

2025 Rule of Law Report - targeted stakeholder consultation

Fields marked with * are mandatory.

Introduction

The annual Rule of Law Report lies at the centre of the Annual Rule of Law Cycle, which acts as a preventive tool, deepening multilateral dialogue and joint awareness of rule of law issues. So far, five editions of the Rule of Law Report have been published since 2020.

As every year, the Commission would like to invite the stakeholders to provide contributions to the 2025 Rule of Law Report. On the basis of these contributions and on-going developments, further targeted questions may be shared at a later stage of preparation of the 2025 Rule of Law Report, in particular in the context of country visits, or bilateral contacts.

The Commission invites stakeholders to provide contributions which include:

- (1) information on measures taken to implement the recommendations addressed to the Member State in the 2024 Rule of Law report, as well as developments with regard to the points raised in the respective country chapter and**
- (2) any other significant developments since January 2024^[1] and up to the date of submission falling under the ‘type of information’ outlined below.**

The input should consist of a short summary, if possible in English, covering the areas referred to below. Legislation or other documents may be referenced with a link. Contributions should focus on significant developments since the last Rule of Law Report both as regards the legal framework and its implementation in practice.

If you would like to provide further specific **input related to the single market dimension in the Rule of Law report**, you can also respond to the additional targeted consultation available [here](#).

^[1] Unless the information was already submitted in the input for the previous Rule of Law Reports.

Type of information to be included:

Under each of the four pillars, the replies should include references to the following types of information:

A) Legislative developments

- Newly adopted legislation
- legislative drafts currently discussed in Parliament
- legislative plans envisaged by the Government

B) Policy developments

- Implementation of legislation
- evaluations, impact assessment, surveys
- white papers/strategies/actions plans/consultation processes
- follow-up to reports/recommendations of Council of Europe bodies or other international organisations
- important administrative measures
- generalised practices

C) Developments related to the judiciary / independent authorities

- important case law by national courts
- important decision/opinions from independent bodies/authorities
- state of play on terms, nominations and expired mandates for high-level positions (e.g. Supreme Court, Constitutional Court, Council for the Judiciary, Prosecutor General, heads of independent authorities included in the scope of the request for input[2])

D) Any other relevant developments

- National authorities are free to add any further information, which they deem relevant; however, this should be short and to the point.

Please also indicate whether the developments reported are linked to the implementation of reforms and investments under the RRP, where applicable. To simplify your answers to the questionnaire, **if there are no developments, it is sufficient to indicate this** and the information covered in the contributions for the previous Rule of Law Reports does not need not be repeated.

[2] Such as: media regulatory authorities and bodies, national human rights institutions, equality bodies, ombudsman institutions, supreme audit institutions and, where they exist, transparency authorities.

About you

* I am giving my contribution as

- ☐ Academic/research institution
- ☐ Business association
- ☒ Civil society organisation/NGO
- ☐ International organisation
- ☐ Judicial association or network
- ☐ Media organisation or association
- ☐ Public authority or network of public authorities

☐ Other

* Organisation name

250 character(s) maximum

CRTA - Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability

Main Areas of Work

- ☐ Justice System
- ☐ Anti-corruption
- ☒ Media Pluralism
- ☒ Checks and Balances
- ☒ Other

If "Other", please specify

Democracy

Please insert an URL towards your organisation's main online presence or describe your organisation briefly:

500 character(s) maximum

www.crtars

Transparency register number

Check if your organisation is in the transparency register. It's a voluntary database for organisations seeking to influence EU decision-making

114264250966-94

* Country of origin

Please indicate the country of origin of your organisation

- ☐ Austria
- ☐ Belgium
- ☐ Bulgaria
- ☐ Croatia
- ☐ Cyprus
- ☐ Czechia
- ☐ Denmark
- ☐ Estonia
- ☐ Finland
- ☐ France
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Greece
- ☐ Hungary
- ☐ Ireland
- ☐ Italy

- ☐ Latvia
- ☐ Lithuania
- ☐ Luxembourg
- ☐ Malta
- ☐ Netherlands
- ☐ Poland
- ☐ Portugal
- ☐ Romania
- ☐ Slovak Republic
- ☐ Slovenia
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Sweden
- ☒ Other - please specify

If "Other", please specify

Please indicate the country of origin of your organisation

Serbia

First name

Tamara

Surname

Brankovic

Email Address of the organisation

office@crt.a.rs

*** Publication of your contribution and privacy settings**

You can choose whether you wish for your contribution to be published and whether you wish your details to be made public or to remain anonymous.

- ☐ Anonymous - Only your type of respondent, country of origin and contribution will be published. Organisation name, URL, transparency register number, first name and surname given above will not be published. **To maintain anonymity, please refrain from mentioning the name of your organisation and any details from which your organisation can be identified in the rest of your contribution.**
- ☒ Public - Your personal details (name, organisation name, transparency register number, country of origin) will be published with your contribution).
- ☐ No publication - Your contribution will not be published. Elements of your contribution may be referred to anonymously in documents produced by the Commission based on this consultation.

☒ I agree with the personal data protection provisions.

[Specific privacy statement targeted stakeholder consultation 2025 rule of law report.pdf](#)

Questions on horizontal developments

In this section, you are invited to provide information on general horizontal developments or trends, both positive and negative, covering all or several Member States. In particular, you could mention issues that are common to several Member States, as well as best practices identified in one Member State that could be replicated. Moreover, you could refer to your activities in the area of the four pillars and sub-topics (an overview of all sub-topics can be found below), and, if you represent a Network of national organisations, to the support you might have provided to one of your national members.

Overview topics for contribution

[List of topics - 2025 Rule of Law Report.pdf](#)

Please provide any relevant information on horizontal developments here

5000 character(s) maximum

Questions for contribution

Under each pillar, you are invited to provide information on measures taken to implement the recommendations addressed to the Member State in the 2024 Rule of Law report, as well as developments with regard to the points raised in the respective country chapter of the 2024 Rule of Law Report and any other significant developments since January 2024 and up to the date of submission[3]. Please always include a link to and reference relevant legislation/documents (in the national language and/or where available, in English). **Significant developments** can include challenges, positive developments and best practices, covering both legislative developments or implementation and practices.

