforms and training regarding justice, the fight against corruption, the promotion of human rights, and the role of free and independent media and civil society, and in monitoring the progress realised in those areas, in line with the revised enlargement methodology ;
- H. whereas Serbia has an interest in the normalisation of relations with Kosovo;
- I. whereas Serbia has remained committed to regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations;
- J. whereas Serbia has remained committed to creating a functioning market economy and has continued to implement the obligations of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, although a number of compliance issues remain; whereas corruption continues to hamper economic development;
- K. whereas Serbia has ratified all the fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO);
- L. whereas freedom of expression and the independence of media remain serious concerns which need to be addressed as a matter of priority;
- M. whereas the Inter-Party Dialogue (IPD) on improving the conditions for holding parliamentary elections, facilitated by the European Parliament, continues to provide a unique platform for reaching consensus on commitments to improve electoral conditions;
- N. whereas the EU agreed on the reallocation of EUR 374 million from the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) to help mitigate the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in the region;
- O. whereas the EU has shown its commitment to the European perspective of Western Balkan countries and mobilised EUR 3,3 billion to address the immediate health crisis and mitigate the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic;

- P. whereas the EU is the biggest assistance and aid provider to Serbia in mitigating the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; whereas Serbia has received EUR 15 million of immediate support for the health sector, EUR 78,4 million of support for the social and economic recovery and EUR 93,4 million in assistance funds;
- Q. whereas Serbia benefits from EU assistance under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), with a total indicative funding allocation of EUR 1 539,1 billion for the period 2014-2020;
- R. whereas the EU is Serbia's biggest provider of financial assistance; whereas the EU has provided Serbia with more than EUR 3,6 billion in grants over the past 18 years in all fields, including the rule of law, public administration reform, social development, environment and agriculture; whereas Serbia has benefited from EU assistance under the IPA to a total value of EUR 2,79 billion since 2007;
- S. whereas Serbia has substantially benefited from trade and economic integration with the EU; whereas the EU is Serbia's biggest trading partner, accounting for 67 % of Serbia's total exports and more than 60 % of its total imports of goods in 2018; whereas EU investment in Serbia reached a total of more than EUR 13 billion between 2010 and 2018;
1. Welcomes the fact that EU membership continues to be Serbia's strategic goal and that it is among the priorities of the newly formed government; takes note of the fact that all of the parliamentary parties are supportive of Serbia's EU integration process; encourages Serbian authorities to communicate more actively and unambiguously their commitment to European values in the public debate and expects a clear and unambiguous commitment by Serbia, in both words and deeds to fulfil of its obligations towards EU accession in a visible and verifiable way;
 2. Stresses the importance of injecting more dynamism into the accession negotiations with Serbia and of the swift implementation of the revised enlargement methodology based on thematic negotiation chapter clusters and phasing-in to individual EU policies and programmes, while stressing clear and tangible incentives of direct interest to citizens of Serbia;
 3. Underlines that the momentum created by the new mandate following the 21 June 2020 elections in Serbia is an opportunity to make important progress towards Serbia's European perspective; advocates that further negotiating chapters should only be opened when Serbia makes the necessary commitments and delivers reforms on required benchmarks; notes that the opening of chapters is an essential tool for achieving sustainable reforms and pro-European change in Serbia;
 4. Calls on the Commission and the Council, where appropriate with the inclusion of the Serbian partners, to take the necessary steps in order to implement the provisions of the revised enlargement methodology, especially those concerning the thematic negotiation clusters, as well as to use this new methodology as an opportunity to accelerate the enlargement process of the Western Balkans and to define, together with Serbia, new steps in Serbia's negotiation process;
 5. Welcomes the cooperation between the Serbian Government and the National Assembly

on the National Convention on the European Union (NCEU); calls on the Serbian Government to appoint a new head of the negotiating team for Serbia's accession to the European Union as soon as possible; calls on Serbia also to improve the administrative capacities of the Ministry of European Integration, in order to better conduct membership negotiations and to do its utmost to make the European integration process as inclusive and open as possible;

