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Resetting the EU's Approach to Serbia:

Lessons from the 2024–25 Protests

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SUMMARY

The students' and citizens' protests in Serbia, triggered by the Novi Sad railway station tragedy on 1 November 2024, represent the most serious challenge thus far to Vučić's government. They resulted in both mass citizen mobilization and a shift of public opinion, as well as increasingly authoritarian government behaviour. To contain the current political crisis and prevent Serbia's further slide into autocracy, the EU must adopt a holistic approach that firmly links tangible democratic improvements to progress in EU accession. Brussels should deploy all available instruments to incentivise genuine reforms rather than accept superficial compliance that leaves Serbia's authoritarian trajectory intact. Clear, consistent, and credible messaging about the EU's commitment to Serbia's democratic future is essential. This includes visible support for the broad spectrum of democratic actors – opposition, civil society, academia and students – who continue to challenge an increasingly oppressive government. Their fragmentation should not be misconstrued as weakness or an absence of reliable partners; rather, it is the result of political conditions shaped in part by years of inconsistent EU engagement. The EU now has a critical opportunity to reset its approach. Seizing this moment is vital for Serbia's future and firmly in the EU's strategic interest.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE NOVI SAD TRAGEDY – A SPARK IN A POWDER KEG

The fall of the canopy of the newly renovated railway station in Novi Sad on 1 November 2024, which resulted in the death of 16 people¹, sparked the most significant protests against the regime of President Aleksandar Vučić, but also contributed to the deepening of an already serious political crisis in Serbia.

This crisis is evident in the corroding Serbian democracy, rising levels of corruption, a culture of impunity, the government's increasingly autocratic behaviour, media capture and lack of citizens' trust in democratic processes. The electoral process has steadily deteriorated since 2016, culminating in the 2023 elections marked by severe irregularities — including vote buying, voter pressure, media imbalance, and organized voter relocation, which was also observed and noted in the ODIHR report.² Public trust has eroded to the point that the opposition boycotted key elections in 2020 and 2024, weakening political participation and blocking citizens' ability to channel discontent through normal political processes.

¹ "Serbia marks anniversary of Novi Sad tragedy that claimed 16 lives", N1, 1 November 2025, <https://n1info.rs/english/news/serbia-marks-anniversary-of-novi-sad-tragedy-that-claimed-16-lives/>

² "Republic of Serbia, Early parliamentary elections, 17 December 2023, ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report," ODIHR, 28 February 2024, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/3/563505_0.pdf

One year after the Novi Sad tragedy, it is clear that the student-led protests had two major consequences. The first is the **mass mobilization of the citizens against the government**. The Serbian government admitted there were 23,000 protests in the first 9 months (85 per day)³, and several of those gathered historical crowds of more than 100,000 people. Polls also showed a shift in popular opinion, with the student movement now having stronger support than the government.⁴

The second major consequence of the protests – prompted in response to the first – is the **strengthening of the government's autocratic grip**. Police and government thugs exercised violence against peaceful protesters, while numerous citizens, students and opposition figures were arrested and faced highly controversial charges. Independent estimates indicate that 1,064 citizens have been arrested (the count is ongoing)⁵. NGO offices were raided by armed police⁶, and the media faced an unprecedented level of violence and pressure.⁷ The highlight of the government violence against protesters came on 15 March 2025, when a sonic weapon was allegedly used⁸ against a huge, peaceful and silent crowd.

All of this substantially diminishes, if not eliminates, the prospects for any meaningful dialogue between the government and the broader opposition. Serbian democracy is therefore at a crossroads, with an increasingly authoritarian government and a new pro-democratic but still politically unstructured actor in the form of the student movement. Tensions remain high and large-scale violence remains a possibility due to the regime's willingness to use force and a lack of a clear path towards democratic transition through early elections.