Information provided in reply to the first question under each pillar, related to the follow-up to the recommendations, does not need to be repeated in subsequent parts of the questionnaire, but can be cross-referenced in the subsequent questions, where relevant. All other questions are not limited to the recommendations, but as in previous years, cover the entire scope of the Report.

[3] Unless already covered in the input for the previous Rule of Law Reports.

Member State/enlargement country covered in contribution [only one choice possible]

If you wish to submit information concerning several Member States/enlargement countries, please fill in the questionnaire separately for each country. There is no limit to the number of contributions submitted by a single participant.

- ☐ Albania
- ☐ Austria
- ☐ Belgium
- ☐ Bulgaria
- ☐ Croatia
- ☐ Cyprus
- ☐ Czechia

- ☐ Denmark
- ☐ Estonia
- ☐ Finland
- ☐ France
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Greece
- ☐ Hungary
- ☐ Ireland
- ☐ Italy
- ☐ Latvia
- ☐ Lithuania
- ☐ Luxembourg
- ☐ Malta
- ☐ Montenegro
- ☐ Netherlands
- ☐ North Macedonia
- ☐ Poland
- ☐ Portugal
- ☐ Romania
- ☒ Serbia
- ☐ Slovakia
- ☐ Slovenia
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Sweden

I. Justice System

Please provide information on measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations received in the 2024 Report regarding the justice system (if applicable)

5000 character(s) maximum

A. Independence

Appointment and selection of judges, prosecutors and court presidents (incl. judicial review)

(The reference to 'judges' concerns judges at all level and types of courts as well as judges at constitutional courts)

5000 character(s) maximum

Irremovability of judges, including transfers, (incl. as part of judicial map reform), dismissal and retirement regime of judges, court presidents and prosecutors (incl. judicial review)

5000 character(s) maximum

Promotion of judges and prosecutors (incl. judicial review)

5000 character(s) maximum

Allocation of cases in courts

5000 character(s) maximum

Independence (including composition and nomination and dismissal of its members), and powers of the body tasked with safeguarding the independence of the judiciary (e.g. Council for the Judiciary)

5000 character(s) maximum

Accountability of judges and prosecutors, including disciplinary regime and bodies and ethical rules, judicial immunity and criminal/civil (where applicable) liability of judges (incl. judicial review)

5000 character(s) maximum

Independence/autonomy of the prosecution service

5000 character(s) maximum

In November 2024, the state and pro-government media launched an orchestrated campaign against the judiciary after prosecutors charged 13 people over the deadly canopy collapse at Novi Sad railway station, including then-construction minister Goran Vesic and several transport officials. The Speaker of Parliament grave accusations: "The prosecutor's office succumbed to pressure from the street and became afraid of the worst among us. In return, they received new orders from those who exerted pressure and threatened them - extremists, criminals, tycoons, thugs and bullies, opportunists, and political vultures without any scruples or morals." The Interior Minister stated that he is unsure whether the prosecutor's office ordered the arrest of 13 people due to the collapse of the canopy at the railway station as a result of public pressure or because someone is genuinely responsible. The President of Serbia continued undermining and putting pressure on the judiciary via the Public Service Broadcaster: "For the first time in the history of Serbia, several people, including two ministers and several other individuals, have resigned from their positions, even though it is not easy to connect them to what happened in Novi Sad. (...) What is much more important is how it is possible and whether some media is indeed right when they say there is a judge in the Basic Court in Novi Sad who brags about how he released criminals from the opposition thanks to his political activism. That is something that undermines our legal order, and it would be good to investigate it properly."

The campaign launched by the highest officials was amplified through pro-government media. CRTA filed a criminal complaint against Dragan J. Vučićević, editor-in-chief of *Informer*, and Vladimir Đukanović, a prominent lawyer and Member of Parliament (MP) from the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). By disseminating baseless accusations and derogatory language through mainstream and social media, Vučićević and Đukanović have sought to delegitimize prosecutorial and judicial independence and create a hostile environment for prosecutors and judges.

Vučićević, through a series of broadcasts on *Informer* TV, attacked the judiciary with inflammatory and derogatory language. In a widely criticized broadcast on November 21, 2024, Vučićević accused prosecutors and judges of being "traitorous judicial cattle" serving opposition politicians and foreign interests. He specifically targeted Stevan Pavlov, a judge of the Basic Court in Novi Sad, making unsubstantiated claims about his alleged political affiliations: "Judge Pavlov, the intimate of yellow screamer Srđan Milivojević, released opposition thugs despite their serious crimes. He has been boasting in judicial circles that he is 'the cadre of the new DOS.' Shame on you, judicial cattle!" These statements were accompanied by broader accusations that the judiciary was undermining the state through politically motivated decisions.

In parallel, Đukanović, leveraging his position as an MP and media presence, has repeatedly used inflammatory rhetoric to delegitimize judicial decisions unfavorable to the ruling party. In his public appearances, he characterized prosecutors as "enemies of the state" and part of a "yellow elite" conspiring to destabilize the government. Echoing Vučićević, he claimed that the judiciary was orchestrating political prosecutions under the influence of foreign-funded media outlets. These attacks escalated tensions, with Đukanović suggesting that systemic changes were necessary to purge the judiciary of so-called "anti-state elements."

For instance, Đukanović publicly supported Vučićević's claims, declaring, "What we are witnessing is an orchestrated effort by so-called independent prosecutors, taking cues from N1, Nova S, and other foreign-funded outlets, to undermine our democratically elected government. This must stop." Such statements not only question the legitimacy of individual prosecutors but also undermine the rule of law by casting doubt on the entire judicial system.

The coordinated nature of these campaigns has created an environment of intimidation and fear among legal professionals. This sustained pressure exacerbates public distrust in the judiciary and raises concerns about the erosion of democratic norms in Serbia.

Independence of the Bar (chamber/association of lawyers) and of lawyers

5000 character(s) maximum

The independence of the Serbian Bar Association was severely undermined by President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, during a television address on January 18, 2025. The President's comments came in response to a week-long suspension of work declared by lawyers in solidarity with the student protests and their demands. In his address, President Vučić referred to the legitimate representatives of the Serbian Bar Association as a "mob" and threatened changes to the system of lawyer registration and removal, which is governed by the Law on Attorneys.

