



Brussels, 30 March 2026

JOINT DECLARATION

EU-Serbia Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee (JCC)

The EU-Serbia Joint Consultative Committee (JCC), established under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), brings together 18 representatives of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and Serbian civil society organisations, including employers' organisations, trade unions and other civil society groups. During its current term, the JCC is co-chaired by Andrej Zorko, President of the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia and Boško Savković, Secretary-General of the Serbian Association of Employers.

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1. *On the state of play in EU-Serbia relations and the accession process*

The JCC

- 1.1. reiterates its firm support for Serbia's EU path; recalls the long-standing **role of the JCC** as a key platform for monitoring Serbia's EU accession process; emphasises that the concerns and recommendations expressed in previous JCC declarations have consistently proven relevant and continue to remain pertinent while certain challenges continue to increase;
- 1.2. expresses concern over the **lack of progress** since December 2021 as outlined in the European Commission's 2025 Serbia Report¹ and recalls that the EU accession process is merit-based; considers that opening Cluster 3 has to be conditioned on concrete government action to strengthen the rule of law and the Fundamentals; emphasises that challenges also do not lie just in the adoption of legislation, but in its effective implementation;
- 1.3. acknowledges the **European Parliament's** ad-hoc mission to Serbia² following its recent resolution³; echoes concerns⁴ raised, including political polarisation, pressure on media and academia, challenges to electoral integrity and risks to judicial independence, as well as reports of repression and disproportionate use of force against demonstrators; condemns the hostile rhetoric directed at Members of the European Parliament; expresses serious concern about the aggressive rhetoric towards certain neighboring EU member and candidate countries;
- 1.4. recalls that the EU is by far Serbia's largest trading partner and principal economic partner; regrets EU action remains insufficiently communicated to the Serbian public; notes that **support for EU membership in Serbia** remains the lowest in the region⁵; expresses concern over anti-EU disinformation in parts of the media and political sphere, and calls on the Serbian authorities to communicate objectively and proactively about the accession process and EU support;
- 1.5. notes the discrepancy between statements by Serbia's political leadership that EU membership remains a strategic **priority**⁶ and political signals that call them into question; stresses that this objective must be reflected in concrete reforms in the rule of law, judicial independence, democratic governance, social dialogue and media freedom, as well as alignment with the EU's common foreign and security policy;
- 1.6. recalls that the disbursement of **pre-accession and Growth Plan funds** to Serbia depends on tangible progress in the rule of law; stresses that maintaining the credibility of the enlargement process

¹ [Serbia Report 2025 - Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood](#)

² [Committee on Foreign Affairs delegation concludes visit to Serbia | News | European Parliament](#)

³ [RESOLUTION on the polarisation and increased repression in Serbia, one year after the Novi Sad tragedy | European Parliament](#)

⁴ [Mission report EP ad-hoc mission to Serbia](#)

⁵ [Public support for EU membership in Serbia shows cautious growth, with strong backing among youth - EU u Srbiji](#)

⁶ [Serbia's key goal in coming period to preserve peace, stability](#)

requires strict adherence to democratic standards and the implementation of reforms in the judiciary, anti-corruption policy and democratic governance; in line with the EESC opinion *New growth plan and Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans*⁷, stresses the importance of continued full and meaningful civil society participation in all future meetings of the Monitoring Committee under the Reform and Growth Facility for Serbia, as an instrument for transparency and democratic oversight of the Reform Agenda;

- 1.7. recalls that Serbia's accession path, as the largest country in the region, is a very important pillar of regional stability; reiterates its support for all initiatives and agreements conducive to unleashing greater potential from **regional cooperation** and contributing to good neighbourly relations and economic development⁸; highlights the essential role of civil society and social partners and business community in promoting regional cooperation;
- 1.8. expresses concern over **public statements** by Serbian top officials about alleged security threats, which refer to the fact that certain countries in the region, some of which members of the European Union, are considering aggressive scenarios towards Serbia; such statements call into question regional stability, especially with Serbia's accelerated armament, including the procurement of sophisticated military equipment from Russia and China, which further complicates relations with the European Union, notably regarding transparency and alignment with the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy;
- 1.9. calls on the European Commission and the Member States, in dialogue with the authorities and social partners of Serbia and other Western Balkan partners, to urgently explore all possible solutions to the operational challenges faced by professional truck drivers from the region resulting from the strict enforcement of the Schengen 90/180-day rule following the introduction of the **EU Entry-Exit System**; notes that these restrictions have led to protests and disruptions at several border crossings and risk negatively affecting trade flows and economic cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans;
- 1.10. calls on the EU to proactively prepare to integrate new Member States while safeguarding its effectiveness and decision-making capacity; encourages EU institutions to draw inspiration from the EESC's Enlargement Candidate Members (**ECMs**)⁹ initiative and to actively promote a gradual and structured approach to integration;
- 1.11. welcomes the **European Democracy Shield**¹⁰ and the **EU Strategy for Civil Society**¹¹; stresses that their objectives are particularly relevant for Serbia; supports the implementation of a European