6. Notes that Serbia has continued to strengthen the alignment and implementation of its legislation in accordance with the *acquis*, and that it must continue to do so; regrets that the pace of the alignment has been significantly slower than what the government had originally planned; underlines the limited progress on chapters 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (Justice, freedom and security); notes that the normalisation of relations with Kosovo and the genuine respect of fundamental rights continue to be essential and will determine the pace of accession negotiations;
7. Regrets the lack of progress in many areas of Serbia's reform agenda and the fact that there has even been backsliding on issues that are fundamental for EU accession; calls on the Commission to change its reporting methodology in order to take account of significant backsliding and send a clear message to accession countries, including Serbia;
8. Stresses the importance of strategic communication on the benefits of EU accession by Serbian stakeholders; underlines that public discussion about EU accession must be based on facts and must promote the full respect of fundamental rights and democratic values;
9. Encourages the Serbian authorities to communicate more actively their commitment to European values in public debate and to increase the transparency of their communication, including by enabling access to information for the general public, as well as by extending cooperation between public authorities and civil society; expresses concern that publicly financed media outlets, often quoting office-holders, contribute to the dissemination of anti-EU rhetoric in Serbia;
10. Calls on Serbia and the EU Member States to pursue a more active and effective communication policy on the European perspective, aimed at both Serbian and EU citizens including those belonging to national minorities; stresses the historical links of friendship and fraternity between the peoples of the European Union and the Serbian people;
11. Notes the disproportionate visibility given by Serbia to third countries; calls on Serbia, the Commission and the EU Delegation to Serbia to step up their efforts in promoting the role and benefits of the close partnership between the EU and Serbia, including through the promotion of EU funded projects and reforms; notes that there is an urgent need to engage with Serbian citizens beyond the major cities and calls on the EU to further increase its support for grassroots civil society;
12. Calls for new opportunities for high-level political and policy dialogue with the Western Balkan countries in order to ensure stronger steering and high-level engagement, as also called for by the revised enlargement methodology; believes that the Conference on the Future of Europe should actively engage and appropriately involve Serbian representatives as well as those from the other Western Balkan countries, both at the

level of government and of civil society and youth organisations;

13. Takes note of the conclusions of the final report of the OSCE/ODIHR special election assessment mission that the 21 June 2020 parliamentary elections were administered efficiently but that the dominance of the ruling party, including in the media, was of concern; regrets the long-term trends of pressure on voters, media bias and the blurring of lines between the activities of all state officials and partisan campaigning; points out, in this regard, the role of state-sponsored disinformation campaigns aiming to shift opinions vis-à-vis elections;
14. Welcomes the establishment of the Working Group for the implementation of ODIHR recommendations; calls on the Serbian authorities to address fully all ODIHR recommendations well ahead of the next elections; stresses that civil society organisations with expertise in election conditions should remain involved in this process;
15. Notes with concern that changes to important elements of the electoral system, including the lowering of the electoral threshold, were passed in parliament just weeks before the scheduled elections without proper public discussion; notes that according to the Venice Commission, fundamental elements of electoral law should not be significantly amended less than one year before elections;
16. Regrets the decision by parts of the opposition to boycott the elections and stresses that in the light of the findings of the OSCE/ODIHR special election assessment mission, which underlined the lack of genuine pluralism and fragmentation of the political scene in Serbia, all political forces, especially the governing authorities, have a responsibility to improve electoral conditions; stresses that the only way to guarantee political representation and an ability to influence the decision-making process for their constituents is to engage in political and electoral processes; calls on the opposition to return to the negotiating table and resume its participation in political and parliamentary activities; notes that due to the boycott of the elections by some opposition parties, the newly constituted Serbian Parliament is marked by the overwhelming majority of the ruling coalition and the absence of a viable opposition – a situation which is not conducive to achieving political pluralism in the country;
17. Recalls the election principles defined by the Venice Commission and notes with concern that President Aleksandar Vučić announced the early elections without constitutional grounding or political necessity, while also announcing, as President of Serbia and of the country's biggest political party, a single election day for Presidential, Parliamentary and municipal elections in Belgrade in spring 2022;
18. Welcomes the establishment of the IPD with the National Assembly of Serbia, facilitated by the European Parliament, and the initial measures taken by the Serbian authorities and the parliamentary majority to improve electoral conditions; calls for further implementation of the remaining commitments undertaken in the framework of the IPD;
19. Welcomes the launch of the second phase of the IPD with the National Assembly of Serbia, facilitated by the European Parliament, with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders and pro-European political forces in Serbia in order to improve the political climate and trust across the political spectrum, and to build consensus on

outstanding issues related to the electoral process, in accordance with the recommendations of international observation missions; urges that new rounds of a more inclusive IPD take place as soon as possible and calls on all sides to define clear goals, criteria, benchmarks and interlocutors; stresses that the IPD should be concluded well in advance of the forthcoming elections to leave sufficient time to implement the necessary legal and other changes to electoral conditions and put them into practice, in order to create a level playing field ahead of the elections; recalls that the government and independent bodies have to ensure the full and proper implementation of the legal frameworks related to the commitments undertaken in the framework of the IPD;

