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ABSTRACT

In Serbia, legal amendments removed some of the existing safeguards to protect prosecutorial autonomy and judicial independence, hampering the implementation of the constitutional reform of 2023; following subsequent legislative and non-legislative measures, the Venice Commission confirmed that Serbia addressed a considerable part of its recommendations on these amendments. Concerns regarding prosecutorial autonomy remain. Political pressure on the judiciary and the prosecution increased significantly, with limited follow-up from the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils, the Government or Parliament. New magistrate members were elected to the High Judicial Council and to the High Prosecutorial Council, while the selection process for the latter encountered delays and procedural challenges. Challenges remain in filling the considerable number of vacant magistrate positions. The implementation of the IT solution for the new prosecutorial case management system is ongoing, while no steps were taken towards introducing a new uniform, centralised case management system for the courts. A new Judicial Development Strategy is being prepared. Efficiency in civil and commercial cases remains stable, but there is a negative trend in criminal cases; serious challenges in handling administrative cases and constitutional complaints have not been addressed.

A majority of the activities of the previous Anti-Corruption Action Plan have not been achieved, with most of them carried over to the new Action Plan. There are concerns about the obstacles and attempts of undue influence to the effective functioning of the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime. The investigations into the deadly collapse of part of the newly renovated Novi Sad railway station remain ongoing. Challenges remain in establishing a robust track record of investigations, indictments and final convictions in high-level corruption. Weaknesses persist in law and in practice regarding the verification and enforcement of asset declarations and conflicts of interest. A draft law is in preparation aiming to address concerns about the limited in scope and low transparency requirements in the Law on lobbying while amendments to the Law on financing of political activities were adopted and have yet to be assessed against OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. Whistleblowers exposing corruption continue to face challenges. Exemptions to the Law on public procurement continue to be widely used, circumventing anti-corruption safeguards.

Serbia's audiovisual market continued to face serious challenges in the absence of a functioning decision-making body of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media. . In early July 2026, the process was relaunched by the National Assembly through the adoption of an authentic interpretation of the Law on electronic media, addressing legal concerns raised by the four REM Council members who had previously resigned and paving the way for their return. Although the Press Council effectively monitored print media's compliance with the Journalists' Code of Ethics, this did not have an impact on the fairness of the allocation of co-funding by public authorities. Concerns regarding editorial autonomy and the pluralism of public service broadcasters persisted. Against a backdrop of further media market concentration, political and economic influence over the media is a serious concern. Media legislation and strategy, particularly with regard to the fairness of public funding and transparency of ownership structures, are not being enforced adequately. Journalists frequently encounter either refusals by public bodies to disclose information or no response at all. The safety of journalists has further deteriorated, with increased physical attacks and threats.

The effectiveness of Parliament and its oversight function continued to be hindered by a lack of genuine political debate, as well as by the limited ability of members of Parliament to scrutinise legislative proposals properly and contribute to the parliamentary and legislative agenda. Recent progress on electoral reform and the launch of the voter register audit still need to be fully implemented. The exercise of presidential powers remains a subject of intense public debate. The legal framework for public consultations and its enforcement has deteriorated. Ten new judges were appointed to the Constitutional Court, while three positions remained vacant. Most independent bodies working in the area of fundamental rights continue to face resource constraints, and the follow-up on their recommendations remains inconsistent. Civil society organisations have been subjected to increasing pressure and attacks.

I. JUSTICE SYSTEM¹

Independence

The level of perceived judicial independence in Serbia continues to be low among the general public and is now average among companies. Overall, 36% of the general population and 57% of companies perceive the level of independence of courts and judges to be ‘fairly or very good’ in 2026². The perceived judicial independence among the general public has increased in comparison with 2025 (30%), while among companies it has significantly increased in comparison with 2025 (36%).

Legal amendments removed some of existing safeguards to protect prosecutorial autonomy and judicial independence, hampering the implementation of the constitutional reform of 2023; following subsequent legislative and non-legislative measures, the Venice Commission confirmed that Serbia addressed a considerable part of its recommendations on these amendments. In January 2026, the Parliament amended five laws³ based on a proposal of a Member of Parliament in an urgent procedure without a transparent and inclusive consultation process, citing efficiency gains⁴ and subsequently consulted the Venice Commission. The Venice Commission found in its April 2026 urgent opinion several concerning shortcomings which removed the safeguards designed to protect prosecutorial autonomy and judicial independence introduced through constitutional amendments of 2023. For instance, the amendments transferred the authority to verify the legality of prosecutorial instructions and workload from the High Prosecutorial Council back to the prosecutorial hierarchy, thereby reducing prosecutorial autonomy, which the Venice Commission recommended to reverse. The amendments also introduced renewable mandates for Court Presidents and Chief Public Prosecutors instead of the previous single five-year mandate, established hierarchical subordination of the Special Department for Cybercrime to the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade and the replacement of some of the existing courts and prosecution offices by the creation of new ones⁵. Furthermore, the amendments rapidly terminated temporary assignments of all seconded prosecutors from 11 March 2026 and shifted the competence for secondments from the Supreme Public Prosecutor to the High Prosecutorial Council⁶. While the Venice Commission accepted the

¹ An overview of the institutional framework for all four pillars can be found [here](#).

² Flash Eurobarometers 581 and 582 (2026). The level of perceived judicial independence is categorised as follows: very low (below 30% of respondents perceive judicial independence as fairly good and very good); low (between 30-39%), average (between 40-59%), high (between 60-75%), very high (above 75%).

³ The following five laws, which implement the constitutional amendments, were changed by the legal amendments regarding the judiciary and prosecution: The Law on the High Prosecutorial Council, the Law on Judges, the Law on Organisation and Jurisdiction of Government Authorities for Suppression of Cybercrime, the Law on Seats and Territories of Courts and Public Prosecutor’s Offices, and the Law on the Public Prosecutor’s Office.

⁴ Serbian Parliament, explanatory note related to the legal amendments on judiciary and prosecution.

⁵ Venice Commission (2026a); Regarding the former, the Venice Commission recommended to revert to the former non-renewable mandates. As for the the Department for Cybercrime, the Venice Commission recommended that it should be granted greater structural and operational independence. Regarding the judicial and prosecution re-mapping, the Venice Commission underlined that additional studies and impact assessments be conducted, based on a comprehensive prior analysis of the key factors, including an examination of the root causes of existing challenges and a careful evaluation of potential alternative measures to address them. The January 2026 amendments also required the Minister of Justice to approve international prosecutorial cooperation, concerning which the Venice Commission recommended a duty to notify the Ministry of Justice for certain situations rather than requiring prior consent.

⁶ Venice Commission (2026a); amendments to the Law on the Public Prosecutor’s Office. This undermined in particular the functioning of the Public Prosecutor’s Office on Organised Crime (POOC), ending the

shift of competence, it underlined that the early termination of secondments without any compelling justification failed to respect the security of tenure of the affected prosecutors and recommended to reinstate them. In May and June 2026, Serbia prepared new draft amendments, and took other non-legislative measures⁷, which the Venice Commission in its follow-up opinion of 16 June 2026 regarded as addressing the majority of its recommendations. According to the Venice Commission, the outstanding recommendations included the reinstatement of the 2 remaining prosecutors to the Public Prosecutor's Office on Organised Crime, reform providing for a greater structural and operational autonomy to the Special Department for Cybercrime and the need to conduct studies and impact assessments on the reorganisation of the judicial and prosecution maps before the implementation of the organisational changes⁸. On 18 June, the High Prosecutorial Council reinstated the remaining 2 prosecutors whose secondment had previously been terminated⁹.

The revision of the Law on the Judicial Academy and the adoption of the Court Rulebook remain to be completed. Full implementation of the constitutional amendments requires the revision of the Law on the Judicial Academy and the adoption of all relevant by-laws. Regarding the revision of the Law on the Judicial Academy¹⁰, Serbia requested a follow-up opinion from the Venice Commission on revised draft amendments, which was adopted on 15 June 2026¹¹. The Venice Commission concluded that while the new draft addresses its recommendation of December 2024 that the Academy should have exclusive responsibility for entry into the judicial and prosecutorial professions, it does not elaborate on or clarify the procedures related to the exercise by the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils and the specific competencies granted to them¹². It also does not fully address the recommendation regarding the protection of the Academy from possible undue influence, as instead of removing the Minister of Justice's *ex officio* membership of the Academy's management board, the draft instead excludes the Minister of Justice from decision-making on certain matters¹³. Shortly before the adoption of the Venice Commission opinion, on 9 June 2026, Serbia submitted revised draft amendments to remove the Minister of Justice's *ex officio* membership from the Academy's management board, replaced with one member appointed by the government from among law professors or from among scientific advisors/associates in the field of legal sciences¹⁴. This proposal is yet to be assessed by the

assignment of 11 out of 20 prosecutors of the POOC. The secondments of 7 out of the 11 prosecutors to the POOC were extended on 6 March 2026. For further details on the effects on the POOC, see pillar II.

⁷ On 4 May, the High Prosecutorial Council decided to reinstate 2 more prosecutors whose secondment had previously been terminated (bringing the number of re-seconded prosecutors to 9 out of 11) and to second 3 new prosecutors to the POOC.

⁸ Venice Commission (2026b).

⁹ In addition to the reinstatements, the High Prosecutorial Council also seconded 1 additional prosecutor to the POOC on 18 June 2026.

¹⁰ Country visit Serbia: the Law on Judicial Academy is the final implementing law following constitutional amendments, which is yet to be adopted.

¹¹ Venice Commission (2026c).

¹² Namely: (i) the monitoring of the Academy's operation and its professional supervision, (ii) the review of the entrance examination report and ranking, (iii) the exercise of discretion in reviewing candidates following successful completion of 'prior training' programme at the Academy.

