

Serbia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2021, the Serbian Parliament and political forces continued to engage in the inter-party dialogue led by the European Parliament, with a view to forging broad cross-party consensus on EU-related reforms, which is vital for the country's progress on its EU path. The political climate during the reporting period remained polarised. Inflammatory language against political opponents and representatives of other institutions expressing diverging political views was used during parliamentary debates. This included verbal attacks against civil society organisations and media by representatives of the ruling coalition. All politicians should counter hate speech and contribute to a political dialogue on EU-related reforms in particular on the fundamentals of democracy and the rule of law. Institutions need to improve cooperation with civil society and treat it as an essential partner in reforms and a guarantor of effective checks and balances.

The legislative and institutional framework in the area of fundamental rights is broadly in place and is largely in line with the relevant international and European standards. However, consistent and efficient implementation of legislation and policies still needs to be ensured. In addition to making substantial efforts to uphold freedom of expression, Serbia needs to address outstanding shortcomings and to strengthen human rights institutions, guarantee their independence, including via the allocation of the necessary financial and human resources, and ensure timely follow-up to their recommendations. Serbia also needs to step up measures to protect the rights of persons facing discrimination including by adopting and starting to implement a new anti-discrimination strategy and to actively pursue investigation and convictions for hate-motivated crimes. Due to lack of trust in institutions, cases of violence and discrimination towards LGBTI persons remain often unreported. It is also essential that Serbia ensures a consistent implementation of legislation regarding persons belonging to national minorities, including Roma, leading to a tangible improvement in the exercise of their rights across the country. This would notably require enhanced data collection.

For more information, please refer to the [European Commission's 2021 Report on Serbia](#)

2. EU action - key focus areas in 2021 included freedom of expression, human rights institutions and the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, including the Roma. The EU's action in Serbia continued to focus on the areas described in the interim benchmarks of Chapter 23 of the accession negotiations – Judiciary and fundamental rights. These benchmarks relate to the effective application of human rights, procedural safeguards, the protection of minorities and cultural rights, the EU *acquis* and international standards against racism and xenophobia, and EU data protection standards. The EU monitored closely Serbia's continuous implementation of its action plan for Chapter 23, including the set timelines.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to monitor closely the respect for human rights in Serbia within the framework of the EU accession negotiations, in particular under Chapter 23 – Judiciary and fundamental rights. There is a regular policy and political dialogue at both technical and political levels, including in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Such dialogue draws from monitoring of the implementation of

the action plan for Chapter 23, regular peer reviews, EU-funded projects, and engagement with international organisations and civil society.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2021, the EU continued to implement a number of IPA programmes to support social inclusion and anti-discrimination policies and to improve the situation of persons in vulnerable situations, including the Roma and internally displaced persons. Throughout the year, numerous projects promoting Roma inclusion were ongoing, with a total value of EUR 30 million.

In the context of strengthening the civil society, projects under the Civil Society Facility worth approximately EUR 6.2 million continued to be implemented during 2021, while an additional amount of EUR 2.5 million was awarded to new projects at the end of 2021. Two of the seven new projects were sizable projects providing financial support to third parties.

Under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), projects amounting to EUR 2 million were completed during 2021 and five new grants (EUR 1 million) were signed in May 2021. EIDHR projects focused notably on the protection of persons belonging to minorities, gender equality, rights of the child, migrants and protection of human rights defenders.

The EU support to media in Serbia continued through the ongoing EUR 2.4 million grant, under the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), addressing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on media actors. Substantial new support is foreseen to be provided in 2022. This grant continues to provide media and media organisations with support for operational costs, as well as productions. It is thus an essential lifeline to keep business operations running and developing in times of falling advertising and other revenues. EU-supported media literacy programmes continued to be rolled out. Support to the Press Council of Serbia, for an amount of EUR 300,000, was ongoing in 2021 in order to raise the ethical standards of the media and to investigate complaints on violations of those standards.

In addition, the implementation of activities under IPA regional projects has continued. For example, the EU/CoE Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey has supported the fight against discrimination and the protection of the rights of groups in vulnerable situations (including LGBTI persons and persons belonging to minorities), as well as freedom of expression and media freedom.

5. Multilateral context: Serbia continued its dialogue and cooperation with national, European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies. The UN Committee Against Torture examined the third periodic report of Serbia during its 72nd session in November-December 2021. In its concluding observations, the Committee Against Torture was “concerned that inadequate efforts are made to investigate the vast majority of criminal complaints lodged against police officers, prison staff and other State agents.”

Turkey

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2021 was characterised by the further deterioration of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Turkey. Broad-scale