20. Condemns the unacceptable verbal attacks and cases of hate speech against Members of the European Parliament, in particular those representing Parliament in its relations with Serbia, including the Chair and Members of the SAPC delegation as well as facilitators of the IPD, as acts not in line with the spirit of Serbia's obligations under the SAA; calls for the Speaker of the National Assembly and the speakers of the political groups represented therein to uphold standards of democratic discourse;
21. Calls on the new government to work on effective and verifiable, fundamental reforms and to address structural reforms and shortcomings in the areas of rule of law, fundamental rights, media freedom, the fight against corruption and the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration;
22. Notes with concern that, overall, corruption remains an issue where limited progress has been made; welcomes the steps which have been made in ensuring the independence of the Anti-Corruption Agency, and the results produced so far in finalising corruption cases; encourages further progress to be made, in particular in the area of improving the track record on investigations, indictments and final convictions in high-level corruption cases, and implementing the laws on the prevention of corruption in line with the EU acquis and the recommendations of GRECO; welcomes the publication of the recent GRECO report and encourages the Ministry of Justice to work on the implementation of its recommendations;
23. Points out that according to the latest GRECO report, Serbia has only partly implemented the recommendations it made in 2015 and that the situation in the country is 'globally unsatisfactory'; stresses the importance of pursuing an effective fight against corruption and calls on the Serbian authorities to comply with these recommendations as quickly as possible; is worried by the recent changes to the law on the prevention of corruption concerning the definition of 'public officials', which took place in a non-transparent and rushed manner, and which significantly limits the number of persons to whom the law applies, thus further weakening anti-corruption mechanisms and opening-up possibilities for the abuse of state resources which were previously deemed illegal;
24. Urges Serbia to deliver convincing results, including a sustainable track record with effective investigations in areas of concern such as the judiciary, freedom of expression and the fight against corruption and organised crime, especially in cases with a high level of public interest, including the cases of Krušik, Jovanjica and Telekom Srbija, and to improve its track record in investigations, the pressing of charges and convictions in high-level corruption cases, including the seizure and confiscation of criminal assets; reiterates its call for justice from 2018 with regard to the unlawful demolition of private property in the Savamala neighbourhood in Belgrade; notes that the new law on

prevention of corruption has been in force since 1 September 2020;

25. Reminds Serbia to step up its efforts to effectively address corruption, focusing on prevention and repression of corruption, including by adopting a new anti-corruption strategy underpinned by a credible and realistic action plan as well as an effective coordination mechanism;
26. Calls on Serbia to improve its fight against organised crime and to switch from an approach based on individual cases to a strategy against organisations in order to dismantle big and internationally spread organisations; notes that such a strategy should include effective investigations, prosecutions and final convictions in serious and organised crime cases, including financial investigations, systematic tracking of money flows, a robust oversight mechanism so as to avoid abuses, and increased financial and human resources capacity for the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime, which should be free from any undue political influence;
27. Expresses concern over the increasing violence by extremist and organised crime groups and calls on the authorities to ensure that cases discovered by investigative journalists or whistle-blowers are duly investigated and that any public officials involved are held responsible;
28. Notes with concern the continued political influence over the judiciary, and notes the need for strengthening the safeguards for the accountability, professionalism, independence and overall efficiency of the judiciary, including, if applicable, by revising the current system of recruitment and human resource management; notes that the government has drafted a proposal for constitutional reforms, which has been positively assessed by the Venice Commission, and sent it to the competent committee of the National Assembly;
29. Underlines the importance of a broad consultation process in constitutional reform; regrets that the previous Serbian Parliament failed to adopt constitutional reforms aimed at strengthening the independence of the judiciary; recommends the adoption of constitutional reforms as soon as possible in consultation with associations of judges and prosecutors and other relevant political actors, including the non-parliamentary opposition;
30. Reiterates the importance of the swift adoption of the law on the financing of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina;
31. Expresses concern about the effective functioning of the new parliament, where there is no parliamentary opposition, whose legitimacy is challenged by opposition parties and whose term, it has already been announced by the Serbian President, is to be shortened, which adopts far-reaching constitutional changes without an open, inclusive and democratic public debate, especially in the area of the judiciary;
32. Welcomes changes made to the functioning of the National Assembly towards reinstating the practices and procedures and complying with the rules of procedure; regrets that the overall parliamentary oversight of the executive has remained rather formalistic; underlines that further substantive reforms in the procedure and practices are necessary to improve the quality of the legislative process, to ensure effective parliamentary oversight and to put a stop to the systemic shortcomings of the National

Assembly, including the reduction of filibustering, the number of urgent procedures and the practice of regrouping unrelated items under the same agenda point;