¹³ Venice Commission (2024), p. 10. Venice Commission (2026c), p. 11. The Venice Commission noted that this represents a welcome improvement but does not sufficiently address the underlying concerns that formed the basis of the Commission's 2024 recommendation. These concerns have become even more evident, given that the Judicial Academy is now established as the sole entry point to a judicial or prosecutorial career.

¹⁴ Venice Commission (2026d). Amended articles of the draft law on the judicial academy, submitted by Serbia to the Venice Commission on 4 June 2026.

Venice Commission. The adoption of the final by-law on the Court Rulebook, required for the implementation of the constitutional amendments, has been delayed since 2024¹⁵.

Concerns regarding prosecutorial autonomy remain and the effectiveness and confidentiality of criminal investigations are hampered by shortcomings in law and practice. The prosecution, including the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime, continues to face increasing obstacles in its work¹⁶. According to stakeholders, the prosecution service is divided between prosecutors close to the Government and the ruling party ('state prosecutors') and more autonomous prosecution offices, including the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and the Supreme Public Prosecution Office¹⁷. Public officials continue to make comments containing information that is not in the public domain, and there is a lack of effective follow-up to complaints about the revelation of information by law enforcement agencies¹⁸. Shortcomings in law and practice continue to increase the risk of information leaks, which undermines the effectiveness of investigations. In particular, the recommendations to revise the legal framework, which mandates the Security Information Agency to initiate criminal proceedings for certain types of offences involving international elements, and the Security Information Agency and the Military Security Agency to carry out special investigative measures alongside the police, were not addressed¹⁹. Additionally, the police still lacks sufficient operational autonomy from the Ministry of Interior's political influence²⁰. Overall, stakeholders reported that recent appointments to crucial police positions were not merit-based and that the police often does not follow the instructions of the prosecution, which is legally in the lead of investigations according to the law, but rather follows the instructions of their superiors²¹.

Political pressure on the judiciary and the prosecution increased significantly, with limited follow-up from the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils, the Government or Parliament. The situation regarding undue influence has further deteriorated. Government and public officials, and Members of Parliament continued to make undue public comments on ongoing investigations and court proceedings. This includes criticism of the work and decisions of individual prosecutors and judges and threats of removal addressed to judges and prosecutors²². Attempts to exert undue influence on the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime have increased further²³. While the associations of judges and prosecutors have

¹⁵ The details of the implementing laws were to be specified through the adoption of 37 by-laws by May 2024. 36 by-laws were adopted between 2024-2025. The outstanding by-law needs to be jointly adopted by the High Judicial Council and the Ministry of Justice. Serbian Government (2026), written input, p. 184.

¹⁶ For further details, see pillar II.

¹⁷ Country visit Serbia, civil society organisations, High Prosecutorial Council, Supreme Public Prosecution Office, Anti-Corruption Council.

¹⁸ TV Pink (2025a,b), Novosti (2025), Politika RS (2026).

¹⁹ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 8 and 48. The Security Information Agency and the Military Security Agency are Serbia's primary civilian and defence intelligence agencies, respectively. Article 12 of the Law on the Security Information Agency provides for certain competences regarding criminal offences. The Criminal Procedure Code foresees the execution of all special evidentiary actions also for the Security Information Agency and Military Security Agency in Articles. 168, 173, 176, 180 and 185.

²⁰ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 4. In 2025, stakeholders shared concerns that as a result the police is prone to follow instructions from their hierarchy even though the law foresees the prosecution in the lead of investigations.

²¹ Country visit Serbia; N1 (2026b,c). Concerns were reported by stakeholders and media concerning the appointments of a new head of the anti-terrorist unit, a new chief of the criminal police, a narcotics service commander, as well as other lower-ranking and operational roles, all seen as part of a broader effort to consolidate political control over law enforcement.

²² Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation (2025).

²³ European Western Balkans (2026).

defended judges and prosecutors in some instances²⁴, the High Judicial Council and the High Prosecutorial Council have remained largely passive²⁵. In 2025, the High Judicial Council received 4 new requests for protection from undue influence, and the High Prosecutorial Council received 15, of which one was found to be well-founded²⁶. Additionally, the Government and the Parliament have not acted in cases involving undue public comments by their respective members, despite such comments appearing to contradict their code of conduct²⁷.

New magistrate members were elected to the High Judicial Council and to the High Prosecutorial Council, while the selection process for the latter encountered delays and procedural challenges. On 6 April 2026, the High Judicial Council and High Prosecutorial Council began operating in their new composition, with five new judge and five prosecutor members respectively. The High Prosecutorial Council election process was contested and faced delays. Following objections to the elections by unsuccessful candidates in December 2025, some of the election results were annulled by the Constitutional Court. The Minister of Justice filed a criminal complaint against the President of the Council for allegedly neglecting his public duties in relation to the selection procedure²⁸. A re-run of the elections in the contested areas took place in February 2026. This time, the Constitutional Court dismissed the appeals of the unsuccessful candidates. Stakeholders reported pressure from the Security Information Agency to select ‘state prosecutors’ and claimed that the Constitutional Court favoured ‘state prosecutors’ despite the appeals being similar²⁹.

The transparency of the High Judicial Council was strengthened. The High Judicial Council began audio-visually recording its sessions in 2025, making the recordings public within 24 hours of the session³⁰. Meanwhile, the sessions of the High Prosecutorial Council continued to be recorded and livestreamed³¹.

Challenges remain in filling the considerable number of vacant magistrate positions. As of June 2026, 164 out of 899 prosecutor positions were vacant (compared to 139 in May 2025)³². Since May 2025, the High Prosecutorial Council has been unable to make appointment decisions and has only seconded prosecutors including to the Prosecutor’s Office for Organised Crime. All appointment processes either ended without results or had to be postponed due to a lack of quorum in the High Prosecutorial Council, which was also caused by the occasional absences of the Minister of Justice and some other members³³.

²⁴ Judges Association of Serbia (2026); Association of Prosecutors of Serbia (2026).

²⁵ Serbian Government, (2026), written input, p. 149. The High Judicial Council issued two public statements of general nature in July and August 2025 respectively, reminding of the prohibition of undue influence.

²⁶ The High Judicial Council found one case of undue influence and three cases are under review. The High Prosecutorial Council established no undue influence in 11 cases, and the remaining cases are pending. High Prosecutorial Council (2025).

²⁷ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 2.

²⁸ Country visit Serbia, High Prosecutorial Council. The complaint was launched based on the HPC President having convened an electronic session of the Council when a session in person was not possible. In the situation in question, the HPC had to decide within 48 hours on the appeals regarding the election of the prosecutor members for the HPC and the convocation of a session in person had failed before due to the obstruction of certain members of the HPC, including the Minister of Justice, to attend an in-person session.

²⁹ Country visit, Serbia, High Prosecutorial Council, Supreme Public Prosecutor and civil society.

³⁰ In accordance with Article 29 of the Rules of Procedure of the High Judicial Council.

³¹ During the country visit, the High Judicial Council expressed its intention to follow the same process as the High Prosecutorial Council and livestream its sessions. Country visit Serbia.

³² High Prosecutorial Council, written contribution.

³³ Serbian Government, (2026), written input, p. 146-147; Country visit Serbia.

Between 1 January 2026 and 1 June 2026, the High Judicial Council passed a decision on the appointment of 205 judges.. As of June 2026, 2 733 judicial positions were filled and 394 were vacant (compared to 383 at the end of 2024)³⁴.

Quality

The implementation of the IT solution for the new prosecutorial case management system is ongoing, but it is not yet fully operational, while no steps were taken towards introducing a new uniform, centralised case management system for the courts. The IT solution for the new case management system for prosecution offices was finalised in 2024, with full operationalisation expected by the end of Q3 2026³⁵. The new uniform and centralised case management system for courts is still stalled; the Ministry of Justice has not yet sought alternative solutions for developing and providing the necessary software³⁶. Further work is required to ensure that all systems can operate efficiently. This includes legislative changes to the Criminal Procedure Code and the Civil Procedure Code to enable digital documentation to be admitted as evidence, as set out in the new case management systems. This will require adequate staffing, financial resources and upgraded communication infrastructure³⁷. Although the number of cases for which legal aid has been granted has increased slightly between 2023 and 2024, shortcomings remain regarding the capacity of local self-government entities to deal with these requests. In addition, there is still a lack of citizen awareness about the existence of legal aid, while there has been an EU funded awareness campaign to address this³⁸.

A new Judicial Development Strategy is being prepared following delays and insufficient implementation of previous strategies, and shortcomings remain regarding the quality of judicial training. There have been delays in implementing the human resources strategy, and the implementation of the ICT strategy is undermined by a lack of coordination and monitoring mechanisms. The Ministry of Justice plans to prepare and formally adopt a new comprehensive Judicial Development Strategy in 2026. This strategy should incorporate all the measures from previous strategies that are yet to be implemented³⁹. The institutional capacity, internal expertise, transparency of the initial testing process and the quality of the mentoring system of the Judicial Academy have not yet been improved. Furthermore, Serbia has not taken any steps towards delivering an advanced programme with clearly defined objectives or introducing a system of quality control to improve the quality of judicial training, including regarding EU law⁴⁰.

³⁴ Serbian Government, (2026), written input, p. 146-147; Country visit Serbia.

³⁴ High Judicial Council, written contribution.

³⁵ Serbian Government, (2026), written input, pp. 171-172. As of January 2025, the programme has been implemented in a total of ten public prosecution offices. Public procurement procedures are currently ongoing for the continuation of regular maintenance of the application.

³⁶ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 5; 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 5. Country visit Serbia. Despite consistent and repeated efforts, no further progress has been possible during the reporting period to solve the contractual dispute, which had caused the stalemate regarding the existing project.

³⁷ Country visit Serbia.

³⁸ The number of cases for which legal aid has been granted rose from 0.10 per inhabitant in 2023 to 0.11 in 2024. CEPEJ (2025), 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 5. Serbian Government, written contribution, p. 4. “You have the right!”, a campaign project to raise public awareness of free legal aid through coordinated national and local outreach, media activities, and training, was launched in October 2024 and concluded in September 2025.