In reaction to these statements, the Serbian Bar Association issued a strong condemnation, stating:

"The Serbian Bar Association has strongly condemned the statement made by the President of the Republic of Serbia in the media, in which he referred to the legitimate representatives of the Assembly of the Serbian Bar Association as a 'mob.'

"These offensive and inappropriate statements represent a serious attack on the reputation of the legal profession and its representatives. Furthermore, the statement that 'someone else,' and not the existing bar associations, will be responsible for the registration and removal of lawyers, as stipulated by the Law on Attorneys, represents a gross violation of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, given that the President of the Republic is not authorized to make decisions in this area.

"We call on all government bodies to respect the constitutional principle of the separation of powers and to act within their authority. This is the fundamental principle on which the legal system of the Republic of Serbia is based, and its violation endangers the rule of law.

"It is particularly important to emphasize that the legal profession is an independent and autonomous service for the provision of legal aid, as explicitly stipulated by Article 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia. These statements and actions come at a time when a seven-day work stoppage by lawyers throughout the Republic of Serbia has been declared, in response to previous unacceptable decisions and statements, with the aim of protecting the independence and integrity of the legal profession. The Serbian Bar Association calls for respect for the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Serbia, in the interest of all citizens of the Republic of Serbia."

On January 19, the first working day following the Bar Association's decision to suspend work, lawyer Goran Petronijević, known for his close ties to the ruling party, filed a lawsuit with the Higher Court in Belgrade seeking the annulment of the Bar's decision. The Court acted with unusual urgency, issuing a judgment within hours and annulling the Bar's decision. This unprecedented speed in delivering a judgment contrasts sharply with the typical delays in the Serbian judiciary and raised questions about judicial impartiality and independence.

The Steering Committee of the Serbian Bar Association rejected the judgment as illegal and swiftly adopted a new decision to suspend work for three days. This second decision was also challenged before the Higher Court in Belgrade, which referred the case to a different judge. In contrast to the earlier ruling, this judge declared the Court to lack jurisdiction, in line with a precedent from 2022 when a similar case was brought before the Court.

Minister of Justice Maja Popović further undermined the Bar's autonomy by urging lawyers to return to work, stating her belief that the Bar Association would not expel them for non-compliance, given the Court's annulment of the first suspension decision.

These events underscore a troubling pattern of governmental interference in the autonomy of the Bar Association and the broader legal profession in Serbia. They raise significant concerns about the erosion of the rule of law and the independence of key institutions tasked with upholding it.

Significant developments capable of affecting the perception that the general public has of the independence of the judiciary

5000 character(s) maximum

B. Quality of justice

(Under this topic, you are not required to give statistical information but should provide input on the type of information outlined in the introduction)

Accessibility of courts (e.g. court/legal fees, legal aid, language)

5000 character(s) maximum

Resources of the judiciary (human/financial/material), remuneration/bonuses/rewards for judges and prosecutors, including observed changes (significant and targeted increase or decrease over the past year)

(Material resources refer e.g. to court buildings and other facilities. Financial resources include salaries of staff in courts and prosecution offices.)

5000 character(s) maximum

Training of justice professionals (including judges, prosecutors, lawyers, court staff, clerks/trainees)

5000 character(s) maximum

Digitalisation (e.g. use of digital technology, including electronic communication and AI tools, within the justice system and with court users, procedural rules, access to judgments online)

5000 character(s) maximum

Use of assessment tools and standards (e.g. ICT systems, including AI-based systems, for case management, court statistics and their transparency, monitoring, evaluation, surveys among court users or legal professionals)

5000 character(s) maximum

Geographical distribution and number of courts/jurisdictions ("judicial map") and their specialisation, in particular specific courts or chambers within courts to deal with fraud and corruption cases.

5000 character(s) maximum

C. Efficiency of the justice system

(Under this topic, you are not required to give statistical information but should provide input on the type of information outlined under section 2)

Developments related to efforts to improve the efficiency of the justice system (e.g. as regards length of proceedings)

5000 character(s) maximum

The efficiency of Serbia's justice system continues to face significant challenges, particularly regarding the length of proceedings. A recent investigation conducted by CRTA highlights delays and inefficiencies in cases related to violations of electoral rights and electoral criminal offenses following December 2023 snap parliamentary, Belgrade and local elections in one part of the country, and June 2024 repeated Belgrade and snap local elections in remaining parts of the country.

CRTA submitted 105 requests for access to public information from 87 public prosecutors' offices. Five offices failed to respond, while data from the remaining offices revealed that prosecutors acted in 170 cases of electoral violations. Despite the volume of cases, only two resulted in final judgments. In one case, a plea bargain was accepted, leading to a fine of approximately 500 euros, and the confiscation of the voting document. In another case, the accused received a three-month suspended prison sentence. Both cases pertained to the offense of destroying voting documents under Article 162 of the Criminal Code.

Out of the total cases, only four indictments were filed, while 55 cases were dismissed or deemed unnecessary to pursue. Alarming, 70 cases remain in the pre-investigation phase, with no clear timeline for resolution. This extended period of inaction highlights inefficiencies within the justice system. For example, the First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade initiated a case based on media reports of forged electoral support signatures but, as of September 2024, had not received requested information from the Criminal Police Administration, nearly a year after making the request.

The lack of timely resolutions is further underscored by a plea bargain concluded in May 2024 regarding electoral corruption offenses during the April 2022 elections. Despite the admission of guilt and an agreement for a conditional sentence, this case has not yet been finalized by the court. Similarly, other indictments and dismissals demonstrate procedural delays. For instance, a case in Leskovac involving the destruction of voting documents (ballots burned in a stove at the polling station) was dismissed only after the suspect fulfilled obligations imposed under the Order to Postpone Criminal Prosecution.

The inefficiency of the system is particularly evident in high-profile or complex cases. The special departments for the suppression of corruption, responsible for 59 cases, have seen limited progress. The lengthy pre-investigation phases and minimal issuance of final judgments indicate systemic inefficiencies, especially in addressing criminal offenses tied to electoral processes.