33. Underlines that the quality of the legislative process still needs to be improved by increasing transparency and social and political dialogue and by ensuring that independent regulatory bodies are empowered to exercise their oversight roles effectively; notes that the annual reports of independent bodies were discussed at the plenary of the National Assembly, and conclusions adopted;
34. Calls for the newly elected parliament to step up its efforts to ensure the transparency, inclusiveness and quality of the legislative process as well as effective parliamentary oversight; calls furthermore for additional measures to ensure cross-party dialogue and a stronger role for civil society, which remains an essential element of a well-functioning democracy; notes with concern the lack of transparency surrounding the reappointment process of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality;
35. Calls for effective cooperation with independent and regulatory bodies and increased engagement of the National Assembly in oversight and control of the government and administration; calls for substantive engagement of the National Assembly in the process of Serbia's EU accession negotiations, in line with its resolution of 16 December 2013 on the role of the National Assembly and principles in negotiations on Serbia's accession to the EU;
36. Underlines that the role of independent regulatory bodies, including the country's Ombudsperson, the Anti-Corruption Agency, the National Audit Authority and the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection, needs to be fully acknowledged and supported; calls on the Serbian National Assembly to engage in the implementation of independent regulatory bodies' findings and recommendations, notably those of the Ombudsperson;
37. Recalls that social dialogue is one of the pillars of the European social model and that regular consultation between the government and social partners is instrumental in the prevention of social tension and conflict; underlines that it is essential for social dialogue to go beyond the exchange of information and that interested parties should be consulted on important laws before they are subjected to parliamentary procedure;
38. Notes with concern that the National Assembly met only 44 days after the declaration of the state of emergency in March 2020, which undermined its position as the key institution of parliamentary democracy as enshrined in the Constitution of Serbia; notes with concern that the National Assembly did not begin its work in full for a long period after the declaration of the final election results on 5 July 2020, despite a clear parliamentary majority; calls on the National Assembly to avoid abusive inflammatory language and to counter hate speech during parliamentary debate; underlines the importance of the work of the opposition in a democracy;
39. Stresses that abusive language, intimidation and slandering campaigns against political opponents and representatives of the media carried out by MPs in the plenary of the National Assembly represent a breach of democratic practice and fundamental democratic values that should be strongly condemned and sanctioned in line with the rules of procedure; is appalled by the recent orchestrated attacks carried out by several MPs and pro-government tabloids against investigative journalists and members of civil

society, including those from the independent media network KRIK and NGOs such as CRTA and the Open Parliament, portraying them as associates of organised criminal groups and as coup plotters, which is in gross violation of their own recently adopted Code of Conduct for MPs;

40. Welcomes the adoption of the new action plan for a media strategy and the fact that a working group was set up to monitor the implementation of the strategy and action plan;
41. Is concerned about allegations made by investigative journalists of government manipulation of COVID-19 statistics for political and electoral purposes; deplores the disinformation campaign concerning EU assistance during the pandemic by government officials; stresses that trust and transparency are of particular importance in the government's efforts against COVID-19 and therefore urges the Serbian Government to provide citizens with all relevant information about the pandemic, including vaccines;
42. Believes that the acquisition of two television channels with national coverage in December 2018 by an individual connected with the ruling party represented a step towards monopolisation of the media landscape in the country by the ruling party; urges the authorities to ensure and maintain the necessary conditions for fair competition and transparency when it comes to all future ownership transactions in the media sphere; invites the editorial teams of all television channels with national coverage in Serbia to respect the highest professional standards and allow for differing opinions to be heard regularly;
43. Regrets the deterioration of media freedom and increase in abusive language, intimidation and even hate speech towards members of the parliamentary opposition, independent intellectuals, NGOs, journalists and prominent individuals, including from members of the ruling parties, whose responsibility to act with respect towards all representatives of the media is of utmost importance; urges the Serbian authorities to take immediate measures to guarantee freedom of expression and media independence and to ensure proper investigations into these cases;
44. Regrets that the commitments taken in the IPD relating to the Regulatory Council on Electronic Media (REM) and to the public service broadcaster (RTS) were only partially or not at all fulfilled by the Serbian authorities; recalls that free and independent media plays a major role in democracy; regrets that since the conclusion of the first phase of the IPD, the work of REM and RTS has failed to restore their credibility among the public and opposition parties; notes that the government has established a working group for the safety of journalists, but all associations of independent journalists and media in Serbia have already withdrawn from it due to the group's failure to react to the attacks of pro-government tabloids on the journalists of the Network for Investigation of Crime and Corruption (KRIK) investigative web portal;
45. Notes with concern that the work of civil society organisations (CSOs) takes place in an environment that is not open to criticism; urges the Serbian Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering of Serbia's Ministry of Finance to fully clarify the situation concerning investigations into CSOs and journalists over allegations of money laundering and urges the authorities to refrain from arbitrarily targeting these organisations and individuals; calls on the Serbian authorities to counter the shrinking space for civil society and independent media and ensure that they can work free from

all restrictions, including intimidation or criminalisation of these organisations; urges the authorities to foster an atmosphere which is conducive to the work of all civil society organisations as soon as possible;

46. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to strengthen their cooperation with and support for civil society, NGOs and independent media on the ground; reiterates its support for the work of democratic European political foundations in strengthening Serbia's democratic processes and fostering a new generation of political leaders;
47. While firmly condemning all acts of violence, notes that incidents of disproportional use of police force during the July 2020 protests deserve particular attention from the authorities, including regarding the consequent lack of cooperation by police officers with the justice system and the public prosecutor; urges the Serbian authorities to properly investigate all cases in which the police force has overstepped its authority in order to prevent impunity and strengthen public trust in the police, as well as to make it easier for persons claiming to be victims of police misconduct to file complaints and to obtain redress, and to show zero tolerance towards law enforcement officers who breach professional ethics or criminal law;
48. Notes that the legal and institutional framework for upholding human rights is formally broadly in place, but that it lacks effective mechanisms to ensure respect for these fundamental rights; calls for all future amendments to the existing laws on upholding human rights, including the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, to be made in a transparent manner with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders; calls for its more effective implementation, with particular regard to the most vulnerable groups in society, including national minorities in the area of education; calls on Serbia to provide for and protect non-discriminatory use of minority languages in education, in dedicated media spaces in state media and in local outlets, as well as to ensure equal opportunities for adequate representation in political life, public administration and the judiciary;
49. Welcomes the increased efforts of Serbia in cooperation with the EU in the field of inclusion of the Roma community, in particular with regard to improving their housing situation; calls on the Serbian authorities to address structural discrimination faced by Roma with regard to their citizenship status, as well as healthcare, education and employment; urges Serbia to improve and simplify the institutional structure dealing with Roma integration, including through a clear distribution of tasks, coordination between national and local authorities, and budgeting sensitive to needs of Roma communities;
50. Welcomes the finalisation of the long-delayed translation of primary school textbooks into Bulgarian, which will enable the Bulgarian national minority to be educated in its mother tongue; notes with concern that not all textbooks for secondary level education have yet been translated; encourages the Serbian authorities to ensure the sustainability of the process by providing a sufficient number of teachers, textbooks and additional materials (school diaries, student grade books, etc.) to adequately address the needs of pupils from the minority;
51. Is concerned by the failure of the Serbian authorities to foster the de facto use of regional or minority languages;

52. Calls on Serbia to strengthen human rights institutions, guarantee their independence, allocate them the necessary financial and human resources and ensure timely follow-up on their recommendations, as well as to adopt and implement a new anti-discrimination strategy;
53. Calls on Serbia to improve its capacities to provide statistics and to carry out the census in a timely manner, adhering to the highest international standards and with the inclusion of independent observers; reiterates its call for improved coordination and inclusion of stakeholders, and for the implementation and periodic revision of the Action Plan for the Realisation of Rights of National Minorities;
54. Is deeply worried about the allegations that the Serbian authorities are abusing the law on the residence of citizens and the ‘passivisation’ of residential addresses of citizens of Albanian ethnicity living in southern Serbia in a systematic and discriminatory manner; calls for independent and thorough investigations into these allegations and on the Serbian authorities to cease all discriminatory practices and targeting;
55. Notes with concern the high rate of women and children who are victims of violence and domestic violence; takes note of Serbia’s efforts to fight violence against women and children and domestic violence; urges, however, that further and more effective implementation is necessary and that concrete improvements are needed, in particular during the current pandemic, in order to improve access to quality services in this area;
56. Welcomes the GREVIO report on Serbia, which stresses the lack of a coherent policy approach towards the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the need for preventive measures, gaps in service provision for victims and low levels of awareness, sensitisation and capacity-building, as well as particular obstacles for a wide range of women due to intersecting factors such as ethnicity, poverty, social origin and disability;
57. Is concerned that a new law on gender equality has been seriously delayed, that coordination and an efficient institutional set-up with adequate resources in this area are still lacking, and that the socio-economic status of women is still significantly worse than that of men, as well as by the high prevalence of patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes in society and public discourse, and the lack of knowledge of the judiciary, prosecutors and lawyers in this regard;
58. Calls on Serbia to increase efforts aimed at gender equality and women’s rights by paying special attention to gender mainstreaming and increased cooperation with civil society, in particular women’s organisations; underlines the importance of including a gender perspective in economic programmes;
59. Commends the strong female representation in the new parliament and government, in the hope that it will lead to the substantive promotion of the human rights and political liberties of women as well as vulnerable groups; welcomes the substantial representation of national minorities in parliament;
60. Underlines the need to continue protecting LGBTI rights; calls for more adequate and effective responses from the authorities to hate speech and hate-motivated crimes; welcomes the peaceful conduct of two pride parades in 2019; stresses the importance for all institutions of supporting the preparation of EuroPride 2022 and ensuring the

safety of all participants;