³ "Narod koji je ustao: U Srbiji 23.000 protestnih okupljanja za devet meseci," 021, 19 August 2025, <https://www.021.rs/info/srbija/418525/narod-koji-je-ustao-u-srbiji-23000-protestnih-okupljanja-za-devet-meseci>

⁴ "Majority for Elections, Majority for Change," CRTA, 13 October 2025, <https://crt.rs/en/majority-for-elections-majority-for-change/>

⁵ "Baza podataka svih hapšenja u Srbiji od 1. novembra 2024. godine," <https://pustiteihsv.org/baza-podataka/>

⁶ "Serbian NGOs Accuse Govt of Pressure Over Police Raids," Balkan Insight, 25 February 2025, <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/02/25/serbian-police-raids-reputable-ngos-over-usaid-money/>

⁷ "Protests in Serbia: at least 89 attacks on journalists recorded by RSF in one year," Reporters without Borders, 29 October 2025, <https://rsf.org/en/protests-serbia-least-89-attacks-journalists-recorded-rsf-one-year>

⁸ "Mystery sound at Serbia protest sparks sonic weapon allegations," Reuters, 2 April 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/mystery-sound-serbia-protest-sparks-sonic-weapon-allegations-2025-04-02/>

2. EUROPEAN UNION'S APPROACH TO SERBIA'S EU ACCESSION

From the outset of the current crisis in Serbia, the EU has struggled to respond in a direct, cohesive and consequential manner. This has been in line with its approach to Serbia's EU accession process, **marred by ambiguity and characterized by prioritizing issues of stability and security over democratic transformation.**

This has created a discrepancy whereby, on the one hand, the fulfilment of fundamentals is insisted upon, and, on the other, Serbia is rewarded with progress or funding for the sake of stability, even though the country has demonstrated clear signs of democratic backsliding.

The consensus in Brussels has for a long time been to appease Serbia, traditionally for the sake of stability, and more recently out of fear of Serbia's geopolitical realignment away from the EU following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This is evident in the fact that there have been no tangible repercussions for Serbia whenever democratic backsliding was observed – except the slow rate of opening/closing Chapters and Clusters of the EU acquis, with the last one, Cluster 4, having been opened in 2021.

In the last ten years, democratic backsliding has been evident in Serbia's significant regression in all international rankings measuring democracy,⁹ media freedom,¹⁰ corruption¹¹ and the rule of law.¹²

At the same time, the excessive centralization of power in the hands of the executive, the erosion of parliamentary oversight and the increased control over the judiciary by the executive branch were never addressed head-on by the EU in its accession process with Serbia. Even though the EU formally insisted on the fulfilment of the fundamentals as a pre-requisite for progress in EU accession, it did not once sanction Serbia for this backsliding, even though it introduced a new enlargement methodology in 2020 that would enable precisely that.

The fundamental problem with the EU's approach was that **it did not explicitly link the issue of democracy in Serbia with EU accession** and condition Serbia's progress on tangible improvements in democratic institutions and an end to attempts to capture the state.

⁹ "Nations in Transit 2024 Serbia Report," Freedom House, 2024, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/nations-transit/2024>; "Nations in Transit 2020 Serbia Report," Freedom House, 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/nations-transit/2020>

¹⁰ "Protests in Serbia: at least 89 attacks on journalists recorded by RSF in one year," Reporters without Borders, 2025, <https://rsf.org/en/protests-serbia-least-89-attacks-journalists-recorded-rsf-one-year>

¹¹ "CPI 2024 for Eastern Europe & Central Asia: Vicious cycle of weak democracy and flourishing corruption," Transparency International, 2025, <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2024-eastern-europe-central-asia--vicious-cycle-weak-democracy-flourishing-corruption>

¹² WJP Rule of Law Index Serbia, 2025, <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/Serbia>

Instead, the EU rewarded superficial or controversial reforms by opening Chapters or Clusters, or noting progress in its annual country reports – such as after the 2022 constitutional change, the adoption of the media strategy in 2020 or the 2023 media laws, all of which only partially aligned with EU standards. **All of these laws, while (partially) aligning with EU standards, have produced no positive effects on the state of democracy in Serbia, as the overall trajectory has remained undemocratic.**

Even during the current crisis, which made the repressive tactics of the regime even more visible, the Union still transferred about 50 million EUR¹³ of funds from the Growth Plan to the Serbian state coffers in the summer of 2025, even though disbursement is based on the rule of law.

This appeasement appears to have produced the opposite effect, actually strengthening and consolidating the ruling party's grip on power¹⁴ through (in)direct legitimacy from EU officials and praise for reforms that failed to make a real difference in improving democracy in Serbia.