This lack of progress undermines public trust in the justice system, as does the apparent inconsistency in processing cases. For example, one indictment filed in Kragujevac related to violent behavior at a polling station involved a range of offenses, including property damage and physical assault, yet resolution timelines remain unclear.

Case of physical violence against election observers on the election day also remains without a court epilogue. The incident that garnered a lot of public attention was the attack on CRTA observers in front of the police station in Odžaci on December 17, 2023. During this incident, unidentified individuals wearing balaclavas used batons to destroy a vehicle in which CRTA observers were seeking refuge in front of the police station after being pursued for an extended period by an unknown vehicle. The pursuit and attack occurred shortly after the observers witnessed vote-buying near a polling station. They reported the incident to CRTA's legal team and the police. A few hours after the attack, government representatives announced that the perpetrators had been arrested. The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Sombor initiated proceedings against one individual on suspicion of committing the criminal offense of violent behavior under Article 344 of the Criminal Code. The suspect denied involvement during questioning, and witnesses were unable to identify the perpetrators. No material evidence was obtained—no phone records, surveillance footage (not even from the police station), and reportedly, police officers did not witness anything. The pre-investigation process appears to have stagnated, with the prosecutor failing to make a final decision since.

Any other developments related to the justice system - please specify

5000 character(s) maximum

II. Anti-Corruption Framework

Where previous specific reports, published in the framework of the review under the UN Convention against Corruption, of GRECO, and of the OECD address the issues below, please make a reference to the points you wish to bring to the Commission's attention in these documents, indicating any relevant updates, changes or measures introduced that have occurred since these documents were published.

Please provide information on measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations received in the 2024 Report regarding the anti-corruption framework (if applicable):

5000 character(s) maximum

A. The institutional framework capacity to fight against corruption (prevention and investigation / prosecution)

List any **changes** as regards relevant authorities (e.g. national agencies, bodies) in charge of prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of corruption and the resources allocated to each of these authorities (the human, financial, legal, and technical resources as relevant), including the cooperation among domestic and with foreign authorities. Indicate any relevant measures taken to effectively and timely cooperate with OLAF and EPPO

5000 character(s) maximum

Safeguards for the functional independence of the authorities tasked with the prevention and detection of corruption

5000 character(s) maximum

Information on the implementation of measures foreseen in the strategic anti-corruption framework (if applicable). If available, please provide relevant objectives and indicators

5000 character(s) maximum

B. Prevention

Measures to enhance integrity in the public sector (including as regards incompatibility rules, revolving doors, codes of conduct, ethics)

5000 character(s) maximum

Measures to enhance general transparency of public decision-making (including rules on lobbying, asset and interest disclosure rules, gifts policy, transparency of political party, financing)

5000 character(s) maximum

Measures to prevent conflicts of interest in the public sector. Please specify the features and scope of their application (e.g. categories of officials concerned, types of checks and corrective measures depending on the category of officials concerned)

5000 character(s) maximum

--> For the three previous points, **please also provide information and figures on their application /enforcement**, such as number of detected breaches/irregularities of the various rules in place and the follow-up given (investigations, sanctions, etc.)

Measures to ensure whistleblower protection and encourage reporting of corruption, including their application (i.e. number of reports received, and the follow-up given)

5000 character(s) maximum

Specific measures to enhance transparency, integrity and accountability in sectors with high risks of corruption, with a view to monitor and prevent corruption and conflict of interests, and where applicable measures to prevent and address corruption committed by organised crime groups.

Such high-risk sectors could include: public procurement, including construction, transport/infrastructure, defence, cohesion, agriculture, environment, healthcare, citizen/residence investor schemes, large-scale investments of national interest and the spending of EU funds, urban planning.

5000 character(s) maximum

C. Repression

The legal framework on the criminalisation and sanctions for corruption and related offences, including foreign bribery

5000 character(s) maximum

Official data on the number of investigations, prosecutions, final judgments and the application of sanctions for corruption offences (differentiated by offence if possible). Please indicate whether the cases: involve legal persons; are related to the implementation of EU or national funds; involve high level corruption. Please indicate which data is publicly available and how policy-making is informed by the data

5000 character(s) maximum

Potential obstacles identified in law or in practice to the investigation and prosecution of high-level and complex corruption cases (e.g. political immunity regulation, procedural rules, statute of limitations, cross-border cooperation, pardoning)

5000 character(s) maximum

Information on effectiveness of criminal and non-criminal measures and of sanctions (e.g. recovery measures and administrative sanctions) on both public and private offenders

5000 character(s) maximum

Any other developments related to the anti-corruption framework - please specify

5000 character(s) maximum

III. Media pluralism and media freedom

Please provide information on measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations received in the 2024 Report regarding media pluralism and media freedom (if applicable)

5000 character(s) maximum

A. Media authorities and bodies

(Cf. Article 30 of Directive 2018/1808)

Measures taken to ensure the independence, enforcement powers and adequacy of resources (financial, human and technical) of media regulatory authorities and bodies

5000 character(s) maximum

In Serbia, the Regulatory Agency for Electronic Media (REM) is tasked with ensuring fairness in the media landscape, particularly during election campaigns. According to the law, REM is expected to prevent unequal treatment of election participants and guarantee citizens' access to a diversity of information. REM is equipped with a range of tools, from warnings and cautions to more severe penalties, including temporary bans on publishing content or advertisements, and even the revocation of licenses for non-compliant media outlets. These powers are meant to safeguard the integrity of the media sector.

However, despite these formal powers, REM has consistently demonstrated passivity in fulfilling its role, particularly in relation to political influence. While new media laws enacted in November 2023 have purportedly strengthened REM's authority, the agency's failure to act in line with its responsibilities has raised concerns about its independence.

During the campaign for the December 17, 2023 elections, REM failed to address blatant instances of favoritism towards election participants from the ruling majority on national television stations. REM itself conducted monitoring but refrained from taking action on any of the thirty complaints submitted during the campaign. It wasn't until June 2024—several months after the elections—that REM imposed sanctions on two major national TV stations, TV Pink and TV Prva, by banning them from airing advertisements during prime time for one day. Local station TV Studio B received a warning. While these sanctions were a step forward, their delayed enforcement nullified the impact they could have had if implemented promptly.