61. Welcomes the government's initiative to move forward with the law on same-sex unions and changes of name and gender of transgender persons in accordance with the relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights, and calls on the government to create a safe environment for LGBTI persons and promote a culture of tolerance towards them;
62. Urges Serbia to improve access to healthcare services for people with disabilities, people living with HIV, children and adults who use drugs, prisoners, sex workers, LGBTI persons, internally displaced persons and Roma, particularly in view of the ongoing pandemic and problems in the health sector;
63. Welcomes Serbia's engagement in regional cooperation initiatives; encourages Serbia to sustain its efforts at all levels aimed at reconciliation and strengthening good neighbourly relations; invites Serbia to fully implement bilateral agreements and to engage in the resolution of all remaining border disputes with neighbouring countries in a constructive and timely manner, including in issues related to reconciliation from the past of Yugoslavia; notes that additional efforts need to be invested in the socio-economic development of the border regions; welcomes the initiative of regional integration through economic development;
64. Welcomes the constructive role of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and Serbia's active participation in it; underlines the importance of regional cooperation in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and stresses that regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations are linked to Serbia's goal of a successful European perspective;
65. Stresses that the normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo is a priority and a precondition for the EU accession of both countries, and would also be essential for securing stability and prosperity in the wider region; acknowledges the increased engagement of both sides in the EU-facilitated dialogue and calls for active and constructive engagement in the EU-facilitated dialogue led by the EU Special Representative, seeking a comprehensive, sustainable and legally binding agreement, in accordance with international law;
66. Reiterates its call to move forward with the full implementation, in good faith and in a timely manner, of all the agreements already reached, including the establishing of the Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities without further delay; calls on the EEAS to set up a mechanism to monitor and verify the implementation of all the agreements so far reached and to report periodically to the European Parliament about the state of play; reiterates, in this regard, its full support for the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, Miroslav Lajčák;
67. Urges the Serbian and Kosovar Governments to refrain from any action that could undermine trust between the parties and put the constructive continuation of the dialogue at risk; reiterates the importance of the multi-ethnic nature of both Serbia and Kosovo and that ethnically homogeneous states should not be the objective in the region;
68. Calls on the Serbian and Kosovar authorities to promote people-to-people contacts between local communities in order to strengthen dialogue, including at non-

governmental level; reiterates its call on the authorities to refrain from using inflammatory language towards other ethnic groups; regrets that the Mitrovica Bridge has not yet been opened to all traffic, in spite of the completion of the renovation works;

69. Welcomes Belgrade's active and constructive participation in the dialogue with Pristina and the implementation of the agreed obligations under the Brussels Agreement;
70. Commends the good regional cooperation between Serbia and Kosovo in the fight against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, including cooperation between the mayors of Mitrovica and communication between ministers of health;
71. Stresses the importance of regional cooperation on war crimes and investigating cases of missing persons, including stepping up efforts in recognition and implementation of court verdicts on war crimes, investigating grave sites, rejecting hate speech and the glorification of war criminals, and supporting domestic prosecutors in bringing perpetrators to justice; calls on the Serbian authorities to continue their efforts at combatting these issues and to condemn all forms of hate speech, intimidation campaigns and public approval and denial of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes; regrets that some Serbian authorities and some Serbian politicians continue to deny the Srebrenica genocide; welcomes the work of civil society organisations in the field of reconciliation, transitional justice and due reparation;
72. Welcomes Serbia's continued cooperation under the Sarajevo Declaration Process and recalls the obligation under the SAA of full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), whose work has concluded, and the United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, and urges Serbia to counter all efforts to undermine the results achieved so far and falsification of the facts established by the ICTY;
73. Reiterates its support for the initiative to establish the Regional Commission for the establishment of facts about war crimes and other gross human rights violations on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (RECOM); highlights the importance of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) and its work; notes that owing to the coronavirus pandemic, the European Commission has suggested postponing the year in which Novi Sad is due to be a European Capital of Culture from 2021 to 2022;
74. Welcomes the fact that Serbia was granted the status of a programme country in the Erasmus+ programme in 2019;
75. Welcomes the progress Serbia has made in the development of a functional market economy; invites Serbia to continue its efforts to boost competitiveness and long-term, sustainable and inclusive growth through structural reforms, in particular in the energy sector and the labour market, as well as by improving transparency and predictability in the regulatory environment; underlines the importance of developing entrepreneurial skills among young people and calls on the Serbian Government to directly tackle the issue of corruption, which stifles the development of a functional market economy, as well as to address concerns raised by GRECO in 2020;
76. Notes that Serbia's healthcare system suffers from a lack of resources and an outflow of its professional workforce, resulting in a lack of medical equipment, medical expertise, and laboratory testing capacities during the COVID-19 pandemic; encourages Serbia to