If the EU wishes to prevent Serbia's further autocratization and the spiralling of the current crisis out of control, **it needs to approach the Serbian socio-political crisis holistically**, clearly link democratic progress to progress in EU accession, and utilise all available instruments to push for meaningful democratic reforms with tangible results, rather than being content with cosmetic changes that do not alter Serbia's evidently authoritarian path under the current government.

¹³ "Serbia receives pre-financing from the EU Growth Plan," EU Delegation to Serbia, 20 June 2025, <https://europa.rs/serbia-receives-pre-financing-from-the-eu-growth-plan/?lang=en>

¹⁴ Solveig Richter and Natasha Wunsch (2019). "Money, power, glory: the linkages between EU conditionality and state capture in the Western Balkans." *Journal of European Public Policy* 27(1): 41–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2019.1578815>

2.1. EU'S APPROACH TO SERBIA'S POLITICAL CRISIS

The EU also failed to properly address the severe political crisis in Serbia through other instruments. After the opposition started boycotting the work of the Serbian National Assembly and threatened to boycott the upcoming 2020 elections, the European Parliament stepped in as a facilitator in the government-opposition inter-party dialogue on electoral conditions. After two rounds of dialogue (2019-2020 and 2021-2022), the process produced very limited results.¹⁵

The EU ultimately failed to apply sufficient pressure on the Serbian government to accept measures that would meaningfully improve electoral conditions and the state of Serbian democracy.

Rather than sanctioning the Serbian government for failing to improve electoral conditions, the EU rewarded it for the reforms it adopted, opening a new cluster in Serbia's EU accession after a constitutional reform was enacted by a single-party parliament.

This stands in sharp contrast with North Macedonia, where the European Commissioner for Enlargement was strongly involved in pushing for a meaningful government-opposition dialogue which resulted in substantial changes, an interim government and fairer elections.

¹⁵ "Međustranački dijalog u Srbiji uz posredovanje EU 2019-2022: Propuštena prilika da se poboljšaju izborni uslovi," Centre for Contemporary Politics, May 2024, <https://centarsavremenepolitike.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2024-05-Medjustranacki-dijalog-u-Srbiji.pdf>

¹⁶ "S&D, Renew and Greens MEPs support the request of Serbian opposition for EU expert reports on rule of law and media," EWB, 17 July 2020, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/07/17/sd-renew-and-greens-meps-support-the-request-of-serbian-opposition-for-eu-expert-reports-on-rule-of-law-and-media/>

¹⁷ "EP adopted resolution on Serbia, calling for an investigation into December elections," EWB, 8 February 2024, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2024/02/08/ep-adopted-resolution-on-serbia-calling-for-an-investigation-into-december-elections/>

¹⁸ Florian Bieber, Marko Kmezić, Claudia Laštro and Lura Pollozhani. "The Future of the Protests and Democracy in Serbia," BiEPAG, February 2025, <https://www.biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/the-future-of-the-protests-and-democracy-in-serbia-214.pdf>

3. COMMUNICATION WITH THE SERBIAN SOCIETY

Arguably, the EU's most vital resource for maintaining its connection with Serbia's democratic public, namely trust, is becoming critically scarce. Serbia is the only Western Balkan country where popular support for EU membership has dropped below 50%; polls show a steady decline, with the latest data indicating just 39%.¹⁹

Naturally, growing mistrust of the EU among Serbian citizens has been shaped by multiple factors. A vigorous and sustained anti-EU campaign, promoted across all pro-regime media outlets, including television stations with national coverage, undoubtedly plays a significant role.

However, an important factor also lies in the **messages and communication style the EU has adopted vis-à-vis Serbia's political leadership**. For example, the statements made by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen during her visits to Serbia since 2021 have always included praise for Serbia's reforms and progress.

In 2021, after Serbia's parliament was without any opposition due to the electoral boycott the previous year, her message was: "I commend you for the steps you have taken ...It is amazing to see the progress".²⁰ In 2023, von der Leyen congratulated Serbia on having "finalised important reforms [on media freedom]", referring to the adoption of the Law on Electronic Media, whose provisions allowed the state-owned Telekom Srbija to own media outlets.²¹ The former European Council president Donald Tusk even called Vučić "the greatest of Serb" and a "kindred spirit".²²

Unsurprisingly, these and similar statements, which were not an exception, but the rule, provoked negative reactions from a large portion of the public, **especially those who had previously seen the EU as an ally in the fight for the rule of law and democracy in Serbia**.