⁷ [New growth plan and Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, EESC.](#)

⁸ [New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans; Berlin Process.; Regional Cooperation Council; Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum – WB6 CIF; Common Regional -Market Action Plan 2025-2028 \(cefta.int\).](#)

⁹ [Enlargement Candidate Members' Initiative, EESC.](#)

¹⁰ [Communication on the European Democracy Shield | European Commission](#)

¹¹ [EU Strategy for Civil Society](#)

Network of Fact-Checkers and strengthening the EU's early warning systems to enable stronger responses to emerging threats and signs of shrinking civic space.

2. On the state of democracy and rule of law in Serbia

The JCC

- 2.1. recalls that the Serbian **civil society and social partners** is one of Serbia's most valuable assets; once again strongly condemns any attempt to silence the voices of Serbian civil society;
- 2.2. reiterates the importance of **youth** for Serbia's present and future, and calls for stronger efforts to create opportunities that enable them to remain and prosper in the country; urges the authorities to ensure meaningful youth participation in decision-making and to rebuild trust in institutions both on national and local levels;
- 2.3. expresses serious concerns about the **electoral environment** in Serbia; strongly condemns the reported violence in the local elections of 29 March 2026; further notes reports of pressure on voters, and allegations of unlawful organised voting practices; invites the European Commission to consider a long term election observation presence;
- 2.4. notes the limited progress in implementing longstanding **ODIHR** recommendations, particularly regarding the transparency of the unified voter register and the prevention of misuse of administrative resources; stresses the need to ensure equal campaign conditions, a clear separation between state functions and party campaigning, and effective oversight and sanctions for violations of electoral rules; expresses extreme concern about the new set of election laws currently in parliamentary procedure, which, under the guise of fulfilling ODIHR recommendations, are leading to an even worse election environment;
- 2.5. expresses concern about the lack of equal **media access** for political actors and the dominance of pro-government narratives in major national media outlets during election periods; stresses the importance of ensuring a balanced coverage of political actors in line with democratic standards and Serbia's commitments in the EU accession process;
- 2.6. takes note of the continued protests and **civic mobilisation** calling for accountability, democratic governance and respect for the rule of law; stresses the importance of safeguarding freedom of assembly, academic freedom and the right to peaceful protests, and calls on the authorities to ensure that these rights are fully respected ; strongly condemns all acts of police brutality, threats, politically motivated prosecutions, arbitrary arrests, intimidation, surveillance, smear campaigns and all other documented violations of the rights of peaceful protesters;
- 2.7. firmly condemns reports of **retaliation** against civil servants and education and cultural institutions, especially in education from primary to academic , condemns reprisals against culture employees for

expressing support for the student-led protests, including dismissals, intimidation, reductions in salaries and withdrawal of institutional and financial support¹²;

- 2.8. expresses serious concern over recent developments affecting the independence of the **judiciary** in Serbia, including both the adoption process and the content of a package of judicial laws, adopted without appropriate public consultation and raising significant concerns as regards its compliance with European standards; recalls that these developments constitute a serious setback on Serbia's EU accession path, undermining previous commitments and progress made; stresses the need to ensure full autonomy of the public prosecution service and the genuine independence of courts, as well as the functional independence of the High Judicial Council and the High Prosecutorial Council; calls on the Serbian authorities to urgently review and revise the adopted amendments, including by considering legal avenues to halt their implementation, and to fully take into account the forthcoming opinion of the Venice Commission, ensuring a transparent and inclusive consultation process with all relevant stakeholders, including the European Commission, so that the legislative framework guarantees the independence of the judiciary and prosecution in line with European standards;
- 2.9. expresses concern about the limited progress in implementing **anti-corruption** commitments, including the recommendations of the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO); calls on the authorities to strengthen the independence and effectiveness of anti-corruption institutions and specialised prosecution bodies, ensure a credible track record in investigating and prosecuting high-level corruption, including in large public investment projects such as the reconstruction of the Novi Sad railway station, and reinforce financial investigations;
- 2.10. stresses the need to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of **public funds**, including public procurement and other state-funded projects; calls for full alignment with EU procurement rules, the elimination of procedures that bypass standard procedures and safeguards, and stronger oversight and public access to information to ensure the responsible use of public resources;
- 2.11. stresses that the continued uncertainty regarding the composition and functioning of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (**REM**), in particular the absence of its decision-making body (Council) since November 2024 following the expiry of its mandate, undermines effective oversight of the electronic media sector, particularly in the context of elections;
- 2.12. remains concerned that Serbia's **media landscape** continues to be heavily concentrated, with limited plurality and ownership opacity; notes with concern reports of state influence in the media market, including involvement in commercial relations between major operators and media groups, which may affect editorial independence and distort fair competition; notes that state co-financing and licensing mechanisms have frequently favoured pro-government outlets, while independent and investigative media face systemic obstacles¹³; remains concerned that the current media situation

¹² [Serbia's academics lose jobs over support for student pro-democracy movement | Science|Business](#)

¹³ [Serbia - Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom](#)

undermines the public's access to diverse information and weakens democratic accountability; condemns intimidation and violence against journalists.