implement reforms with a view to strengthening the public health sector, improving social protection and providing support to the private sector in order to mitigate the economic consequences of COVID-19;

77. Welcomes the good progress Serbia has made in economic and financial areas such as company law, intellectual property law, competition and financial services, and managerial accountability and audit; notes however, that further progress is needed in the area of public procurement;
78. Expresses concern about China's increasing influence in Serbia and across the Western Balkans and the lack of transparency and environmental and social impact assessment of Chinese investments and loans; calls on Serbia to strengthen its legal compliance standards for Chinese business activities;
79. Calls on Serbia to increase the sustainability of its energy sector by diversifying its energy sources, launching a low-carbon energy transition and moving towards renewables and less polluting fuels while at the same time removing all non-compliant coal subsidies; encourages Serbia to adopt the necessary measures to preserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas and to step up the monitoring of the implementation of the National Emissions Reduction Plan;
80. Welcomes the launch of the largest wind farm, Čibuk 1, and the progress made on the gas interconnector between Serbia and Bulgaria; notes with concern the consistent lack of compliance with and the consequent breach of the Energy Community Treaty; reiterates its call for the countries of the Western Balkans to be placed at the heart of the EU's connectivity strategy;
81. Welcomes Serbia's active participation in the Transport Community and in Trans-European Network projects, including the construction of the Niš-Merdare-Pristina highway;
82. Welcomes the entry into force of the new Regional Roaming Agreement signed in April 2019;
83. Urges the authorities to ensure alignment with EU standards and policy objectives on climate protection and environment as well as energy efficiency – in particular in the light of the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans – including but not limited to the introduction of carbon emissions pricing, the updating of energy efficiency legislation and the development and adoption of an integrated National Energy and Climate Plan, in order to facilitate the transition to a circular economy and the adoption of the necessary measures to preserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas;
84. Encourages Serbia to finalise the reforms of its national electricity and gas sectors by ensuring, in particular, the unbundling of the system operators, and to work on regional connectivity and the completion of the regional energy market in compliance with the Paris Agreement and international obligations under the Energy Community Treaty;
85. Is concerned by the high levels of air pollution in Serbia and urges the authorities to swiftly take measures to improve air quality, especially in large cities and industrial areas such as Smederevo, Bor and Kolubara; stresses the importance of finding

sustainable solutions and limiting the use of lignite and other low-calorie coal in energy production, as well as for heating;

86. Deplores the lack of action on the pollution of the River Dragovishtitsa by mines operating in the region;
87. Welcomes Serbia's continued endorsement of the Global Strategy for the EU's foreign and security policy;
88. Reiterates the importance of alignment with the EU common foreign and security policy (CFSP), which must progressively become an integral part of Serbia's foreign policy as a condition for the accession process; expresses concern about Serbia's alignment rate, which is the lowest in the region; notes that some government officials and some politicians continue to make occasional statements that call into question Serbia's foreign policy orientation; is concerned by Serbia's repeated support for Russia in the UN General Assembly over the annexation of Crimea;
89. Welcomes the fact that Serbia aligned with the EU's position on the presidential elections in Belarus; remains concerned, however, that Serbia has failed to align with the sanctioning of Belarusian officials and with the EU's position on the new security law in China; calls on Serbia to increase its level of alignment with the declarations of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on behalf of the EU, and with Council decisions, including those on sanctions;
90. Notes the signature of economic normalisation agreements by Serbia and Kosovo on 4 September 2020 in Washington; regrets, however, provisions in the text that require Kosovo to stop seeking membership in international organisations; welcomes the renewed engagement of the United States, and underlines the need for the EU and the United States to strengthen their partnership and coordination in the Western Balkans; underlines that transatlantic cooperation is an important factor for stability in the region, and stresses the EU's leading role as mediator in the process of normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo;
91. Recalls that moving the Serbian Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem would go against the position of the European Union on the two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine dispute;
92. Calls for the strengthening of European cooperation with Serbia on addressing manipulative disinformation and cyber and hybrid threats that seek to divide societies, discredit the EU and undermine the European perspective of the region; encourages concrete steps in building resilience and cyber security and calls on Serbia, the Commission and the EEAS to support measures aiming at reinforcing media pluralism and quality journalism; stresses the need to improve European coordination in order to fight regional disinformation campaigns that often originate in Serbia, such as through the possible creation of a Balkan-focused centre of excellence on disinformation;
93. Is particularly concerned about the disinformation narratives emanating from the Kremlin and distributed through Sputnik Serbia and other domestic actors; calls on the Serbian authorities to revisit the arrangements allowing these operations in order to reduce disinformation both inside and outside the country and to step up its efforts in the fight against disinformation campaigns, which have grown since the beginning of

