European Parliament
2024-2029

Committee on Foreign Affairs

2025/2022(INI)

10.2.2025

DRAFT REPORT

on the 2023 and 2024 Commission reports on Serbia
(2025/2022(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Tonino Picula

CONTENTS

Page

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION 3

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT 9

ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT 10

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the 2023 and 2024 Commission reports on Serbia
(2025/2022(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States of the one part, and the Republic of Serbia, of the other part[1], which entered into force on 1 September 2013,

– having regard to Serbia's application for membership of the EU 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 28 June 2013 to open EU accession negotiations with Serbia,

– having regard to the Brussels Agreement of 27 February 2023 and the Ohrid Agreement of 18 March 2023 and the Implementation Annex thereto,

– having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)[2],

– having regard to Regulation (EU) 2024/1449 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans[3],

– having regard to the presidency conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council meeting of 19 and 20 June 2003,

– having regard to the Berlin Process, launched on 28 August 2014,

– having regard to the first agreement on principles governing the normalisation of relations between the governments of Serbia and Kosovo of 19 April 2013, to the agreements of 25 August 2015, and to the ongoing EU-facilitated dialogue for the normalisation of relations,

– having regard to the agreement on free movement between the governments of Serbia and Kosovo of 27 August 2022, to the agreement on licence plates of 23 November 2022, and to the Energy Agreements' Implementation Roadmap in the EU-facilitated Dialogue of 21 June 2022,

– having regard to the Commission communication of 5 February 2020 entitled 'Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans'

[1] OJ L 278, 18.10.2013, p. 16, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_internation/2013/490/oj.
[2] OJ L 330, 20.9.2021, p. 1, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1529/oj.
[3] OJ L, 2024/1449, 24.5.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1449/oj.

(COM(2020)0057),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 6 October 2020 entitled ‘An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2020)0641),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 8 November 2023 entitled ‘2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy’ (COM(2023)0690), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled ‘Serbia 2023 Report’ (SWD(2023)0695),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 8 November 2023 entitled ‘New growth plan for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2023)0691),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 20 March 2024 on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews (COM(2024)0146),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 30 October 2024 entitled ‘2024 Communication on EU enlargement policy’ (COM(2024)0690), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled ‘Serbia 2024 Report’ (SWD(2024)0695),

– having regard to the European Council conclusions of 9 February 2023 on the EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina,

– having regard to the European Council conclusions of 26 and 27 October 2023 on Kosovo and Serbia,

– having regard to the Council conclusions of 17 December 2024 on enlargement,

– having regard to the final report of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) election observation mission on the early parliamentary and presidential elections of 3 April 2022 in Serbia, published on 19 August 2022,

– having regard to the final report of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission on the early parliamentary elections of 17 December 2023 in Serbia, published on 28 February 2024,

– having regard to the memorandum of understanding between the European Union and the Republic of Serbia on a strategic partnership on sustainable raw materials, battery value chains and electric vehicles, signed on 19 July 2024,

– having regard to its resolution of 29 February 2024 on deepening EU integration in view of future enlargement[4],

– having regard to its previous resolutions on Serbia, in particular that of 19 October 2023 on the recent developments in the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue, including the situation in the northern municipalities in Kosovo[5], and that of 8 February 2024 on the situation in Serbia following the elections[6],

[4] OJ C, C/2024/6746, 26.11.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/6746/oj.
[5] OJ C, C/2024/2654, 29.4.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/2654/oj.
[6] OJ C, C/2024/6339, 7.11.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/6339/oj.