³⁹ Serbian Government (2026), written input, p. 159.

⁴⁰ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 5; 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 31.

Efficiency

Efficiency of the justice system in civil and commercial cases remains stable, but there is a negative trend in criminal cases; serious challenges in handling of administrative cases and constitutional complaints have not been addressed. For civil and commercial cases, the clearance rate for first instance cases fell (from 140% in 2023 to 119% in 2024), while the disposition time remained stable. For second instance cases, however, the clearance rate improved (from 97% in 2023 to 106% in 2024), but the disposition time increased (from 351 in 2023 to 381 days in 2024)⁴¹. For criminal cases, the clearance rate decreased slightly for both first (from 103% in 2023 to 98% in 2024) and second instances (from 99% in 2023 to 96% in 2024). Disposition times increased by 63% for first instance criminal cases (from 219 in 2023 to 170 days in 2024) and by 40% for second instance criminal cases (from 36 in 2023 to 49 days 2024)⁴². Meanwhile, the situation concerning administrative justice remains challenging: despite a reduction in incoming cases linked to a drop in lawsuits triggered by ‘administrative silence’, and an improvement in the clearance rate (from 34.78% in 2023 to 76% in 2024 and 119% in 2025) and disposition times, the latter remained long (1 362 days in 2025 and 1 933 days in 2024, down from 2 095 days in 2023). The authorities attributed the decrease in filings to the improved responsiveness of administrative bodies. However, structural challenges persist, particularly regarding the implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance⁴³. Preparation of a new unified backlog programme for 2026-2030 after the expiration of the 2021-2025 programme has been finalised, but its publication is pending⁴⁴. The number of cases pending before the Constitutional Court slightly decreased but overall remained high: 42.460 cases as of April 2026 (compared to 43 666 cases in 2024 and 29 672 in 2023). Of these cases, 99% are constitutional complaints⁴⁵.

II. ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK

The perception among experts, citizens and business executives is that the level of corruption in the public sector remains high. In the 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, Serbia scores 33/100 and ranks 116th globally⁴⁶. This perception has deteriorated over the past five years⁴⁷. The 2026 Special Eurobarometer on Corruption

⁴¹ The disposition time remained relatively stable, with a further slight improvement from 278 in 2023 to 274 days in 2024. CEPEJ (2025), p. 16.

⁴² CEPEJ (2025), pp. 18-20.

⁴³ CEPEJ (2025), p. 2. In Serbia, the notable drop in the number of incoming administrative cases in 2024 is largely due to a decrease in the so-called Ucu cases—lawsuits filed because of the administration's failure to respond within the legally prescribed deadlines, mainly directed against the Republic Pension and Disability Insurance Fund. In 2023, the Administrative Court received a total of 78 017 cases, of which 61 794 were Ucu cases. By 2024, the number of incoming cases fell to 42 741, with 27 113 falling under the Ucu category. According to the authorities, this significant decrease suggests that the competent administrative bodies have improved their responsiveness, resolving requests more promptly and thus reducing litigation triggered by administrative silence. However, challenges persist in the implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, as the legislation remains unchanged and no amendments have been introduced to address existing gaps.

⁴⁴ Serbian Government (2026), written contribution.

⁴⁵ Constitutional Court (2026), written input received after the country visit.

⁴⁶ Transparency International (2026). The level of perceived corruption is categorised as follows: low (the perception among experts and business executives of public sector corruption scores above 79); relatively low (scores between 79-60), relatively high (scores between 59-50), high (scores below 50).

⁴⁷ In 2021, the score was 38, while in 2025 the score was 33. The score significantly increases/decreases when it changes more than five points; improves/deteriorates (changes between 4-5 points); is relatively stable (changes from 1-3 points) in the last five years.

shows that 84% of respondents consider corruption widespread in their country (EU average 71%) and 34% of respondents feel personally affected by corruption in their daily lives (EU average 30%). As regards businesses, 84% of companies consider that corruption is widespread (EU average 65%) and 45% consider that corruption is a problem when doing business (EU average 37%). Furthermore, 30% of respondents find that there are enough successful prosecutions to deter people from corrupt practices (EU average 38%), while 35% of companies believe that people and businesses caught for bribing a senior official are appropriately punished (EU average 31%)⁴⁸.

A majority of the activities of the previous Anti-Corruption Action Plan have not been achieved, with most of them carried over to the new Action Plan. A National Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2024-2028 is in place⁴⁹. On 4 June 2026, a new Action Plan for 2026-2028 was adopted to implement the strategy, including addressing the outstanding GRECO recommendations from the 4th and 5th round⁵⁰. The Agency for the Prevention of Corruption has analysed the implementation of the 2024-2025 action plan and concluded that out of a total of 143 activities, 43% were fully implemented, while 56% were not fully implemented⁵¹. According to the implementation report, around 80% of activities were transferred from the previous action plan to the new one⁵². The effective implementation and monitoring of the new action plan can only be ensured if adequate coordination mechanisms and budgetary resources are put in place, as well as an effective monitoring and evaluation system to track progress and impact⁵³. The absence of such measures impeded the implementation of the previous action plan. The legal framework to fight corruption remains broadly in place, and most forms of corruption are criminalised⁵⁴. Serbia is not a signatory party to the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention⁵⁵.

There are concerns about the obstacles and attempts of undue influence to the effective functioning of the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime. The Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime (POOC), which has jurisdiction over high-level corruption cases, continues to be limited in its capacity to process and investigate complex organised crime and high-level corruption cases⁵⁶. Following the judicial amendments in January 2026 the secondments of 11 of its prosecutors ended⁵⁷. While the premature ending of the mandates of the seconded prosecutors failed to respect their security of tenure and raised questions regarding compliance with the principles of legal certainty and prosecutorial autonomy, the High

⁴⁸ Data from Special Eurobarometer 573 (2026) and Flash Eurobarometer 582 (2026).

⁴⁹ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 7. Serbian Government (2026), written input, pp. 218-219. The Anti-Corruption Strategy was adopted in July 2024 and includes measures recommended by the Commission, namely to counter corruption in sectors vulnerable to corruption, including health, taxes, customs, education, local self-government, privatisation, public procurement and police and features both prevention and repression objectives.

⁵⁰ Serbian Government (2026b); GRECO (2024). According to the latest GRECO compliance report of 4 July 2024, of the 24 recommendations from the 5th evaluation round, only one has been fully met, and 10 have been partially met. During its plenary of 8-12 June 2026, the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) adopted the Second Compliance Report for Serbia under its Fifth Evaluation Round, which is yet to be published.

⁵¹ Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (2026). Two activities or 1% could not be assessed.

⁵² Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (2026). According to the Agency's assessment, 115 out of 143 (80%) of the activities from the previous action plan were carried over to the new action plan.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 7.

⁵⁵ OECD (2026).

⁵⁶ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Country visit Serbia.

Prosecutorial Council eventually reinstated these prosecutors between March and June and seconded four other prosecutors in total to the POOC⁵⁸. Furthermore, cooperation with the police has deteriorated in recent months, including instances where police officers were withdrawn from task forces and failed to follow orders from the prosecution, as also reported by prosecutors⁵⁹. Stakeholders further reported increasing internal pressure in the police, with the recent appointments at various levels of the police force perceived as attempts to increase political control over law enforcement⁶⁰. The police's specialised organised crime unit investigating high-level corruption offences lacks sufficient staff to effectively carry out their tasks. The role and mandate of the POOC regarding the overall coordination of corruption-related investigations, including those conducted by specialised departments within the Higher Public Prosecutors' offices⁶¹, remains inadequately defined by law. No special mechanism has been established to ensure this coordination, and the law does not oblige the relevant institutions to inform each other when investigations are launched. This leads to parallel and/or ineffective investigations in practice and risks hindering the consistency of action in corruption investigations by the different specialised bodies, resulting in a lack of effectiveness⁶².

The investigations into the deadly collapse of part of the newly renovated Novi Sad railway station remain ongoing. Following the tragic incident at Novi Sad railway station in which 16 people were killed in 2024, which prompted widespread public protests, the authorities launched investigations into alleged corruption linked to the collapse of the canopy. These investigations are yet to be completed⁶³. The POOC reported a lack of

⁵⁸ Venice Commission (2026a), p. 18; Venice Commission (2026b), p. 11. Of the 11 temporarily assigned prosecutors, whose mandate ended with effect from 11 March under the January 2026 amendments, the High Prosecutorial Council (HPC) renewed the 7 secondments on 6 March, 2 more secondments on 4 May, and 2 additional secondments on 18 June. The HPC also seconded 3 new prosecutors to the POOC on 4 May and 1 new prosecutor on 18 June. This means that all 11 prosecutors whose security of tenure was affected, were reinstated, 4 additional prosecutors were seconded and the POOC is now functioning with 24 out of 25 prosecutors (in addition to the Chief Public Prosecutor for Organised Crime). The current premises of the Public Prosecutor's Office are not sufficient to accommodate new staff as plans to construct a new building to accommodate the POOC are currently on hold due to unsecured financial resources (2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 34).

⁵⁹ Country visit Serbia; Serbian Monitor (2025a). On 4 September 2025, the Police withdrew 17 police officers from the Task Force investigating financial flows linked to the canopy collapse in Novi Sad.

⁶⁰ Country visit Serbia; NIN (2025). See also pillar I. Concerns were reported by stakeholders and media concerning the appointments of a new head of the anti-terrorist unit, a new chief of the criminal police, a narcotics service commander, as well as other lower-ranking and operational roles, all seen as part of a broader effort to consolidate political control over law enforcement.

⁶¹ Serbia has four specialised Anti-Corruption Departments within the Higher Prosecution Offices in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis and Kraljevo, competent for corruption cases not exceeding a value of RSD 200 million and a Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime which is the main body in charge for corruption cases exceeding this value (Art. 3 of the Law on the Organisation and Competence of State Authorities in the Suppression of Organised Crime, Terrorism and Corruption).