the COVID-19 pandemic;

94. Notes the conclusion of the agreement on border management cooperation between Serbia and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) which will allow Frontex to assist Serbia in border management and carry out joint operations; notes that Serbia has played an active, cooperative and constructive role in EU external border management;
95. Reiterates that the EU is Serbia's leading trading partner, investor and aid donor; takes note of Serbia's decision to sign a free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union in October 2019; expects Serbia, however, to align with EU trade policy; recalls the Union's commitment to defend its interests by mitigating the negative effect of free-trade agreements with the Eurasian Economic Union signed by countries which have applied for membership of the European Union and signed an SAA, such as Serbia; regrets that Serbia is still not a member of the World Trade Organization;
96. Calls on Serbia to improve alignment with EU labour law, adopt a new law on the right to strike, tackle undeclared work and amend the law on inspection oversight to comply with the relevant ILO conventions which have been ratified by Serbia;
97. Encourages Serbia to ensure that it has sufficient financial and institutional resources for employment and social policies;
98. Welcomes Serbia's continued participation in crisis management missions and operations under the common security and defence policy (CSDP); encourages Serbia to maintain its current commitments to provide personnel to four CSDP missions and operations, as well as to seek further participation in the future; welcomes the counterterrorism arrangements signed between the EU and Serbia; welcomes, in this respect, improvements in regional and international cooperation on combating terrorism and violent extremism;
99. Expresses concern over Serbia's increasing dependence on defence and security equipment and technologies from the People's Republic of China, including a mass surveillance system in Belgrade and mass personal data collection without appropriate safeguards, and the insufficient transparency of the security sector's public procurement practices; continues to be concerned about Serbia's close political and military cooperation with Russia, including the continued presence of Russian air facilities in Niš; calls on Serbia to align with the CSDP and its instruments;
100. Reiterates its call on the Serbian authorities to continue their efforts to eliminate the legacy of the former communist secret services by making its files open to the public, as a step towards the democratisation of Serbia; calls on Serbia to intensify the process of succession and implementation of obligations relating to the division of the common archive of the former Yugoslavia; reiterates, in this connection, that full access to all archival materials, especially those of the former Yugoslav Secret Services (UDBA) and the Yugoslav People's Army Secret Service (KOS) is of vital significance; reiterates its call on the authorities to facilitate access to those archives that concern the former republics of Yugoslavia and to return them to their respective governments if they so request;
101. Recalls that the EU is the largest provider of financial assistance to Serbia; welcomes

the Commission's efforts to invest more strategically in the Western Balkans through a dedicated Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans; recognises the importance of the EIP in supporting sustainable connectivity, human capital, competitiveness and inclusive growth as well as in reinforcing regional and cross-border cooperation with a view to improving the opportunities of local and regional level administrations to reap the benefits of this investment; stresses that any investment must follow the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal;

102. Underlines that the EIP should encourage the necessary structural reforms in infrastructure, energy, environment and education and be implemented as quickly and effectively as possible in order to improve the visibility of EU-funded projects and to increase the trust of the citizens of Serbia in the European Union and its institutions;
103. Calls on the co-legislators to fine-tune both incentives and conditionality in the future Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) and to make use of suspension mechanisms in case of serious backsliding; considers it essential that IPA III support further strengthening of fundamental values and good governance; believes that the 'more for more' and 'less for less' principle of reversibility of the accession process under the renewed methodology should also be clearly reflected in pre-accession financing; reiterates that the scale of financial assistance should match the actual rate of implemented reforms;
104. Calls on the Serbian authorities to make the best use of the EU's reallocation of IPA financing to help mitigate the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; underlines the importance of paying special attention to vulnerable groups;
105. Reiterates that the EU swiftly mobilised immediate support for the Western Balkans to tackle the health emergency resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and facilitate the socio-economic recovery of the region;
106. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to allocate sufficient COVID-19 vaccines to the citizens of all Western Balkan countries;
107. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the European Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the President, Government and Parliament of Serbia.