Furthermore, out of 57 complaints filed by CRTA during the June 2024 elections, REM failed to act in a timely manner, and in eight cases, it determined that there were no grounds to initiate proceedings. The outcomes of the remaining complaints have not been published.

REM's selective transparency also undermines its role. After the December election campaign, it published monitoring data only for public service broadcasters and cable television, withholding data for commercial national TV stations. This selective release of data created a distorted picture of political pluralism during the campaign. Notably, REM did not conduct monitoring of the June 2024 campaign at all.

By failing to act swiftly and decisively during election periods, selectively publishing monitoring data, and missing legal deadlines for decision-making, REM has allowed biased reporting by commercial television stations with national coverage. This inaction undermines its credibility and reinforces perceptions of political interference. Moreover, there is no public information indicating that REM has ever initiated procedures to address violations of the political pluralism principle outside of election periods.

Through such behavior, the current REM Council contributes to the normalization of biased media reporting, which favors a single political option during both electoral and non-electoral periods. This raises serious questions about REM's effectiveness, independence, and commitment to ensuring a pluralistic media environment in Serbia.

Conditions and procedures for the appointment and dismissal of the head / members of the collegiate body of media regulatory authorities and bodies

5000 character(s) maximum

The appointment process for the members of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) Council in Serbia has been marred by serious irregularities and concerns that undermine the legality, independence and impartiality of this crucial media oversight body. The Law on Electronic Media, enacted in November 2023, aimed to reform the appointment process by reducing the influence of the National Assembly, increasing civil society representation, and introducing stricter professional criteria for candidates. However, the implementation of these reforms has fallen significantly short of these goals.

The appointment process, overseen by the Committee on Culture and Information of the National Assembly, was characterized by significant and unlawful delays. The public call for proposing candidates was published with a considerable delay of four months, beyond legal deadlines, and the subsequent review and approval of candidates by the Committee were also prolonged. These delays not only hindered the timely establishment of a fully functioning REM Council but also raised concerns about the Committee's commitment to ensuring a swift and transparent process.

Furthermore, the review of proposed candidates revealed numerous irregularities, together with the Committee's approval of candidates that do not meet legal requirements for the position. Civil society organizations, including CRTA, have raised serious concerns about the qualifications and eligibility of majority (12/18) of shortlisted candidates. Some candidates appear to lack the necessary professional experience or academic credentials as outlined in the Law on Electronic Media, or previously held positions conflicting with the Law. Moreover, there are concerns about the legitimacy of some of the entities that

proposed candidates, raising questions if they comply with the legal requirements for acting as authorized proposers.

The Committee's handling of these concerns has been inadequate. Despite the documented irregularities, the Committee has shown a reluctance to thoroughly investigate these issues and disqualify ineligible candidates.

The prolonged delays, the questionable eligibility of some candidates, and the Committee's inadequate response to these concerns collectively undermine the credibility of the entire appointment process. These issues cast a long shadow over the independence and impartiality of the next REM Council, raising serious concerns about its ability to effectively fulfill its mandate. The lack of transparency and the apparent disregard for legal requirements in the appointment process have eroded public trust in the integrity of this crucial institution.

Existence and functions of media councils or other self-regulatory bodies

5000 character(s) maximum

B. Safeguards against government or political interference and transparency and concentration of media ownership

Measures taken to ensure the fair and transparent allocation of state advertising

5000 character(s) maximum

Safeguards against state / political interference, in particular:

- safeguards to ensure editorial independence of media (private and public)
- specific safeguards for the independence of heads of management and members of the governing boards of public service media (e.g. related to appointment, dismissal), safeguards for their financial and operational independence (e.g. related to reporting obligations and the allocation of resources) and safeguards for plurality of information and opinions
- information on specific legal provisions and procedures applying to media service providers, including as regards granting/renewal/termination of licenses, company operation, capital entry requirements, concentration and corporate governance

5000 character(s) maximum

Transparency of media ownership and public availability of media ownership information, including on direct, indirect and beneficial owners

5000 character(s) maximum

C. Framework for journalists' protection, transparency and access to documents

Rules and practices guaranteeing journalists' independence and safety, including as regards protection of journalistic sources and communications, referring also, if applicable, to follow-up given to alerts lodged with the Council of Europe's Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists

5000 character(s) maximum

Law enforcement capacity, including during protests and demonstrations, to ensure journalists' safety and to investigate attacks on journalists

5000 character(s) maximum

Access to information and public documents by public at large and journalists (incl. transparency authorities where they exist, procedures, costs/fees, timeframes, administrative/judicial review of decisions, execution of decisions by public authorities, possible obstacles related to the classification of information)

5000 character(s) maximum

Lawsuits (incl. SLAPPs - strategic lawsuits against public participation) and convictions against journalists (incl. defamation cases) and measures taken to safeguard against manifestly unfounded and abusive lawsuits

5000 character(s) maximum

Any other developments related to media pluralism and freedom - please specify

5000 character(s) maximum

The provided data from CRTA's media monitoring for 2024 highlights a significant imbalance in media coverage in Serbia, with an overwhelming focus on the ruling majority and President Vučić - a longstanding trend that repeats throughout the years. In 2024, President Vučić scored record high number of live TV appearances - a total of 354, with an average broadcast time of around 30 minutes per appearance. Notably, the maximum consecutive days without a live television broadcast was 14 days, while the highest number of live addresses in one day reached six.

Furthermore, the ruling majority consistently dominates media coverage across major television channels. Central news on key television channels with national coverage, such as RTS 1 (the national public broadcaster), and four commercial national TV channels: Pink, Prva, Happy, and B92, dedicate approximately 92% of their airtime to the ruling coalition and only 8% to the opposition.

This excessive media presence of the President and the overwhelming dominance of the ruling coalition in media coverage create a significant information imbalance, depriving citizens of their right to truthful and complete information on political, social and other developments in the country.