⁶² 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 8. See also the following para for further details on the Novi Sad investigations.

⁶³ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 6. 16 people were killed in this incident in November 2024, prompting widespread public protests over corruption and the perceived lack of accountability and transparency in Government infrastructure and construction projects. In December 2024, the Higher Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad filed indictments against 13 public officials on charges for endangering public safety, including the former Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, who subsequently resigned from his post. Parallel investigations into related corruption crimes caused risks of uncoordinated proceedings at the outset, due to the divided competences between the four specialised Anti-Corruption Departments and the Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime.

cooperation by the police regarding the full provision of evidence collected⁶⁴. The Task Force set up by the POOC for this investigation ceased its activities in September 2025 following the removal of 17 experienced members by the Ministry of the Interior, explaining that a new job classification system had been adopted⁶⁵. These decisions impeded indictments, resulting in the Belgrade Higher Court's decision to remove the detention measures for the accused. Another factor that has contributed to the slow investigations is the initial initiation of parallel proceedings concerning the same case, which were only later incorporated into the POOC-led proceedings⁶⁶. This incident and the lack of progress in its investigation continue to fuel perceptions of a lack of accountability and transparency in Government infrastructure and construction projects. The investigation of the European Public Prosecutor's Office launched in March 2025 into the reconstruction of the railway station is ongoing⁶⁷.

Challenges remain in establishing a robust track record of investigations, indictments and final convictions in high-level corruption cases and there have been no significant judicial outcomes of the anti-corruption operation in 2025. Overall, challenges remain in establishing a robust track record of investigations, indictments and final convictions in high-level corruption cases, including the seizure and confiscation of criminal assets⁶⁸. Against this backdrop, stakeholders continued to express concern about the reluctance on the side of the prosecution and the police to investigate corruption suspects with links to political and economic power⁶⁹. The anti-corruption operation which took place primarily from February to April 2025 following public announcements on an anti-corruption campaign made by senior public officials did not yield significant judicial outcomes. Over 153 individuals were arrested during this period. However, many were subsequently released⁷⁰ and the campaign achieved limited results, with no systemic investigation, prosecutorial follow-through or final judicial outcomes until now⁷¹.

Weaknesses persist in law and in practice regarding the verification and enforcement of asset declarations and conflicts of interest. The Law on prevention of corruption, which prescribes the duty for public officials to file asset declarations and to report conflicts of interest, still needs to be amended to broaden the definition of public official in line with GRECO recommendations. Serbia has prepared draft amendments, which are yet to be assessed by GRECO⁷². The system for verifying declarations continues to raise concerns.

⁶⁴ Country visit Serbia, Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime; Public statement of 25 November 2025 of the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime.

⁶⁵ Serbian Monitor (2025b).

⁶⁶ Initially, both the Higher Prosecution Office in Novi Sad and the Higher Prosecution Office in Belgrade started separate corruption related investigations, which were later transferred by the Supreme Public Prosecutor to the POOC, allowing for investigations by one prosecutorial entity, which has, however, since ceased. Stakeholders during the country visit underlined that the divided competences lead to challenges regarding coordination and consistency of corruption related offences in Serbia. Country visit Serbia.

⁶⁷ Serbian Monitor (2025c).

⁶⁸ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, pp. 6 and 34. 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 7.

⁶⁹ Country visit Serbia.

⁷⁰ European Western Balkans (2025).

⁷¹ Transparency Serbia (2025).

⁷² While some public officials are covered by the current law, relevant high-level positions, such as advisors to the president, prime minister and heads of cabinets are so far under no obligation to submit asset declarations and to report conflicts of interest. See GRECO (2022), pp. 4,21; 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 8. Serbian Government, written contribution, p. 13. Draft amendments have been prepared with the aim to provide a more detailed regulation of asset declaration requirements, broaden the definition of public officials, and strengthen reporting obligations concerning conflicts of interest, with a view to aligning the legal framework with the recommendations of GRECO. However, these amendments are yet to be assessed by GRECO.

The Agency for the Prevention of Corruption has continued to publish in advance which category of public officials will be subject to substantive checks in the respective year, thereby risking to reduce the effectiveness and deterrent impact of controls. While there has been a slight increase in the number of Agency employees, its human and technical resources remain insufficient to effectively and comprehensively carry out its corruption prevention tasks⁷³. This lack of capacity was demonstrated in the Agency's 2025 annual verification plan, which indicated that the Agency continued to carry out substantive checks on the asset declarations of only around 1% of public officials⁷⁴. Sanctions for non-compliance remain rare and are predominantly applied to misdemeanour offences⁷⁵. Furthermore, no steps have been taken to enhance the independence, impartiality and accountability of the Agency.

The lack of systematic consultation and follow-up to the recommendations of the Anti-Corruption Council as the Government's advisory body remains a serious concern. The Anti-Corruption Council continues to be active in identifying and analysing systemic corruption. However, institutional follow-up is weak. While other institutions still undertake limited follow-up on the Council's findings, the Government neither systematically consults the Council on draft legislation nor implements its recommendations. The Council's operational capacity remains limited due to financial and human resource shortages, and the high number of vacancies remains unaddressed⁷⁶. Furthermore, also prosecution offices continue to take only limited action in pursuing cases detected by the Council⁷⁷.

A draft law is in preparation aiming to address concerns about the limited scope and low transparency requirements in the Law on lobbying while the amendments to the Law on financing of political activities were adopted and have yet to be assessed against OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. The scope of the Lobbying Law is still limited to formal, written contacts between representatives of interest groups and individuals in senior executive roles, and it excludes all other forms of interaction. Lobbying records and the annual activity reports required of lobbyists are still not made public, limiting transparency and accountability. GRECO has recommended addressing both of these issues⁷⁸, and the

⁷³ Serbian Government (2026), written input, p. 222. 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 8. Compared to the previous reporting period, there has been an increase in the number of employees. Of the 23 employees provided for by the Regulation on Systematization in the Agency, 13 positions have been filled in the Sector for the Control of Assets and Income, which deals with matters related to the declaration of property of public officials, but the Agency reports that this sector needs to be further strengthened with human resources.

⁷⁴ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 8; Country visit Serbia, Agency for Prevention of Corruption. According to the national register, around 30 000 public officials exist in Serbia. In 2025, the Agency checked the asset declarations of 305 public officials, which is a slight increase compared to 290 in 2024, but nevertheless accounts only for around 1% of all public officials.

⁷⁵ In 2025, the Agency reported 10 criminal offences to the Public Prosecutor's Office (compared to 1 offence in 2024). The Agency imposed 218 warning measures, 7 measures of public announcement on the decision on violation of the law, 118 misdemeanours and 7 reports to other state bodies due to the suspicion of a criminal offences within their jurisdiction. Country visit Serbia, Agency for Prevention of Corruption.

⁷⁶ At present the Council has six members out of 11. While the rules of procedure of the Council entail safeguards aimed at promoting its independence, such as that appointments to the Council must be based on proposals of candidates by the Anti-Corruption Council, two members were appointed in 2017 by the government without being proposed by the Council. Against this background, the Anti-Corruption Council has expressed concern that adoption of new rules of procedure, as set out in the anti-corruption action plan 2024-2025, could effectively undermine its independence. Country visit Serbia, Anti-Corruption Council.

⁷⁷ Limited action is taken by the prosecution offices to investigate corruption cases. The Council cited the long-pending issue of police autonomy from the Ministry of the Interior, which undermines the authority of the prosecution. Country visit Serbia, Anti-Corruption Council.

⁷⁸ GRECO (2022), pp. 18 ff., paras 64-68.

authorities have prepared draft amendments to the Lobbying Law with the aim of complying with the recommendations⁷⁹. These amendments have not yet been adopted. Amendments to the Law on Financing Political Activities were adopted in July 2026 and have yet to be assessed against OSCE ODIHR recommendations, such as the lack of rules on campaigning by third parties, as well as ensuring the effectiveness of the oversight mechanism⁸⁰.

Whistleblowers exposing corruption continue to face challenges and the Government is planning an analysis of the legal framework. The Government plans to conduct an analysis of the Law on the Protection of Whistleblowers by 2026 to prepare a new draft law to align with the EU *acquis*, which is yet to be achieved. While no steps were taken during the reporting period, the planned analysis would provide an opportunity to revise the law⁸¹ to include all types of disclosures and persons, such as former employees, and to explicitly protect whistleblowers whose disclosure is not substantiated⁸². Support mechanisms for whistleblowers, including legal aid, have not yet been strengthened. In practice, whistleblowers face pressure from state institutions, including removal from their positions and arrest⁸³, risking causing a chilling effect on reporting and the detection of corruption. The enforcement of protection for whistleblowers against any form of retaliation remains ineffective in practice, and challenges related to oversight have not been resolved⁸⁴.

Exemptions to the Law on public procurement continue to be widely used, circumventing anti-corruption safeguards, and oversight remains weak. The law stipulates the publication of awarded contracts in the Public Procurement portal, providing for transparency⁸⁵. However, many contracts are awarded outside the scope of this standard public procurement legislation through project-specific special laws and intergovernmental agreements used for large infrastructure projects, with provisions for exclusive access to particular bidding procedures. These are not in line with the EU *acquis*. In 2025, the value of public procurement exempted from the application of the law was close to that of public procurement contracts concluded through regular proceedings⁸⁶. There are also cases where the estimated value of procurement is set just below the thresholds laid down by the law, thus being exempted from its scope and procedures. Although the Criminal Code provides for a

Serbia has prepared and shared with the European Commission a first draft of the law for assessment, however, no further steps have been taken.

⁸⁰ OSCE/ODIHR (2024), pp. 15 ff.; Venice Commission, OSCE/ODIHR (2022), pp. 22 ff.

⁸¹ Serbian Government (2026), written input, p. 215. Country visit Serbia.

