



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1528 Vienna, 17 July 2025

EU Statement in Response to the Acting Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Carolina Hidea

1. The European Union warmly welcomes the Acting Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, Ms Carolina Hidea, and thanks her for the comprehensive report.
2. We highlight the important expertise and support the Mission provides to Serbia at all levels, under budgetary constraints, in the mandated areas of rule of law, human rights, the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, media, good governance, and law enforcement.
3. We commend the Mission's efforts to advance the process of judicial reform and support capacity building, including the 2022 constitutional amendments aiming at strengthening the independence and accountability of the judiciary. We underline the importance of rigorous and immediate implementation and stress that the independence and overall efficiency of the judiciary need to be improved.
4. We commend the Mission's efforts to strengthen the capacities of Serbian authorities to fight effectively corruption and money laundering, as well as to tackle organised crime and take action against human trafficking. While taking good note of the adoption of the new anti-corruption strategy and the by-laws to the laws implementing the constitutional amendments, we underline the need for Serbia to further step up its efforts in the fight against corruption and organised crime and achieve tangible results and a convincing track record with effective investigations, prosecutions, final convictions, freezing and confiscation of criminal assets, including at the high level.

5. We underline that Serbia needs to pay particular attention to the full respect of fundamental rights, including the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. We note the concerns expressed by ODIHR on 4 July about the reported violence and arrests during the ongoing protests in Serbia. We also stress the need to pay particular attention to the protection of persons belonging to the most vulnerable groups, as well as the non-discriminatory treatment of persons belonging to national minorities throughout Serbia, in line with the international standards and bilateral agreements. Tangible improvements are still needed in the effective exercise of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, especially in the areas of education, use of minority languages, access to media and religious services in minority languages. Representation in public administration and representative bodies is also important. Investigations and convictions for hate-motivated crimes should be pursued actively. We reiterate our call for effective implementation of the relevant strategic documents.
6. We welcome the Mission's activities to improve the overall environment for freedom of expression and the independence of the media as well as transparency and professionalism in media reporting as well as media literacy. We appreciate the support provided to implement the national Media Strategy, including the support of the selection process for the Regulatory Body of Electronic Media (REM). We also commend the Mission's work to improve the safety of journalists and encourage the host country to address the increasing cases of threats, intimidation and violence against journalists promptly and more rigorously. Overall, we encourage Serbia to step up efforts on the effective implementation of its Media Strategy, respecting the letter and spirit of the latter's objectives, in accordance with EU acquis and standards. We also reiterate our call for Serbia to actively engage in preventing and tackling all forms of disinformation and foreign information manipulation in all media channels and encourage Serbia to ensure an enabling environment and a stronger role for civil society organisations.
7. We note the final report of the ODIHR Election Observation Mission on the June 2024 local elections. We stress that key aspects of the electoral process require tangible improvement and further reform. Full implementation of all ODIHR recommendations remains an immediate priority for Serbia. We note with concern the limited progress in

implementing the 2023 and 2024 ODIHR priority recommendations. All recommendations must be effectively addressed and the EU remains ready to support the competent authorities in implementing them.

8. We stress the importance of the Mission's continued engagement in the areas of gender equality and youth participation, including through the OSCE Dialogue Academy for Young Women and an ODIHR-led participatory gender audit in the National Assembly, aimed at advancing gender-sensitive institutional reforms. We also commend the Mission's work on environmental protection, especially with regard to environmental legislation and governance.
9. We highly appreciate the Mission's work in monitoring war crimes proceedings, within the framework of the relevant EU-funded project. The EU continues to underscore the importance of meaningful regional cooperation in the domestic handling of war crimes, resolving the remaining cases of missing persons and full cooperation with the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, including by fully accepting and implementing its rulings and decisions as a matter of urgency. Support and public space for convicted war criminals or the glorification or denial of their crimes are unacceptable.
10. We stress the importance of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations as a prerequisite for stability, reconciliation and a climate conducive to addressing open bilateral issues and overcoming legacies of the past. In this respect, we welcome that Serbia has maintained its commitment in a number of regional cooperation initiatives, resulting in positive tangible results. We encourage Serbia to further strengthen good neighbourly relations and contribute to stability and reconciliation with all partners in the region.
11. We take good note of Serbia's humanitarian and other assistance to Ukraine. At the same time, we reiterate our strong expectation of Serbia, in line with its negotiating framework, to step up its efforts towards full alignment with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, including restrictive measures on Russia and Belarus, as a matter of utmost priority. Preventing the circumvention of EU restrictive measures adopted in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is of paramount importance.

In this regard, we welcome Serbia's improved cooperation with the EU and encourage Serbia to continue with these efforts.

12. The EU underlines that progress in the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina remains essential for both in order to advance on their respective European paths, in line with the European perspective of the region. Both risk losing important opportunities in absence of progress. We expect both to engage constructively. The Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Implementation Annex, adopted in February and March 2023, offer a clear platform for advancing the normalisation of relations. The obligations stemming from this Agreement remain valid and binding, and have been incorporated in their respective European paths. Its implementation is urgent and crucial for the stability of the entire region. We call on both sides to fully implement all obligations and past commitments without delay or preconditions, including the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities in Kosovo*. We expect Serbia to deliver on its own pending Dialogue obligations in parallel.
13. We reiterate the need to establish the facts regarding the Zubin Potok canal explosion on 29 November 2024, and the Banjska/Banjskë attack on 24 September 2023, and call on Serbia to hold perpetrators of the Banjska/Banjskë attack accountable and face justice. In parallel to the investigations, we stress the importance of both sides refraining from actions that could further escalate tensions.
14. The EU reaffirms its commitment to enlargement, as an investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity. We reiterate the EU's unequivocal support for the European Union membership perspective of the Western Balkans, based upon credible reforms by partners, fair and rigorous conditionality and the principle of own merits. We welcome Serbia's overall progress made so far, with 22 out of 35 negotiating chapters opened and 2 chapters provisionally closed, and we encourage further and more focused efforts to accelerate reforms and deliver concrete and tangible results in the identified key areas. Continued commitment to EU values, including full alignment with EU CFSP, necessary reforms, notably on the rule of law, and fostering good neighbourly relations are essential in the enlargement process.

15. In conclusion, we would like to reiterate our strong support for the Mission and thank Ms Carolina Hidea and her dedicated team for their important work.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.