– having regard to Rule 55 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A10-0000/2025),

A. whereas enlargement is one of the most successful EU foreign policy instruments and a strategic geopolitical investment in long-term peace, stability and security throughout the continent;

B. whereas democracy and the rule of law are the fundamental values on which the EU is founded;

C. whereas each candidate country for enlargement is judged on its own merits;

D. whereas Serbia has not imposed sanctions against Russia following the Russian aggression in Ukraine;

Commitment to EU accession

1. Notes Serbia's stated commitment to EU membership as its strategic goal and its ambition to align fully with the EU *acquis* by the end of 2026; stresses the need for Serbia to seriously demonstrate that it is strategically oriented towards the EU and to communicate objectively and unambiguously on the EU;

2. Reiterates the strategic importance of the Western Balkans in today's geopolitical context and for the security and stability of the EU as a whole, and highlights the significance of Serbia's influence in the region;

3. Notes with concern that there has been limited or no overall progress in meeting the benchmarks for EU membership across negotiating chapters, with particular shortcomings in critical areas such as the rule of law, public administration reform, and alignment with EU policies;

4. Regrets the fact that no progress has been made on Chapter 31, as Serbia's pattern of alignment with EU foreign policy positions has remained largely unchanged;

5. Calls on Serbia to align with the EU's restrictive measures and general policy towards Russia, systematically and without delay;

6. Notes Serbia's progress on aligning with EU visa policy and calls for full alignment;

7. Reiterates that the overall pace of the accession negotiations continues to depend on tangible progress on the fundamentals and the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, in addition to alignment with the common foreign and security policy;

Democracy and the rule of law

8. Notes the ongoing challenges in ensuring judicial independence, including undue influence on the judiciary;

9. Stresses the importance of adopting the Law on the Judicial Academy;

10. Notes that limited progress has been made in the fight against corruption despite the

adoption of a new anti-corruption strategy for 2024-2028; expresses concern that corruption is still prevalent in many areas;

11. Welcomes the more pluralistic composition of the new parliament, with a broader representation of political parties; notes that the early election and the corresponding break in the functioning of the government and parliament have impeded progress on reforms;

12. Reiterates its readiness to support the National Assembly and the members thereof in the democratic processes related to Serbia's European path by using the European Parliament's existing democracy support tools and initiatives;

13. Takes note, with concern, of the final report of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission on the December 2023 elections; considers it essential to reform the electoral framework and address the recurrent shortcomings; underlines the critical importance of implementing all outstanding and recent recommendations on electoral reform issued by the OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe bodies, as part of a transparent and inclusive process, and ahead of any new elections;

14. Stresses the critical importance of ensuring the independence of key institutions, including media regulators such as the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media; regrets the delay in the election of the new members; deeply regrets the fact that the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media neglected its legal obligations to scrutinise the conduct of the 2023 election campaign in the media;

Fundamental freedoms and human rights

15. Expresses its sincere condolences to the families of the 15 victims who lost their lives following the collapse of the canopy of Novi Sad train station on 1 November 2024; calls for full and transparent legal proceedings to be opened following the investigation by the authorities;

16. Expresses deep concern about the systemic issues highlighted by the student protests in Serbia, such as issues relating to civil liberties, institutional and financial transparency, and accountability;

17. Underlines the importance of freedom of speech and assembly; condemns, in the strongest terms, the violent attacks against peaceful protesters; is concerned that some of the protesters were arrested and that legal proceedings have been opened against them; urges the diplomatic missions of the EU and the Member States to continue monitoring the ongoing legal cases relating to the protests;

18. Strongly condemns the Serbian authorities' unsubstantiated allegations that EU Member States were involved in organising the student protests with a view to triggering a 'colour revolution'; strongly condemns, in that context, the unlawful arrests and expulsions of EU citizens and the public disclosure, by convicted war criminals, of the personal data of EU citizens;

19. Urges the Serbian Government to increase the transparency of media ownership and financing; calls on the authorities to investigate and prosecute all instances of hate speech, smear campaigns and strategic lawsuits against journalists;

20. Underlines the importance of a framework that enables civil society organisations to operate freely and participate in policymaking in inclusive and meaningful ways;