⁸² 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 9.

⁸³ Freedom House (2026).

⁸⁴ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 9. Oversight duties are shared between several ministries with no overall supervision mechanism of the effective follow-up of whistleblower reports.

⁸⁵ The Law on public procurement is broadly aligned with EU *acquis*, but a large number of contracts are exempted from the application of the law. No further measures have been taken since the most recent amendments to this law in 2024, which introduced the requirement of the publication of all contracts concluded in public procurement procedures on the Public Procurement Portal.

⁸⁶ Public Procurement Office (2026), PrEUgovor (2025), Transparency Serbia (2024). Over the past five years, approximately EUR 24 billion has been awarded through procurements exempt from the application of the Law on public procurement. This accounts for almost half of the total value of all procurements carried out in this period. In 2025, the value of contracts exempted from the Law was EUR 7 billion and the value of contracts concluded under the Law was EUR 7.9 billion. In 2024, the value of contracts exempted from the Law was slightly lower than in 2023 (the total value of exempt procurements in 2024 was EUR 5.7 billion while the total value of contracts concluded under the Law was EUR 8.9 billion; in 2023 the figures were respectively EUR 7 billion exempted and EUR 7.3 billion concluded under the Law). However, this data is only indicative, as some procurements are not included, especially the contracts based on the provisions of special laws.

specific offence of abuse in public procurement⁸⁷, convictions remain rare⁸⁸. While the numbers of contracts monitored by the Public Procurement Office is slowly increasing and the State Audit Institution's recommendations are broadly implemented⁸⁹, 96% of identified irregularities in 2025 relate to public procurement⁹⁰, raising concerns. Overall, public procurement in Serbia remains a high-risk area for corruption and irregularities due to systemic challenges with transparency, the extensive use of laws circumventing standard procedure and high-value infrastructure project. Other areas at particular risk to corruption include State-owned enterprises, concessions, bankruptcy proceedings, public-private partnerships and the health sector⁹¹.

III. MEDIA PLURALISM AND MEDIA FREEDOM

Serbia's audiovisual market continued to face serious challenges in the absence of a functioning decision-making body of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media. The election of a new Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) had been pending since the previous Council's mandate expired in November 2024. In early July 2026, the process was relaunched by the National Assembly through the adoption of an authentic interpretation of the Law on electronic media, to address legal concerns raised by the four REM Council members who had previously resigned and paving the way for their return. In the meantime, the audiovisual market was left without a regulatory authority to react to breaches of the media legislation. Some TV channels have started broadcasting on Telekom Srbija cable, without the required airing licence. Some of these channels have also received public funding and public officials have appeared on them⁹². The competition for the allocation of the fifth frequency for national broadcasting, launched in 2022, has not yet concluded⁹³. Another consequence of the delayed election of the REM Council is that, despite the requirements of the amended Law on Public Broadcasting Services of June 2025, there was no REM Council to approve the new secondary legislation concerning the operation of public broadcasters, including the new rulebook for appointing their management boards. Serbia has not taken notable action to combat foreign information manipulation and interference. RT Balkans continues to broadcast in the Serbian language, via the majority state-owned Telekom Srbija cable operator, and under the licence previously issued by the REM Council in 2024⁹⁴.

Although the Press Council effectively monitored print media's compliance with the

⁸⁷ Article 228 Criminal Code.

⁸⁸ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 9. Country visit Serbia.

⁸⁹ Serbian Government (2026), written contribution, chapter 32, p. 32. The SAI distinguishes three priorities to measure the implementation of recommendations. For each priority, the SAI has set a different standard for its expectation on auditees' follow-up. In 2025, auditees implemented 89% of SAI's first priority recommendations, and 74% second and third priority recommendations. A database of the recommendations is available on the SAI website.

⁹⁰ In 105 of the audited entities, it was determined that the procurement of goods, services and works was not carried out in accordance with the aforementioned law in 923 cases, corresponding to an amount of 108.22 billion dinars. State Audit Institution (2026), p. 13.

⁹¹ Anti-Corruption Council (2026).

⁹² Niš TV started broadcasting in 2025, without a licence. The company owning this channel is reported to have received public co-funding from the City of Niš. Guests on the programme have included the President of the Republic, the head of the ruling party and a Minister. ANEM (2025a) and (2025b).

⁹³ Prior to the expiry of REM's mandate, the Council had not allocated it as, according to REM, the procedure was interrupted and would continue after the decision of the Administrative Court on the lawsuit against the decision on the award of four national licenses. This, however, would not prevent a fifth license from being allocated.

⁹⁴ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 41.

Journalists' Code of Ethics, this did not have an impact on the fairness of the allocation of co-funding by public authorities. In 2025, the Press Council received 185 complaints, which was a sharp increase compared to 2024 (88). The Council found that the Code of Ethics had been violated in 110 cases, and that there had been no violation in 23 cases⁹⁵. Of particular concern for the Press Council was the new practice of simultaneously publishing identical texts across multiple media outlets, often with the exact same headlines, which lacked basic journalistic standards and appeared to be intended to harm the individuals mentioned in the articles⁹⁶. Regarding the authorities' calls for public co-financing, while the Law on Public Information and Media prescribes the extent to which the respective media outlets adhere to ethical standards as one of the criteria for receiving co-funding, some media outlets that violated the Code of Ethics continued to receive funding⁹⁷.

Concerns regarding editorial autonomy and the pluralism of public service broadcasters persisted. The Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) 2026 found that the 'independence of public service media' indicator deteriorated in 2025 and became a very high-risk area (85%)⁹⁸. The amendments to the Law on Public Broadcasting Services in June 2025 did not ensure the full financial independence of public broadcasters. State funding for Radio Television Vojvodina was needed again in 2026 to compensate for the low level of the fee⁹⁹. New secondary legislation, which was legally required by December 2025¹⁰⁰, has not yet been adopted. This includes a Programming Council's general act that was to further regulate the procedure for electing a new 'Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of Listeners, Viewers and Readers', as well as the scope of work of the Commissioner and the termination of their duties. Concerns over limited pluralism and biased reporting in favour of the government persisted¹⁰¹. The two public broadcasters continued to be strongly criticised by civil society and media associations for their lack of reporting, or their politically slanted reporting, of the student protests¹⁰². Some journalist redundancies at RTS were reportedly in retaliation for their personal social and political views¹⁰³. In February 2026, a new RTS director¹⁰⁴ was appointed, on the basis of the previous Law on Public Broadcasting Services¹⁰⁵, following a process criticised by some media associations, during which another

⁹⁵ As for other cases, in two cases no consensus was reached, 13 complaints were resolved through mediation, in 11 cases complainants withdrew from the procedure, and 26 complaints were dismissed for formal reasons. Press Council (2025).

⁹⁶ Most complaints regarding this type of content were submitted by participants in student and civic protests. Press Council (2025).

⁹⁷ According to the data in the Unified Information System for the Implementation and Monitoring of Co-financing of Projects in the Field of Public Information (JIS) of the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications.

⁹⁸ Compared with 70%, a high-risk area, in 2024. 2025 Media Pluralism Monitor, p. 33.

⁹⁹ According to the Law, the core activity of the public broadcasting service shall be financed from fees. The monthly fee is bundled with electricity bills and collected from citizens and legal entities.

¹⁰⁰ Within six months of the adoption of the law, as required by the Law on Public Broadcasting Services.

¹⁰¹ 2026 Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM), p. 41. Aggregated data over the month of April 2026, for example, shows that the ruling majority was covered in 95% of airtime in the central news broadcast of Radio Television Serbia (RTS), compared to 5% for opposition parties, according to the data of a CSO specialised in democracy and media monitoring in Serbia.

¹⁰² Country visit Serbia, civil society and media associations.

¹⁰³ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 42.

¹⁰⁴ The new director commented that the broadcaster had been destabilised from within during the previous period and that while RTS staff were free to have different opinions about the channel's reporting, they could not engage in individual activism. Interview in RTS's central news, 3 March 2026. RTS (2026).

¹⁰⁵ Stakeholders have questioned the legality of the procedure as the call was published after the law was amended but before the secondary legislation was updated in the absence of a REM Council. Country visit Serbia.

candidate withdrew, citing irregularities¹⁰⁶.

Against a backdrop of further media market concentration, political and economic influence on the media, including on editorial policy, is a cause of serious concern. The MPM 2026 considered that the ‘political independence of media’ indicator, a very high-risk area, worsened in 2025 (97%)¹⁰⁷. The media market became more concentrated following the 2023 amendments to the Law on Public Information and Media, which allowed state-owned companies to own media outlets¹⁰⁸. In August 2025, concerns were raised about political pressure on media outlets perceived as critical towards the authorities when a leaked phone conversation between the CEOs of a private media group and Telekom Srbija, which is majority state-owned, regarding personnel changes in the former was published¹⁰⁹. In February 2026, new governance and editorial boards were announced for that private media group, followed by the dismissals of the CEO of the subsidiary company and, in April 2026, of the director of its news channel. Several local media outlets, owned by the same few economic entities, were launched or acquired in municipalities, including those where elections were due to take place in March 2026¹¹⁰.

Media legislation and strategy, particularly with regard to the fairness of public funding and transparency of ownership structures, are not enforced adequately. Media often depend heavily on public co-funding due to the large number of registered media outlets combined with the limited advertising market, particularly at the local level¹¹¹. Out of 174 municipalities and self-governments, all but 12 launched calls for media co-financing within the legal deadline in 2025¹¹². Grants were allocated at national and local levels even when evaluation committee members did not adhere to the scoring grids set out in secondary legislation¹¹³. Other types of public funding are awarded through less transparent processes, such as the procurement of information services and advertising¹¹⁴. The objective of Serbia’s media strategy¹¹⁵ to disclose all sources of public funding in a transparent, comprehensive and user-friendly manner in the media register remains to be fully implemented. The register still does not reveal the ultimate ownership of each media outlet, since many owners are

¹⁰⁶ One of the candidates filed a lawsuit against RTS with the Higher Court in Belgrade.