IV. Other institutional issues related to checks and balances

Please provide information on measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations received in the 2024 Report regarding the system of checks and balances (if applicable)

5000 character(s) maximum

A. The process for preparing and enacting laws

Framework, policy and use of impact assessments and evidence based policy-making, stakeholders'^[1]public consultations (including rules and practices on the transparent participation of civil society to policy development and decision-making processes), and transparency and quality of the legislative process both in the preparatory and the parliamentary phase

[1] This includes also the consultation of social partners

5000 character(s) maximum

Serbian authorities consistently demonstrate a lack of inclusiveness and transparency in policymaking, often displaying intolerance towards civil society participation. This was glaringly evident in the development of Serbia's Reform Agenda, a roadmap for EU integration Growth Plan, which was crafted out of public view. To fulfill formalities, the government held only one consultative meeting within the parliamentary European Integration Committee. This Committee session, held at the very end of the process, was closed to the public, purportedly due to "European Commission requirements," as explained by the Minister for European Integration. Consequently, comments from the present civil society members of the National Convention on the European Union were disregarded, resulting in a Reform Agenda riddled with inconsistencies and lacking in ambition.

Another striking example is the process of implementing ODIHR recommendations following the deeply flawed December 2023 elections. These elections were marred by severe irregularities, including forged candidacies, voter intimidation, manipulation of laws and Voter Registry, and a complete lack of institutional response to these breaches, as documented by international and domestic election observation missions. Although state representatives were vocal in discrediting and inciting intolerance towards observers - underlining that there will be "no Maidan revolution" in Serbia, while receiving endorsements from Russia - the ensuing political crisis and widespread international condemnation, including a European Parliament resolution, forced the government to initiate electoral reform. This reform process became an integral part of the Reform Agenda, with benchmarks set for the end of 2024, and the government ostensibly agreeing to include civil society.

However, the implementation of ODIHR recommendations has been hampered by a persistent lack of political will from the ruling majority, including their frequent attacks against civil society participating in the process. While a parliamentary Working Group for the Improvement of the Electoral Process was established, including both members of Parliament and civil society representatives, it failed to achieve any result. After 28 meetings in various formats, the reform process reached an impasse due to obstruction by the ruling majority. Despite diligent efforts by civil society to provide concrete solutions within tight deadlines, even the initial steps towards implementing ODIHR recommendations were blocked. By the end of 2024, no progress had been made, with the ruling majority either refusing to make decisions or attempting to manipulate the process by cherry-picking politically expedient solutions while violating parliamentary procedure – a clear breach of the principles of good faith, partnership, transparency, and trust enshrined in ODIHR recommendations and international standards for electoral reform.

Rules and use of fast-track procedures and emergency procedures (for example, the percentage of decisions adopted through emergency/urgent procedure compared to the total number of adopted decisions)

5000 character(s) maximum

New convocation of the National Assembly was constituted in February 2024 and the new Speaker (former Prime Minister Brnabić) continued to abuse her position and manipulate the Rules of Procedure to benefit the ruling majority. Despite initial attempts to appear impartial, the Speaker has increasingly adopted a partisan approach, mirroring the practices of her predecessor. While the opposition may have slightly improved access to the floor, they still face significant discrimination. Other issues include the Speaker engaging in partisan debates from the chair, unequal application of the Rules of Procedure, and the systematic exclusion of opposition co-chairs from presiding over committee meetings.

The atmosphere in the Assembly is increasingly hostile, marked by verbal attacks and disruptions. The Speaker has failed to maintain order, and incidents of physical altercations have occurred. The opposition has been disproportionately targeted with disciplinary measures, while members of the ruling coalition face few consequences for their behavior. Additionally, there have been numerous instances of procedural irregularities, such as the manipulation of transcripts and the suppression of dissenting views.

The Assembly held a total of eight sessions during the period under review, including one constituent session, four regular sessions, two extraordinary sessions, and one special session. The plenary sessions spanned 27 working days. Six out of seven sessions in this convocation were convened shorter of the seven-day period stipulated by the Rules of Procedure.

A total of 91 laws were passed, of which 46 (51%) were ratifications of international agreements, and 45 (49%) were considered "crucial pieces" of legislation. Among these crucial pieces, 15 were new laws, while 30 were amendments to existing legislation. Ten laws (11%) were passed through an urgent procedure, including four international agreements and six crucial pieces of legislation.

A significant majority of the laws passed were initiated by the Government (88 out of 91, or 97%). The remaining laws were proposed by the National Bank of Serbia (1), a majority MP (1 on local elections), and one opposition MP (on a unified voter list). It is important to note that the opposition MP's proposal was likely a tactical move by the ruling party.

Rules and application of states of emergency (or analogous regimes), including judicial review and parliamentary oversight

5000 character(s) maximum

Regime for constitutional review of laws

5000 character(s) maximum

B. Independent authorities

Independence, resources, capacity and powers of national human rights institutions ('NHRIs'), of ombudsman institutions if different from NHRIs, of equality bodies if different from NHRIs and of supreme audit institutions

(Cf. the website of the European Court of Auditors: <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/SupremeAuditInstitutions.aspx#>)

5000 character(s) maximum

Statistics/reports concerning the follow-up to recommendations by National Human Rights Institutions, ombudsman institutions, equality bodies and supreme audit institutions in the past two years

5000 character(s) maximum

C. Accessibility and judicial review of administrative decisions

Transparency of administrative decisions and sanctions (incl. their publication and rules on collection of related data)

5000 character(s) maximum

Judicial review of administrative decisions: short description of the general regime (in particular competent court, scope, suspensive effect, interim measures, and any applicable specific rules or derogations from the general regime of judicial review)

5000 character(s) maximum

Rules and practices related to the application by all courts, including constitutional jurisdictions, of the preliminary ruling procedure (Art. 267 TFEU)

5000 character(s) maximum

Implementation of final judgments by the public administration and State institutions and follow-up given to supranational judgments, including decisions from the European Court of Human Rights, as well as available remedies in case of non-implementation

5000 character(s) maximum

D. The enabling framework for civil society

Measures regarding the framework for civil society organisations and human rights defenders (e.g. legal framework and its application in practice incl. registration, transparency and dissolution rules)

5000 character(s) maximum

The legal framework for civil society organizations (CSOs) and human rights defenders in Serbia has raised significant concerns, particularly with the introduction of the Bill on the Special Registry of Agents of Foreign Influence, submitted to the Serbian Parliament on November 29, 2024, by Members of Parliament from the pro-Russian coalition, including the Movement of Socialists, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar

Vulin.