21. Calls on Serbia to fight disinformation, including manipulative anti-EU narratives and, in particular, state-sponsored disinformation campaigns; condemns the opening of an RT (formerly Russia Today) office in Belgrade and the launch of RT's online news service in Serbian;

22. Takes note of the adoption of the national strategy for gender equality and the strategy for prevention of and protection against discrimination, and calls for their full implementation;

Reconciliation and good neighbourly relations

23. Reiterates that good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation remain essential elements of the enlargement process;

24. Urges Serbia to step up its reconciliation efforts and seek solutions to past disputes, in particular when it comes to missing persons;

25. Reiterates its full support for the EU-facilitated dialogue and welcomes the appointment of Peter Sørensen as the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue;

26. Reiterates the importance of constructive engagement on the part of the authorities of both Serbia and Kosovo in order to achieve a comprehensive legally binding normalisation agreement; calls on both Kosovo and Serbia to avoid unilateral actions that could escalate tensions; calls for all past agreements to be respected and fully implemented, including the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities; calls on the negotiating parties to restore the full functioning of all Kosovo institutions;

27. Expects Kosovo and Serbia to fully cooperate and take all the necessary measures to apprehend and swiftly bring to justice the perpetrators of the 2023 terrorist attack in Banjska; deplores the fact that Serbia still has not prosecuted the culprits, most notably Milan Radoičić, the Vice-President of Srpska Lista; reiterates that the perpetrators of the terrorist attack in Zubin Potok must also be held accountable and must face justice without delay;

28. Calls on the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and on the Commission to take a more proactive role in leading the dialogue process; calls for an enhanced role for the European Parliament in facilitating the dialogue;

Socio-economic reforms

29. Welcomes Serbia's partial progress towards developing a functioning market economy with positive GDP growth; reiterates the need for more substantial reforms in the labour market, education and public administration;

30. Welcomes Serbia's active engagement in the implementation of the new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans; takes note of the fact that Serbia adopted its Reform Agenda

on 3 October 2024; calls for the relevant EU funding to be reprogrammed to redirect more funds towards supporting judiciary reforms and anti-corruption measures;

Energy, the environment, sustainable development and connectivity

31. Notes the legislative progress in the area of the environment and climate change;

32. Takes note of the EU-Serbia memorandum of understanding launching a strategic partnership on sustainable raw materials, battery value chains and electric vehicles; considers that the promotion of the highest environmental standards and dialogue with the affected populations, the scientific community and civil society should be at the centre of any such strategic partnership;

33. Reiterates the importance of diversifying Serbia's energy supply to reduce its dependency on Russia;

°

° °

34. 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 National Assembly of Serbia.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

This report provides Parliament's response to the 2023 and 2024 European Commission Reports on Serbia, reflecting recent events in the country marked by concerns over the state of democracy and the rule of law.

Serbia has been advancing towards EU accession since 2012, when it received candidate country status. Since the opening of Serbia's accession negotiations in January 2014, 22 out of 35 chapters have been opened. All chapters in cluster 1 on the fundamentals and all chapters in cluster 4 on the Green agenda and sustainable connectivity have been opened. Two chapters have provisionally been closed. In June 2021, Serbia accepted the revised enlargement methodology.

Despite some progress in negotiations, Serbia still has major hurdles to overcome: improving internal political dialogue, rule of law and anti-corruption reforms, reaching a comprehensive normalisation agreement with Kosovo, and full alignment with EU foreign policy.

Ensuring the independence of key institutions, including media regulators such as the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM), and full implementation of all outstanding and recent recommendations by the OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe bodies on electoral reform in a transparent and inclusive process and well ahead of any new elections, remain of critical importance.

ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS
FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT

Pursuant to Article 8 of Annex I to the Rules of Procedure, the rapporteur declares that he received input from the following entities or persons in the preparation of the draft report, prior to the adoption thereof in committee:

Entity and/or person
Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood (DG ENEST), European Commission

The list above is drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of the rapporteur**(**s**)**.