¹⁰⁷ Compared with 92% in 2024. 2025 Media Pluralism Monitor, p. 33.

¹⁰⁸ Reversing the previous prohibition in Serbian legislation, and contrary to the objective of Serbia’s media strategy 2020-2025.

¹⁰⁹ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 42.

¹¹⁰ The 2026 MPM reported that in 2025 the government pursued a strategy of purchasing financially weakened local media through its exponents, to secure more control ahead of the March 2026 local elections. As a result, an increasing number of local outlets now operate under direct or indirect political control and produce content with tightly controlled topics; NPM (2026), p. 47. The election observation mission of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities also reported on the state of local media as negatively affected by ownership concentration and self-censorship; Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2026).

¹¹¹ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 43.

¹¹² Statistics provided by the Serbian authorities. The Ministry of Information and Telecommunications initiated misdemeanour proceedings against them for failing to meet the legal deadline.

¹¹³ Rulebook on Co-financing of Projects for the Realization of Public Interest in the Field of Public Information; information provided by the Serbian authorities in the context of Reform and Growth Facility payment requests. Media associations also continued to report irregularities, such as many project co-financing committees being composed of the same individuals, often not the most qualified experts, and resulting in the largest allocations going to media linked to senior government officials and their associates; 2026 Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM), p.29.

¹¹⁴ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 43.

¹¹⁵ Adopted by the Government on 30 January 2020. It expired in 2025, and a new media strategy has yet to be adopted. The corresponding action plan had expired already in 2022.

listed as subsidiary companies¹¹⁶. The inspections service of the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications over the media register, as planned by the Law on Public Information and Media, was established in June 2025. The enforcement of the amended provision of the Law on Public Information and Media regarding the adoption of internal ethical codes lacks monitoring¹¹⁷. Measures foreseen in the previous media strategy (2020-2025) to ensure the fair and transparent allocation of state advertising have yet to be implemented. The privatisation of the media sector, as also planned by the strategy, remains incomplete¹¹⁸.

Journalists frequently encounter either refusals by public bodies to disclose information or no response at all, including regarding sensitive information of public importance.

Serbia has signed, but not yet ratified, the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents¹¹⁹. The Commissioner for Information of Public Importance is still unable to enforce its decisions directly through coercive action¹²⁰. According to their 2025 report, as in previous years, a higher percentage of the Commissioner's decisions on complaints by journalists remain unexecuted than those of other complainants¹²¹. In 2025, 72 complaints (43%) out of 166 filed by journalists were filed against the silence of the administration¹²². During the same year, of the 195 resolved complaints from journalists¹²³, the Commissioner issued 45 decisions ordering the provision of information, 10 of which (22%) were not enforced, and for another 12, no information was provided as of 5 March 2026. Access to sensitive information of public importance was denied notably in cases concerning environmental damage, capital projects, the use of public resources, legalisation of illegally constructed buildings and the co-financing of media projects¹²⁴.

The safety of journalists has further deteriorated, with an increase in cases of physical attacks, threats, intimidation and hate speech. The MPM 2025 found that the indicator for 'journalistic profession, standards and protection' worsened in 2025 (77%)¹²⁵. There was an increase in cases of physical attacks, threats, intimidation and hate speech against journalists¹²⁶, which were not consistently condemned by the authorities¹²⁷. Threats and

¹¹⁶ 2026 Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM), p. 25. The MPM also found that, due to shortcomings in the media registers, it is practically impossible to determine how many media an individual owner owns. Neither register enables searches by the name of the owner or licence holder.

¹¹⁷ Policy dialogue with the Serbian authorities, RISSP subcommittee of 4 February 2026.

¹¹⁸ Serbian Government, (2026), written contribution, chapter 23, p. 35.

¹¹⁹ [The Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents](#) (CETS No. 205), also known as the Tromsø Convention, entered into force on 1 December 2020.

¹²⁰ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 12.

¹²¹ The authorities often refuse to disclose information on the unjustified ground that the requests come from journalists. Commissioner for information of public importance and personal data protection (2026).

¹²² Among ministries, the most complaints about silence on journalistic requests were filed against the Ministry of Internal Affairs (6), and when it comes to local government bodies, the most complaints were filed against the City Administration of the City of Belgrade (5). Commissioner for information of public importance and personal data protection (2026).

¹²³ Also including complaints received in previous years. Media associations and CSOs pointed out that the Commissioner increasingly used the possibility of mediation with public bodies before issuing its decisions, which slowed down the process. Country visit Serbia.

¹²⁴ Commissioner for Information of Public Importance (2026).

¹²⁵ Compared with 68% in 2024. 2025 Media Pluralism Monitor, p. 12.

¹²⁶ The Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS) recorded 371 cases of threats to journalists' safety in 2025 (compared to 168 in 2024), including 113 physical attacks and 165 threats. NUNS (2025). The Supreme Public Prosecution Office also informed that a higher number of criminal complaints and reports were filed in 2025 (134, compared to 65 in 2024); Serbian Government (2026), written input, p. 96. The Supreme Public Prosecution Office further informed that 142 cases were opened in Public Prosecution Offices between July 1, 2025 and May 31, 2026. The first-instance or final decision was rendered in 35 cases, which represents 38,89% of the total number of cases. During this period, 23 cases of physical attacks

serious attacks were also reported in the context of local elections in March 2026¹²⁸. Female journalists were particularly vulnerable to threats and attacks, especially online. Recurrent verbal attacks by high-level officials against journalists persisted, having a chilling effect on freedom of expression. Some physical attacks against journalists occurred in front of police officers who did not intervene, and there have also been reports of police using force against journalists, preventing media workers from reporting on the protests, and briefly detaining journalists¹²⁹. Few of the reported cases resulted in final convictions¹³⁰. Since July 2025, the Council of Europe's Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists reported 42 alerts¹³¹. The Media Freedom Rapid Response project has reported 209 alerts since July 2025, consisting of 38 'physical assaults', 45 'attacks to property', 132 'verbal attacks', 6 'legal incidents', and 41 'interferences'¹³². Civil society has reported that the Serbian authorities have continued to use spyware to unlawfully target journalists, environmental activists and other individuals¹³³. One case was initiated in 2025 and is currently at the pre-investigation stage, with no indication of progress to date¹³⁴. The reporting period was also marked by coordinated bot attacks against the social media accounts of independent media outlets and CSOs¹³⁵. Cases of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP) persist, increasingly hindering the work of investigative media and CSOs. There were 14 complaints in 2025 compared with 7 in 2024¹³⁶. Serbia will need to align with the EU *acquis*, including covering the early dismissal of manifestly unfounded claims and providing remedies against abusive court proceedings¹³⁷. Courts have continued to fail to consistently adhere to the case law of the European Court of Human Rights with regard

were formed, a continuation of the increase of such cases, with 28 reports filed in 2025 compared with 6 in 2024. So far, 5 cases were formed during 2026, while 7 cases were formed in the same period of 2025. There was a noticeable decrease in the share of cases of attacks against female journalists in the total number of victims, especially noticeable in cases of online threats. A higher number of criminal complaints and reports were filed in 2025 (118.46% more than in 2024). Criminal offenses committed online decreased in the total number of formed cases, with a share of 51.41% in 2025 against 67.69% in 2024. The first five months of 2026 compared with the same period in 2025 shows a 33.33% increase in the number of formed cases, as well as a 38.1% increase in the cases of the Special Department for Combating High-Tech Crime. Supreme Public Prosecution Office, written contribution.

¹²⁷ For example, a documentary series broadcast on several TV channels, including national channels, contributed to a smear campaign against several journalists. NUNS (2026b). The smear campaign was publicly condemned by OSCE Representative for the Freedom of the Media. OSCE (2026).

¹²⁸ Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (2026).

¹²⁹ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 40. See also Media Freedom Rapid Response, Monitoring Report 2025, p. 45: *"In 2025, physical attacks increased alarmingly, with 44 instances recorded, compared to 14 for 2024. Violence was normalised, especially as law enforcement officers have shifted from inaction to excessive use of force against journalists covering protests. Of the 16 assaults attributed to police, over 90% were recorded at protests and five resulted in injuries"*.

¹³⁰ The Supreme Public Prosecution Office informed that three convictions were rendered in 2025. Serbian Government (2026), written input, p. 95.

¹³¹ Including 14 with a state reply. The alerts consist in 15 attacks on 'physical safety and integrity of journalists', one 'detention and imprisonment of journalists', and 23 'harassment and intimidation of journalists'; three other alerts relate to a smear campaign against independent journalists, cyber-attacks and the resignation of REM Council members over obstruction claims.

¹³² European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, Media Freedom Rapid Response – Serbia.

¹³³ Country visit Serbia, civil society and media associations.

¹³⁴ This case concerns at least seven individuals. 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 40.

¹³⁵ International Press Institute (2026a).

¹³⁶ SLAPP cases against media, CSOs and other individuals, according to the database of the National Anti-SLAPP Working Group (2026), an informal collaboration of several civil society organizations and experts.

¹³⁷ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 41.

to SLAPPs¹³⁸. There has been no progress in establishing accountability for the murders of three journalists in 1994, 1999 and 2001, one of which has reached the statute of limitation¹³⁹. Regarding one of these three cases the Supreme Court ruled that the 2024 decision of the Court of Appeal in Belgrade¹⁴⁰ had significantly violated criminal procedure provisions in favour of the defendants, without affecting the legal force of the verdict¹⁴¹.