This bill closely mirrors similar legislation in other countries, such as Russia, Georgia, Hungary, and Republika Srpska in Bosnia, marking a broader regional trend toward more authoritarian measures that control civil society and political discourse. These laws are often used to stigmatize civil society actors, media, and human rights defenders by labeling them as "foreign agents" due to their foreign funding. In this context, Serbia's bill raises concerns about the freedom of association and the right to expression.

Although the bill proposes a special registry for organizations receiving foreign funding, with a threshold of 50% of funding originating from foreign sources for mandatory registration, the law remains somewhat more liberal than its Russian counterpart. However, the bill's broad definitions of "political activity" and its enforcement mechanisms could result in significant limitations on the ability of civil society to operate freely, particularly due to its potential use as a tool for government control and repression.

The narrative and thinking behind the bill have been publicly supported by key figures such as the President of Serbia and the mainstream media, who have used increasingly harsh rhetoric that labels civil society organizations and critical voices as "domestic traitors" and "foreign mercenaries." This language serves to delegitimize civil society and human rights defenders, aligning with the broader authoritarian trends seen in countries like Russia and Hungary.

It remains unclear whether the bill will pass in the Serbian Assembly, but its potential to restrict the activities of civil society organizations could significantly impact human rights defenders and activists in the country.

The law could create a chilling effect, undermining efforts to hold the government accountable and potentially restricting advocacy on key issues of public interest.

In conclusion, the proposal of this bill indicates a concerning trend towards authoritarian control in Serbia. Its impact on the independence of civil society, freedom of expression, and the ability of human rights defenders to operate without fear of retribution could have serious consequences for the democratic environment in Serbia.

Rules and practices having an impact on the effective operation and safety of civil society organisations and human rights defenders. This includes measures to protect them from attacks – verbal, physical or on-line –, intimidation, legal threats incl. SLAPPs, negative narratives or smear campaigns, measures capable of affecting the public perception of civil society organisations, etc. It also includes measures to monitor threats or attacks and dedicated support services, as well as available remedies

5000 character(s) maximum

The effective operation and safety of civil society organizations (CSOs) and human rights defenders in Serbia face considerable challenges, including a range of attacks—verbal, physical, and online—as well as intimidation, legal threats, negative narratives, and smear campaigns. These issues have been exacerbated by several recent actions by the authorities.

One significant concern is the use of spyware by state authorities to unlawfully monitor journalists and activists. In December 2024, Amnesty International published a report revealing that several Serbian journalists and activists had their phones infected with spyware such as NoviSpy and Cellebrite, after their devices were in possession of police or security services during questioning. Digital forensic analysis confirmed the installation of the spyware without proper authorization. Despite this, the Serbian Intelligence Agency (BIA) dismissed the report, labeling it as sensationalist and refusing to address the claims. Interior Minister Ivica Dačić also denied the allegations, calling them an attack on Serbia's security practices. Notably, no investigation or consequence followed the illegal monitoring of these individuals, further reinforcing concerns about the lack of accountability in cases of unlawful surveillance.

In addition to digital threats, human rights defenders have faced direct physical intimidation at the borders. Two prominent activists have reported being subjected to unjustified and lengthy detentions at border crossings. These detentions, occurring when the activists traveled by plane, bus, or car, had no legal basis and were not linked to any investigation. The detentions were widely seen as a form of harassment and pressure on individuals critical of government policies. Interior Minister Dačić later acknowledged that these

activists were on “watch lists” of individuals considered problematic due to their public stances, but he claimed that the lists would be abolished. Former Interior Minister and head of the Security and Information Agency, Aleksandar Vulin, admitted to compiling these lists without explaining the legal basis for doing so. Lists also included individuals such as politicians from Montenegro and celebrities from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

New levels of repression involved detention and unjust deportation of citizens and civic activists from Austria, Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, Albania, and North Macedonia, who were participating in the Erste Stiftung NGO Academy in Belgrade in January 2025. These individuals were detained overnight, interrogated without evidence, labeled as “national security threats,” and banned from entering Serbia for a year. This follows a pattern of harassment, with two similar expulsions of Croatian nationals in recent weeks and a number of repressive actions against Serbian human rights defenders and peaceful protesters.

Further, the freedom of assembly has been increasingly restricted, as seen in the banning of festivals by the Ministry of the Interior. In 2024, the Ministry issued an order to prohibit the “Mirdita, dobar dan” festival, an event promoting Kosovo-Serbia reconciliation. The Ministry justified the ban by citing security concerns and the risk of disrupting public order. However, critics, including the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Civic Initiatives and Integra, denounced the ban as a violation of the right to free assembly, arguing that the government’s actions demonstrated that freedom of assembly is selectively applied, favoring hooligan groups while restricting peaceful gatherings. Similarly, the Kikinda Short literature festival was also banned by local authorities, allegedly due to the “anti-Serbian” views of some participants. These actions demonstrate a broader trend of political censorship targeting cultural and civil society events.

These incidents, combined with the lack of effective remedies or monitoring of such threats, create a hostile environment for CSOs and human rights defenders in Serbia. The absence of legal accountability for unlawful surveillance, coupled with measures to restrict freedom of assembly and expression, underscores the precarious position of civil society in the country.

Organisation of financial support for civil society organisations and human rights defenders (e.g. framework to ensure access to funding, and for financial viability, taxation/incentive/donation systems, measures to ensure a fair distribution of funding)

5000 character(s) maximum

E. Initiatives to foster a rule of law culture

If there have been developments related to initiatives to foster a rule of law culture, please specify, which (e.g. debates in national parliaments on the rule of law, public information campaigns on rule of law issues, contributions from civil society, education initiatives, etc.)