Not only was undeserved praise given, but, more importantly, criticism was absent when it was crucial to deliver it. Serbian citizens have been protesting almost yearly since 2016, con-

¹⁹ "Highest support for EU in Kosovo, lowest in Serbia," EWB, 12 September 2025, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2025/09/12/highest-support-for-eu-in-kosovo-lowest-in-serbia/>

²⁰ "Statement by President von der Leyen on the occasion of her official visit to Serbia," European Commission, 30 September 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_21_4961

²¹ "Statement by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with Serbian President Vučić," European Commission, 31 October 2023, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-president-von-der-leyen-joint-press-conference-serbian-president-vucic-2023-10-31_en

²² "Tusk: Mislim da je nemoguće naći većeg Srbina od Vučića," N1, 26 April 2018, <https://n1info.ba/regija/a256946-Tusk-i-Vucic-u-Beogradu/>

sistently warning of declining civic and media freedoms, the usurpation of the judiciary, and the erosion of accountability in public affairs. Yet the EU failed to properly acknowledge and support this struggle.

For instance, the 2020 elections and ensuing protests marked a crucial step in the regime's abuse of power. Capitalising on its firm grip over media discourse during the COVID-19 lockdown, Aleksandar Vučić's ruling coalition used the June 2020 snap elections, boycotted by the opposition, to consolidate power. Only a few weeks later, during the July demonstrations triggered by both anti-COVID measures and the state's mishandling of the pandemic, the citizen protests were met with police brutality for the first time. This combination of the regime's total control over state institutions and recourse to violence provided a perfect platform for a more rigorous and clearer stance from the EU – but the opportunity was missed.

The following years saw further consolidation of authoritarianism and increasingly refined electoral manipulation, leaving the bitter impression that the EU continues to favour “stability-tocracy” in the region.

The last few years allowed the regime to further entrench anti-Western narratives in public discourse while simultaneously strengthening ties with Russia and China. This had a spill-over effect on public perceptions and arguably took root among parts of the student movement and broader public protests of the past year.

The EU has failed to explicitly communicate that Serbia's slow progress is due to issues with democracy and the rule of law, focusing instead on Serbia's refusal to align with sanctions on Russia. As a result, **citizens believe the government when it claims that the EU is delaying Serbia's accession for “political” reasons or because of good relations with Russia**, rather than because of the government's own poor reform track record. The perception of the EU as a necessary and crucial ally in securing a democratic future has been severely damaged, and it was within this atmosphere that the student protests erupted.

Consequently, it is of utmost importance to deliver clear and strong messages about the EU's commitment to Serbia's democratic future and its willingness to support and engage with democratic actors working to oppose the oppressive regime, including opposition groups, civil society, academia, and students.

3.1. CLEARER COMMUNICATION BRINGS POSITIVE EFFECTS

Some positive changes, albeit unsystematic, in the EU's communication and approach towards Serbia's EU accession can be noticed since the spring of 2025. Enlargement Commissioner Marta Kos **explicitly equated the student movement's demands regarding the rule of law and democracy with those of the EU** and met with the movement's representatives as well as academia and civil society during her visit to Serbia in April 2025.²³ On multiple occasions, she explicitly condemned²⁴ the violence against protesters, criticised the lack of reforms in Serbia and called out²⁵ the Serbian government and its President's disingenuous approach to EU accession.

At the same time, the **European Parliament has become more vocal** in condemning the Serbian regime's excessive use of violence against protesters and openly criticised Serbia's handling of the crisis. **This change of tone also led the students to cycle and run to Brussels and Strasbourg in April 2025** as a form of protest and to seek support from the EU as the only relevant international actor that aligns with their demands.

As of September 2025, a change of tone is noticeable even in the European Commission. For instance, von der Leyen's visit to Belgrade in October 2025 seemed to address shortcomings more directly than on previous occasions. The President of the European Commission noted that the EU "stands for freedom instead of oppression, including the right of peaceful assembly,"²⁶ alluding to the regime's recent crackdown on protesters. She also met with civil society and posted a picture with them on social media – the only picture she posted during that visit.