IV. OTHER INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES RELATED TO CHECKS AND BALANCES

The effectiveness of Parliament and its oversight function continued to be hindered by a lack of genuine political debate, as well as by the limited ability of members of Parliament to scrutinise legislative proposals properly and contribute to the parliamentary and legislative agenda. Recent progress on electoral reform and the launch of the voter register audit still need to be fully implemented. On electoral reform, amendments to four election-related laws were adopted in May 2026, further legislation is under preparation following ODIHR opinions, and the Commission for the audit of the voter register has started its work, although meaningful data access and full implementation remain to be completed. Nine (regular and extraordinary) plenary sessions were held since June 2025. During these sessions, there continued to be a lack of genuine political debate on the substance of the legislative proposals. Despite rules limiting this to exceptional circumstances, all plenary sessions were called within a shorter timeframe than the regular notice of at least seven days¹⁴². This restricted the ability of members of Parliament to propose changes to the agenda or table amendments to adopted laws or bills, nearly all of which were proposed by the Government¹⁴³. Public scrutiny and involvement in the legislative process also remained limited. The practice of amalgamating large numbers of often unrelated items into a single agenda item also continued, making meaningful scrutiny and debate difficult. Parliamentary oversight of the executive is therefore weak. Under the applicable rules, question time with the Prime Minister and the Government should take place monthly while Parliament is in session¹⁴⁴. No such question time was held in 2026, and only one was held in 2025. Furthermore, derogatory language and occasional incidents have been reported during parliamentary debates, including disruptions, violence, and boycotts. The Rules of Procedure and the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament are not consistently enforced¹⁴⁵.

The exercise of presidential powers remains a subject of intense public debate. Although

¹³⁸ Country visit Serbia, media associations. For example, investigative outlet KRIK alone faces 14 SLAPP cases. In 2025, an Appellate Court judge initiated a third action against KRIK over its “Judge Who Judges” database, now escalating to a criminal complaint seeking prison sentences and a two-year reporting ban for two editors, alleging a breach of privacy, MPM (2026), p. 14.

¹³⁹ As referred to in Chapter 23 interim benchmark. Council of the European Union (2016), p. 28.

¹⁴⁰ The 2024 decision had overturned the convictions of four former intelligence officers on charges related to the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija.

¹⁴¹ Verdict issued in October 2025 and made public in January 2026. Supreme Court (2025). The International Press Institute noted that “*the result is that the murder case remains in a state of total impunity 27 years later*”. International Press Institute (2026b).

¹⁴² Rules of Procedure of the Parliament, Article 86(1).

¹⁴³ Some drafts laws proposed by MPs from the ruling coalition were adopted. None of the drafts proposed by opposition MPs were put on the agenda.

¹⁴⁴ Rules of Procedure of the Parliament, Article 205.

¹⁴⁵ 2025 Enlargement report, Serbia, p. 4.

the Constitution provides for relatively limited presidential powers¹⁴⁶, the actual exercise of presidential powers continues to be intensively debated in the public discourse. Civil society and other stakeholders have expressed concerns that the political debate and decision-making are, in practice, steered by the President in a manner not set out in the Constitution¹⁴⁷. The President has granted pardons to individuals charged with severely physically harming protesters, justified on the basis of correcting alleged injustices caused by prosecutors and courts¹⁴⁸, and also announced potential pardons for senior officials involved in criminal proceedings. This has raised concerns about presidential interference in the independence of the judiciary.

Ten new judges were appointed to the Constitutional Court, while three positions remained vacant. In December 2025, the terms of 10 Constitutional Court judges ended, resulting in significant turnover within the 15-member body. The Court now has 12 serving judges, as 10 new judges were elected by Parliament and the President in December 2025 in line with the existing legal framework, while three remain to be appointed¹⁴⁹. Serbia has not yet taken any steps to introduce a qualified majority with an anti-deadlock mechanism for electing those Constitutional Court judges appointed by Parliament, as recommended by the Venice Commission¹⁵⁰. The High Judicial Council and the High Prosecutorial Council still need to make their nominations to the respective appointment bodies for the three vacant positions¹⁵¹. They also need to adopt a joint Rulebook, including the nomination procedure before proceeding with their nominations¹⁵². The efficiency of the Constitutional Court is negatively impacted by the vacant positions. On 22 January 2026, a new president of the Constitutional Court was appointed, whose public comments concerning the need to dismiss judges who oppose the current government¹⁵³ raised concerns among stakeholders¹⁵⁴.

The legal framework for public consultations and its enforcement has deteriorated, with lowered standards and a decrease in the number of consultations. In November 2025, the government adopted amendments to its rules of procedure, lowering the standards of public

¹⁴⁶ Primarily the right to propose a Prime Minister, to express state unity, to represent the country at home and abroad and to promulgate the Acts of Parliament; Constitution of Serbia, Articles 101, 109, 110 and 111. See also Venice Commission, OSCE/ODIHR (2022), para 152.

¹⁴⁷ Country visit Serbia. Freedom House (2024). See also Venice Commission, OSCE/ODIHR (2022), para 152.

¹⁴⁸ 2025 Enlargement report, Serbia, p. 30.

¹⁴⁹ 10 out of 15 judges were replaced because their nine-year terms expired or they reached the mandatory retirement age. Two judges whose mandates began in 2019 and had not yet expired remain in the Court from its previous composition. On 18 December 2025, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia elected five new judges to the Constitutional Court based on a proposal from the President of the Republic. Simultaneously, the President appointed five judges from a list submitted by the National Assembly.

¹⁵⁰ Venice Commission (2021), p. 19.

¹⁵¹ Three vacancies remain for judges to be appointed by the Supreme Court from among candidates proposed by the HJC and HPC.

¹⁵² 2025 Rule of Law Report, Serbia, p. 15.

¹⁵³ Country visit Serbia; NUNS (2026), N1 (2026a). The comments were made during an appearance on 28 January on Pink TV and published by the daily Politika on 1 February 2026 and also contained accusations that some judges conduct political activities against the state. This led to the CC restricting the media appearances of the CC President.

¹⁵⁴ Country visit Serbia; N1 (2026a). The Judges' Association of Serbia condemned comments in a press release, noting that "all judges, including those on the CC and particularly its president, should refrain from commenting on issues that could potentially come before the CC. It is essential not only that they remain impartial, but that they avoid any public perception of bias, which serves only to undermine trust in the judiciary". The statement also reminded that public officials must not use public appearances to discourage judges from speaking out on judicial policy, in particular when judges believe that proposed measures may threaten the independence of the judiciary.

debate by introducing several exemptions that were not in line with the primary legislation¹⁵⁵. In June 2026, the government drafted new amendments to address this issue. The percentage of public consultations on draft laws fell from 58% in 2024 to 51% in 2025¹⁵⁶. During this same period, public consultation of public policy documents fell from 100% to 85%, while consultations on by-laws remained at 30%¹⁵⁷. There is still no central body responsible for overseeing and controlling the quality of public consultations¹⁵⁸. Although the use of the e-consultations platform is mandatory by law, it remains insufficient¹⁵⁹, and despite the obligation to publish the results of public consultations¹⁶⁰, this was not done systematically¹⁶¹, with limited information on the rationale for dismissing comments. In addition, the quality of the policy-making process was undermined by new Government decrees of March 2026 exempting draft laws and public policy documents related to the European integration process from mandatory impact assessments¹⁶².

Over half of the companies surveyed in Serbia express confidence in the effectiveness of investment protection. 61% of companies are very or fairly confident that investments are protected by law and courts, a figure which has increased compared with 2025 (57%)¹⁶³. Further, 49% perceive the level of independence of the public procurement review body (Republic Commission for Protection of Rights in Public Procurement Procedures) as very or fairly good, a figure which has significantly increased in comparison with 2025 (32%)¹⁶⁴. 46% perceive the level of independence of the national competition authority (Commission for Protection of Competition) as very or fairly good, a figure which has significantly increased in comparison with 2025 (33%)¹⁶⁵.

On 1 January 2026, Serbia had 22 leading judgments of the European Court of Human Rights pending implementation, an increase of 2 compared to the previous year¹⁶⁶. At that time, Serbia's rate of leading judgments from the past 10 years that had been implemented was at 56% (compared to 62% in 2025; 44% remained pending), and the average time that the judgments had been pending implementation was 3 years and 4 months (compared to 5 years and 7 months in 2025)¹⁶⁷. The oldest group of leading judgments, pending implementation for 17 years, concern the violation of the applicants' right of access

¹⁵⁵ Law on State Administration and Law on the planning system.

¹⁵⁶ Laws that ratify international agreements are not included in the calculation.

¹⁵⁷ Serbian Government (2026), written input, pp. 8-10.

¹⁵⁸ One of the three recommendations of the European Commissions in the public administration reform area in Serbia, in light of the gap between legal provisions and their enforcement. 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, pp. 5 and 26.

¹⁵⁹ Only 32 % of conducted public consultations on legislation adopted by the Government in 2025 were performed through the e-consultation platform.

¹⁶⁰ Law on the planning system.

¹⁶¹ Out of the public consultations performed through the e-consultation platform, no more than 15% had mandatory reports published on the platform.

¹⁶² Government sessions of 19 March and 26 March 2026. Government (2026).

¹⁶³ Flash Eurobarometer 582 (2026) and Flash Eurobarometer 555 (2025). In 2026, only 11% and 9% of the surveyed investors respectively perceive concerns about quality, efficiency or independence of justice the frequent changes in legislation or concerns about the quality of the law-making process as a reason for the lack of confidence in investment protection.

¹⁶⁴ Flash Eurobarometer 582 (2026) and Flash Eurobarometer 555 (2026).

¹⁶⁵ Flash Eurobarometer 582 (2026) and Flash Eurobarometer 555 (2026).

¹⁶⁶ For an explanation of the supervision process, see the [website](#) of the Council of Europe.

¹⁶⁷ All figures calculated by the European Implementation Network (EIN) and based on the number of cases that are considered pending at the annual cut-off date of 1 January 2026. EIN (2026), written input, p. 2.

to a court and the peaceful enjoyment of their property¹⁶⁸. As regards the respect of payment deadlines, on 31 December 2025 there were 13 cases in total awaiting confirmation of payments (compared to 16 in 2024)¹⁶⁹. On 17 June 2026, the number of leading judgments pending implementation had increased to 25¹⁷⁰.