5000 character(s) maximum

On November 1, 2024, a tragedy struck when a concrete canopy collapsed at the newly renovated railway station in Novi Sad, resulting in 15 fatalities and several critically injured. Citizens expressed concerns about corruption, lack of transparency, and negligence in the station’s reconstruction, which was part of a \$1.2 billion project involving the Chinese government and construction companies. Despite being ceremonially opened twice, and in operation, the station lacked necessary paperwork, as the renovation was incomplete. This led to mass protests across Serbia, demanding an investigation and prosecution of those responsible. In response, the government resorted to repressive measures, arresting more than two dozen citizens and activists, some of whom remained in detention for weeks. For the first time since 2000, citizens were treated as political prisoners. These arrests were often carried out by masked and unidentified officers, including agents from the Security Intelligence Agency (BIA), who detained activists in undisclosed locations. One

protester was severely injured, requiring surgery and amputation, after police brutality.

Student protests erupted, demanding the release of unlawfully detained individuals. These protests, especially one in front of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, were violently attacked by public officials and ruling party activists. State institutions largely failed to protect students and protesters, even denying or dismissing allegations of abuse. Instead of offering protection, authorities retaliated against these individuals, with state officials and pro-government media launching smear campaigns against detainees.

The government's response to protests sought to justify harsh crackdowns while consolidating executive power, deepening societal divisions, and perpetuating repressive rhetoric. Alarming, political influence on the judiciary was evident, with the public prosecutor's identity in the Novi Sad case remaining undisclosed for weeks. Once arrests were made, including of a government minister, a coordinated smear campaign was launched to discredit the judiciary.

President Aleksandar Vučić played a central role in shaping the public narrative. He used his media platform to vilify and discredit protesters, ensuring that all decision-making power was concentrated in his hands. His rhetoric further deterred citizens from exercising their right to protest and undermined the rule of law and separation of powers.

The protests sparked significant public outrage, particularly among younger people who were victims of state violence and manipulation. University work was blocked in solidarity, and protests escalated with incidents of violence against protesters, including an attack on protesters blocking the street for 15 minutes to honor the victims. In January, a driver ran over a 20-year-old student, severely injuring her, and was arrested on suspicion of attempted murder.

The mass protests, including the largest-ever protest on December 22 with over 100,000 participants, were led by students who voiced four clear demands, three of which call for the application of rule of law standards: 1) making all documents related to the station's restoration public and available to the prosecution (partially fulfilled, though some key documents remain undisclosed); 2) prosecution and removal of office for those responsible for attacking peaceful protesters (partially fulfilled); and 3) the release and dropping of unlawful charges against protesters and students (though charges remain pending, those detained have been released).

Any other developments related to the system of checks and balances - please specify

5000 character(s) maximum

The Second Session of the Second Regular Sitting of the National Assembly, held on November 25, 2025, marked an unprecedented erosion of parliamentary integrity in Serbia. CRTA's Open Parliament initiative documents systemic breaches of constitutional and procedural norms during its first day, exposing a National Assembly at its institutional lowest point. These violations, orchestrated and normalized by the Assembly's leadership, underscore the institution's furthest descent into dysfunction.

The Speaker rejected a valid proposal for a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister despite it meeting constitutional and procedural requirements and without any legal authority to do so. The Constitution (Article 130) and the Rules of Procedure (Articles 217-219) clearly stipulate that such a motion must be discussed at the next session, provided it has the support of at least 60 MPs. Even with two disputed signatures treated as withdrawals, the proposal retained well over 60 valid signatures (83). Furthermore, disputed signatures must be verified through an appropriate judicial procedure.

The Speaker failed to read the full titles of proposed acts, violating the Rules of Procedure (Articles 88-93), which require clarity in agenda setting to enable informed decision-making by MPs.

The Speaker refused to address MPs' procedural violation claims before finalizing the agenda, contradicting Article 103 of the Rules of Procedure, which allows MPs to raise concerns immediately after violations occur.

The Speaker combined discussions on 68 agenda items, including the budget proposal, criminal law, tax

law, energy, and international agreements, without adequately justifying the connection between them. The Rules of Procedure (Article 157) allow joint debates only if the proposals are interdependent or closely related, which was not demonstrated in this case. This practice has been normalized in several convocations in the past, as there were multiple sessions with a large number of unrelated acts that merged into a joint discussion. Sessions with the joining of more than thirty unrelated acts were observed in XIII convocation (2022-2023) with 35, 32, 30, and 60 acts, and two in XIV convocation (2024) with 60 and now with a record-breaking 68 acts.

A proposal to double the time for debate on the 68 agenda items was denied despite Article 97 of the Rules of Procedure allowing such extensions with majority approval. This decision limited meaningful debate for a session that included the Budget Act for 2025 and 67 other unrelated acts.

The session descended into chaos when opposition MPs protested with signs and slogans during the entrance of government members, marking the beginning of severe disruptions. A physical altercation between MPs from the opposition and the ruling coalition erupted shortly thereafter, leading to the intervention of security. This violence in the parliamentary chamber resulted in the suspension of any meaningful discussion, as no one was able to speak or participate in the session. Despite the disruption, the Speaker failed to restore order or ensure the procedural integrity of the session.

The Speaker gave a fiery political speech while presiding over the session, breaching procedural norms. According to Article 100 of the Rules of Procedure and Article 19 of the Law on the National Assembly, the Speaker must step aside and allow a deputy to preside if she wishes to participate in the debate, but this was not followed.

The chaotic atmosphere prevented any debate on the 68 items, including the 2025 Budget Act. The session intended for 10 hours of discussion (Articles 97 and 158) was completely disrupted, preventing MPs from fulfilling their constitutional rights to participate in decision-making (Article 40 of the Law on the National Assembly).

The Speaker abruptly ended the session without finishing her statement on closing the debate or scheduling a voting day. This breached Articles 87, 102, and 158 of the Rules of Procedure, which require clear communication about session conclusions and voting schedules.

Voting on agenda items was concluded after 150 seconds instead of the 15 seconds for electronic voting, as mandated by Article 126 of the Rules of Procedure. Objections by the opposition MPs were shrugged off by the Speaker. This irregularity undermined the integrity of the voting process.

These breaches highlight significant procedural violations, undermining transparency, accountability, and the legislative process during the session. Moreover, they collectively outline the instrumentalized position of the highest democratic institution in the Republic of Serbia.

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