3. ***On the social situation in Serbia***

The JCC

- 3.1. reiterates the importance of upholding the principle of **decent work**, including secure employment, safe and healthy working conditions, fair and timely remuneration and effective mechanisms for resolving labour disputes; expresses concern that several aspects of Serbia's labour legislation remain inconsistent with the European Social Charter¹⁴, including excessive working hours in certain sectors, insufficient protection for domestic workers and obstacles to collective bargaining; calls on the authorities to align labour legislation with the EU *acquis* and European standards and strengthen the protection of workers' rights;
- 3.2. stresses the importance of strengthening **social dialogue** in Serbia and ensuring that trade unions and employers are effectively involved in decisions affecting wages, employment and economic development; calls on the authorities to promote collective bargaining, extend the coverage of collective agreements and ensure that initiatives proposed within the Social and Economic Council of Serbia (SEC) are meaningfully reflected in policy decisions;
- 3.3. calls on the authorities to respect **wage-setting** legal framework based on objective economic indicators, social dialogue and principles of fairness in order to ensure adequate living standards and prevent wage compression across the labour market, also in accordance with the conventions and recommendations of the ILO;
- 3.4. notes the recent protests of farmers across Serbia highlighting the difficult situation in the **agricultural sector**; stresses the need for constructive dialogue between the authorities and farmers' associations to address concerns related to subsidies, market conditions and structural problems¹⁵, including the impact of imports on domestic production, and calls for sustainable policies supporting rural development and the long-term viability of Serbian agriculture;
- 3.5. stresses that **foreign direct investments** supported by the Government must be implemented in full compliance with the Regulation on criteria for granting incentives for direct investments¹⁶; expresses concern about the lack of transparency and equal treatment of investors and calls on the authorities to ensure fair competition, strengthen transparency and consistently apply legal procedures in the attraction and implementation of investments;

¹⁴ [Council of Europe Serbia report Jan 2026](#)

¹⁵ [Livestock Sector in Serbia: Challenges, Structural Gaps, and Strategic Pathways Towards Sustainability | MDPI](#)

¹⁶ <https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/uredba-odredjivanju-kriterijuma-dodelu-podsticaja-radi-privlacenja-ulaganja.html>

- 3.6. stresses the need for Serbia to ensure full compliance with **EU *acquis* and European standards** in the areas of environmental protection, occupational health and safety and human rights; calls on the authorities to strengthen labour and environmental inspections, ensure effective enforcement and protect whistleblowers and affected communities, including vulnerable groups, so that they can fully exercise their right to a safe and healthy environment;
- 3.7. stresses the need for Serbia to ensure full compliance with EU standards in the areas of **environmental** protection; notes that the repetition of the same recommendations in successive European Commission reports indicates persistent weaknesses in the implementation of environmental legislation in Serbia; expresses particular concern over the insufficient reliability and timeliness of monitoring data, as well as the inadequate and poorly structured budgetary allocations for monitoring, inspection and enforcement, which seriously undermine the effectiveness of oversight and the application of legislation; highlights the urgent need for strengthening human and technical capacity in inspection services; underlines that full implementation of the *acquis* cannot be achieved unless Serbia ensures effective access to justice, including by abolishing restrictive and formalistic practices that deny standing to interested members of the public in environmental matters, in accordance with EU standards, the Aarhus Convention, and the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union;
- 3.8. calls once again on the Serbian authorities to accelerate the implementation of the Action Plan for **Chapter 19** on Social Policy and Employment, as key reforms remain outstanding, including improvements to labour legislation, the adequacy of social benefits and the development of effective labour market policies; calls to the government to intensify work on the adoption of the Strategy for Social Security.

The JCC instructs its co-chairs to forward this joint declaration to the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Council, the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC), the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Commission and the Government of Serbia and all relevant ministries. The JCC calls for this declaration to be published on all relevant websites, including the website of the Ministry of European Integration, and distributed to all relevant stakeholders within Serbia and the EU.

In accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the EU-Serbia Joint Consultative Committee, this joint declaration was adopted by all members, with the abstention of the Chamber of Commerce of Serbia.

The next JCC meeting is to be held in Belgrade in the second half of 2026. As agreed at the previous meetings, the assessment of an enabling environment for civil society and fulfilment of the Copenhagen political criteria for accession are a permanent part of the JCC's meeting agenda.