Most independent bodies working in the area of fundamental rights continued to face resource constraints and the follow-up to their recommendations remained inconsistent. The Ombudsperson is the national human rights institution (NHRI) accredited with ‘A-Status’¹⁷¹. While the Office of the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection reached the staffing target set in Serbia’s action plan for chapter 23, the Offices of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and of the Ombudsperson still had fewer staff than the target number¹⁷². There continues to be no systematic follow-up on the recommendations of the independent bodies¹⁷³. In the 2025 annual report, the Ombudsman introduced a more formalised mechanism to measure the authorities’ follow-up to his general (systemic) recommendations, which nuances the high follow-up rate reported in previous years¹⁷⁴. As in previous years, stakeholders considered that the independent bodies needed to be more vocal in denouncing violations of fundamental rights¹⁷⁵.

Civil society organisations have been subject to increasing pressure, attacks and intimidation, including by high-level officials, and reported cases of excessive use of force by the police against protesters have not led to convictions so far. The space for

¹⁶⁸ Judgment of the ECtHR, 2269/06, *Kačapor v. Serbia*, pending implementation since 2008.

¹⁶⁹ Council of Europe (2026), p. 163.

¹⁷⁰ Data according to the online database of the Council of Europe (HUDOC).

¹⁷¹ Accreditation by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).

¹⁷² For the Office of the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection: 132 staff as of January 2026, compared with 129 in the Action Plan for Chapter 23, which is the main document in which Serbia sets out how it will reach the Interim Benchmarks for this chapter. For the Office of the Ombudsperson: 72 staff as of 16 June 2026 compared with 106 in the Action Plan for Chapter 23; a new staff systematisation rulebook is under preparation. The Ombudsman currently does not have any deputies as required by law. For the Office of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality: 43 staff as of December 2025 compared with 60 in the Action Plan for Chapter 23; a new rulebook targeting a total of 60 staff in the next three years was adopted in May 2026. For a staff increase the independent bodies would need first the consent of the Ministry of Finance, before seeking the approval by the Parliament.

¹⁷³ Annual reports are submitted to the Parliament by 15 March of each year, which then adopts conclusions on them. The annual reports published in March 2026 have yet to be discussed in a plenary session of the Parliament. Parliamentary discussions tend to remain general and do not focus on key recommendations.

¹⁷⁴ While the authorities’ follow-up to individual recommendations of the Ombudsman was reported at 86.7% for 2025, a more thorough analysis by the Ombudsman of the follow-up to his general (systemic) recommendations showed that 6% were fully implemented, 54% partially, 36% not implemented and 3.5% could not be determined. Ombudsman (2026). The Ombudsman’s Office pointed out that the follow-up of individual and general (systemic) recommendations should be observed separately; systemic recommendations cannot be viewed in the context of regular annual reports but rather over a longer period of time. Ombudsman, written contribution.

¹⁷⁵ For example, they felt that the Commissioner for Personal Data Protection did not react sufficiently to spyware attacks against journalists and human rights activists, nor did the Ombudsperson react sufficiently to the alleged use of a sound cannon against protesters in Belgrade in March 2025; country visit Serbia, civil society organisations. Regarding the first example and based on the authorities’ statement that they did not have forensic tools for digital data processing and that they were acting within the law, the Commissioner for personal data protection concluded that the conditions were not met for him to conduct an inspection; country visit Serbia, Commissioner for personal data protection. Regarding the second example, the Ombudsman’s Office pointed out that he did respond to the alleged use of a sound cannon against protesters in Belgrade on 15 March 2025, that based on information received from the media and CSOs, the Ombudsman launched an investigation procedure on its own initiative on 17 March 2025, and that to date none of the requested information has been received from CSOs. Ombudsman, written contribution.

civil society was downgraded to ‘repressed’ by Civicus¹⁷⁶. Organisations and individuals who criticise the authorities continued to come under pressure¹⁷⁷, particularly those monitoring alleged electoral irregularities or campaigning for the rule of law and anti-corruption measures. The police search of the offices of four CSOs in February 2025 has not led to any charges, and the search was widely perceived as an act of intimidation against civil society¹⁷⁸. There have been no concrete improvements in the transparency or fairness of public funding for civil society¹⁷⁹. In the context of increased pressure on civil society, formal cooperation with the authorities has not resumed since, in February 2025, CSO members of the National Convention on the EU announced their withdrawal from the government’s working groups¹⁸⁰. Student and civic protests demanding accountability and a more effective fight against corruption have continued, albeit less frequently. A large protest took place on 23 May 2026. High-level authorities continued to attempt to delegitimise protesters, as well as several media outlets and CSOs¹⁸¹. The Security Information Agency continued to hold ‘informative talks’ with protesters, which were perceived as a form of pressure and intimidation. Overall, several hundred individuals were arrested, some of whom were detained or placed under house arrest on grounds including ‘invoking a violent change to the constitutional order’¹⁸². However, few of these cases resulted in indictments¹⁸³. There have been violent incidents against demonstrators and journalists reporting on the protests, and to date only some of the perpetrators have been prosecuted¹⁸⁴, while several others were previously pardoned from criminal prosecution by the President. Cases of excessive use of force by the police during the protests, including against journalists and minors, have been reported and cases handled by the prosecution are either ongoing or have been dismissed¹⁸⁵. Regarding the European Court of Human Rights’ interim measure on the alleged use of a sonic weapon for crowd control at the demonstrations in Belgrade in March 2025¹⁸⁶, there has been no credible follow-up yet by the authorities, who continue to deny such use¹⁸⁷. Pressure on activists,

¹⁷⁶ With a score of 38/100. CIVICUS (2026a,b). Rating by CIVICUS; ratings are on a five-category scale defined as: open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed and closed.

¹⁷⁷ UN High Commissioner on Human Rights (2026). Freedom House (2026). See also pillar III on Media Pluralism and Media Freedom regarding spyware attacks and SLAPPs targeting both civil society organisations and media.

¹⁷⁸ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 25. In addition, Serbia’s Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering requested in January 2025 confidential bank data on five CSO employees who have not been informed, since then, about the outcome of the case. FATF (2025).

¹⁷⁹ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 25. Stakeholders reported that, according to public data collected by investigative journalists and CSOs, some public funds are allocated to ghost organisations or government-organised non-governmental organisations; country visit Serbia, civil society organisations. A case filed in 2023 by CSOs on alleged corruption in the calls implemented by the Ministry of Demography and Family Care is still in pre-investigative stage.

¹⁸⁰ Except for their participation as members of the Reform and Growth Plan Monitoring Committee in a tripartite format with the European Commission. NCEU (2025). CSOs’ membership in the Council for cooperation and development of civil society has also remained frozen since January 2025.

¹⁸¹ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 43.

¹⁸² Serbian Government (2026), written input, pp. 111-112.

¹⁸³ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 43 and Serbian Government (2026), written input, pp. 111-112.

¹⁸⁴ Serbian Government (2026), written input, pp. 96-97, 110-114.

¹⁸⁵ Statistics provided by the Serbian authorities at the JLS subcommittee, 24-25 February 2026.

¹⁸⁶ The Court indicated to the Government that it should prevent any use of sound devices for crowd control (other than for communication purposes). It noted that the use of such weapons for crowd control was unlawful in Serbia, and the potentially serious health effects that could be caused to a large number of persons. It reiterated that the decision did not mean it had taken any position as to whether use of such weapons had occurred: European Court of Human Rights (30 April 2025).

¹⁸⁷ 2025 Enlargement Report, Serbia, p. 43. A case initiated by the Organised Crime Prosecutor’s Office is ongoing.

including gender-based violence, increased in the run-up to the local elections in some municipalities in March 2026¹⁸⁸.

¹⁸⁸ CRTA's long-term observation of the elections identified more than 30 cases of pressure and attacks. For example, 14 women, either opposition-affiliated activists or citizens supporting the student protests, were identified in a social media post and publicly threatened with the release of alleged intimate content. 24 CSOs and initiatives issued a joint statement characterising the case as digital violence, gender-based harassment and political intimidation. CRTA (2026).

Annex I: List of sources in alphabetical order*

* The list of contributions received in the context of the consultation for the 2026 Rule of Law report can be found at https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2026-rule-law-report-targeted-stakeholder-consultation_en.

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Annex II: Country visit to Serbia

The Commission services held hybrid meetings in March 2026 with:

- A11 Initiative
- Agency for the Prevention of Corruption
- Anti-Corruption Council
- Anti-Corruption Unit of Department for Fight Against Organised Crime, Directorate of Criminalistics Police
- Appellate Court
- Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM)
- Asylum Protection Center
- Autonomous Women's Center
- Basic Public Prosecution Office
- Belgrade Centre for Human Rights
- BIRN
- BIRODI
- Civic Initiatives
- Commissioner for Personal Data Protection and Access to Information of Public
- Constitutional Court
- CRTA
- Education Center UNS
- High Judicial Council
- High Prosecutorial Council
- Higher Court
- Higher Public Prosecution Office
- Importance
- Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS)
- Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV)
- Judges Association of Serbia
- Judicial Research Center
- KRIK
- Lawyers' Association of Serbia
- Media Association
- Ministry of European Integration
- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry of Justice
- MODS
- Ombudsman
- Partners for Democratic Change Serbia
- Press Council
- Prosecutors Association of Serbia
- Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime (POOC)
- Radio Television Serbia (RTS)
- Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM)
- SHARE Foundation
- Slavko Curuvija Foundation
- Supreme Court

- Supreme Public Prosecution Office
- Transparency Serbia
- YUCOM

* The Commission also met the following organisations in a number of horizontal meetings:

- Civil Liberties Union for Europe
- Civil Society Europe
- End FGM EU
- European Civic Forum
- European Partnership for Democracy
- Human Rights Watch
- ILGA-Europe
- International Federation for Human Rights
- Philea - Philanthropy Europe Association
- Transparency International EU