Additionally, in late October 2025, the European Parliament adopted the harshest resolution on Serbia²⁷ to date, in which it even called for sanctions against those responsible for serious violations of law and human rights. This resolution was celebrated by pro-EU citizens in Serbia, and **the European Parliament has increasingly been seen as an allied institution to many within the student-led movement**. Similarly, the country report for Serbia by the European Commission from 4 November 2025 has a harsher tone than previous reports and notes

²³ "Marta Kos visits Serbia: 'What we are asking is very close to the demands of the protesters'," EWB, 30 April 2025, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2025/04/30/marta-kos-visits-serbia-what-we-are-asking-is-very-close-to-the-demands-of-the-protesters/>

²⁴ "N1 interview with Marta Kos: What demonstrators and students demand is the same that EC is asking from Serbia," N1, 29 March 2025, <https://n1info.rs/english/news/n1-interview-with-marta-kos-what-demonstrators-and-students-demand-is-the-same-that-ec-is-asking-from-serbia/>

²⁵ "Marta Kos: Novi Sad tragedy is changing Serbia, citizens demand values and the EU," N1, 1 November 2025, <https://n1info.rs/english/news/marta-kos-novi-sad-tragedy-is-changing-serbia-citizens-demand-values-and-the-eu/>

²⁶ "Statement by President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen with President Vučić of Serbia," EU in Serbia, 15 October 2025, <https://europa.rs/statement-by-president-of-the-european-commission-ursula-von-der-leyen-with-president-vucic-of-serbia/?lang=en>

²⁷ "Resolution on the polarisation and increased repression in Serbia, one year after the Novi Sad tragedy," European Parliament, 22 October 2025, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-10-2025-0459_EN.html

the unfulfilled reforms on the rule of law, electoral process and others promised in Serbia's non-paper from late 2024.

This change of tone is welcome, especially among pro-EU civil society and opposition parties. It can also strengthen the position of the pro-EU faction within the student-led protests, demonstrating that the EU has finally adopted a more critical stance and explicitly condemned both the Serbian regime's actions and its decade-long centralization of power in the hands of the President.

At the same time, this change of communication signals to the Serbian public that the EU is their ally and breaks the government's long-standing narrative that Serbia is not progressing towards the EU simply because of its non-recognition of Kosovo or its non-alignment with EU foreign and security policy. It reaffirms the importance of tangible democratization as a precondition for moving forward. However, **the change of rhetoric needs to be backed up by political action as well.**

4. INCREASING EU OUTREACH TO PRO-DEMOCRATIC ACTORS

It is important for the EU to look beyond the current government when it comes to finding interlocutors and establishing partnerships within Serbian society. On the one hand, **strengthening such outreach helps empower pro-democratic actors in Serbia.**

On the other hand, **it helps the EU's own influence and reputation.** Failure to be perceived as an ally of Serbian citizens who are fighting for democracy would do long-term damage to the EU's reputation and the support of Serbian citizens for EU accession.

As previously noted, various EU institutions have intensified efforts in this regard. Political groups in the European Parliament have strengthened their relations with their Serbian counterparts and the EP has positioned itself as an ally of various pro-democratic groups.

High level EU officials' visits, such as Ursula von der Leyen, Kaja Kallas, Marta Kos and Antonio Costa, have also increasingly included pro-EU opposition, civil society and students as interlocutors during their visits to Belgrade. Such moves did not go unnoticed in Serbia and have emboldened these actors to engage with EU institutions further.²⁸

However, the complexity of the political situation in Serbia complicates the EU's strategic considerations. The students – who are currently the dominant pro-democratic actor and driver of democratic changes – have no leaders and are quite decentralized. Their electoral list – whose victory could usher in a democratic government – is still not public. This is further complicated by the movement's scepticism concerning the EU and the lack of EU flags in their protests, which raise suspicion within the Union about where the movement stands on EU issues.

But despite these legitimate concerns and the students' caution concerning the EU, their bike ride to Strasbourg and the relay race to Brussels have shown that **the EU is still perceived as a natural ally among students and their supporters.**²⁹

When it comes to the pro-EU opposition, the European Parliament has engaged them in dialogue, with political groups establishing cooperation with their Serbian counterparts. This helped Serbian pro-EU parties' position and gave them more convincing incentives to stay on a pro-EU path and continue being strong promoters of Serbia's EU membership.

²⁸ "Opozicija otkriva kako je izgledao razgovor sa Martom Kos: Najbolji i najplodonosniji sastanak u poslednjih 10 godina," Nova.rs, 30 April 2025, <https://nova.rs/vesti/politika/opozicija-otkriva-kako-je-izgledao-razgovor-sa-martom-kos-najbolji-i-najplodonosniji-sastanak-u-poslednjih-10-godina/>

²⁹ "'EU, Where Are U?' Serbian students arrive in Brussels after ultramarathon protest", New Union Post, 13 May 2025, <https://newunionpost.eu/2025/05/13/serbian-students-marathon-brussels/>

Finally, the student electoral list – composed exclusively of non-students – is expected to have a dominant role in the next parliamentary elections. The list will represent the political materialization of the student movement, thus presenting potential interlocutors and avenues for dialogue with EU officials. The EU must be ready once new political platforms have materialized, ensuring that the EU is seen as a desired ally and EU integration as a preferred strategic choice for Serbia.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ongoing protests in Serbia represent the culmination of a long-lasting political crisis to which the EU must develop a coherent response. It should look at the crisis both as a warning that previous policies have failed and as an opportunity to apply new approaches.

It would not be a stretch to say that the EU and the Serbian citizens fighting for democracy are natural allies, and their interests in Serbia align closely. There can be no EU accession of Serbia without democracy, but much needs to be done to make sure that this alliance is practical rather than just theoretical.

First, the EU needs to take a holistic approach to addressing Serbia's democracy and clearly link it with EU accession. Second, it should communicate more clearly about the problems regarding Serbia's democracy. Third, it needs to engage various groups from the Serbian society – establishing connections that could help resolve the current crisis but also represent a foundation for future Serbia-EU relations.

Specific recommendations for the EU (European Commission, European Parliament, EU Member States) are as follows:

1. Relations with the government:

- ◀ The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Member States should place special focus on the next elections in Serbia, apply more diplomatic pressure to ensure the ODIHR recommendations from 2024 are implemented and react to any electoral manipulations or irregularities. The European Commission should provide adequate funding for and deploy an EU observation mission.
- ◀ The European Commission and the Member States should condition Serbia's EU accession progress with clear and tangible results in building independent, democratic institutions and insist on implementation and results.
- ◀ The European Commission and the Member States should apply pressure on the Serbian government to refrain from authoritarian practices through enlargement conditionality, including suspending negotiations, withdrawing funding or adopting sanctions on individuals.

2. Communication with the Serbian public:

- ◀ The European Commission should rebuild trust with Serbia's democratic public through consistent and credible communication that clearly distinguishes between engagement with Serbian society and conditionality applied to its leadership.
- ◀ The European Commission and the European Parliament should communicate clearly that the demands of pro-democracy protesters align with the EU's expectations from Serbia and that the EU is an ally of the citizens fighting for democracy in Serbia.
- ◀ The European Commission and Member States should explicitly state the problems they see when it comes to democracy in Serbia and not praise superficial or cosmetic reforms.

3. Relations with the opposition and civil society:

- ◀ The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Member States should continue strengthening outreach towards pro-democratic actors in Serbia, including pro-EU opposition parties, civil society organizations, academic community and the student movement, and engage them as interlocutors with high-level officials.
- ◀ The European Commission should not put pressure on opposition and civil society to cooperate with the authoritarian government on EU-related reforms. Tangible progress concerning democracy must be a precondition for any such cooperation.
- ◀ The European Commission, the European Parliament and Member States should compensate for limited direct access to the student movement by strengthening outreach to the academic community and the MP candidates from the student list.
- ◀ The European Commission and the Member States should bypass state-controlled structures where possible by strengthening direct (financial) support for democratic actors – civil society, independent media, academia, and local initiatives.

ABOUT US

The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) is a group of policy analysts, scholars and researchers, established as a joint initiative of the European Fund for the Balkans and the Centre for Southeast European Studies of the University of Graz with the aim to promote the European integration of the Western Balkans and the consolidation of democratic, open countries in the region. BiEPAG is composed of prominent policy researchers from the Western Balkans and all of Europe who have established themselves for their knowledge and understanding of the Western Balkans and the processes that shape the region.

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