

European Parliament report on the 2022 European Commission Report on Serbia

IRIS 2023-6:1/4

*Eric Munch
European Audiovisual Observatory*

On 2 May 2023, the European Parliament adopted a motion for a resolution on the 2022 Commission Report on Serbia. The Report is one of seven reports by the European Commission on six Balkan countries and Turkey in relation to their status as candidates for membership of the European Union (EU).

Published on 12 October 2022, the report aims to describe the state of play in Serbia to the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions with an analysis of the progress of the reforms launched in Serbia since the opening of its accession negotiations in January 2014. While, according to the Serbian government, EU membership remains a strategic goal, the report noted that the pace of reforms had slowed down since the calling of parliamentary elections and the dissolution of Parliament in February 2022.

Of note is the absence of progress made regarding freedom of expression during the reporting period (between June 2021 and June 2022). While two working groups on the safety of journalists continued to meet during the year and the police and prosecution reacted swiftly in several cases of attacks and threat against journalists, those cases remain a concern – the report noted. The media strategy's implementation has experienced delays which included amending the Law on public information and media and the Law on electronic media. The report also notes that in July 2022, the Serbian national regulatory authority for the media, the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM), rewarded all four national frequencies to the same television channels that had already been awarded those frequencies in the previous period, and all of which had received warning from REM due to violation of their legal obligations. A quote from the final report of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) also indicates that, despite equitable coverage of the campaign activities of all contestants, the national public broadcasters had “provided extensive uncritical news coverage to public officials who were also candidates” while private broadcasters with national coverage “presented the election campaign without meaningful editorial input and focused their news coverage on state officials”. Overall, it also found REM to have remained passive during the campaign period, despite its mandate to oversee the broadcast media.

In its motion for a resolution, the European Parliament, acting upon the findings of the report, notes in its point F. that over time, the governing majority “has steadily undermined some political rights and civil liberties, putting pressure on independent media, the political opposition and civil organisations”, adding that Serbia has become a safe haven for major Russian media companies, including RT, and that social media platforms have become “tools to foster anti-democratic political movements in the Western Balkans.” Disinformation – the report notes – is also spreading faster than independent fact-checkers can react, often originating from political figure and subsequently being reported upon by state-affiliated media and shared on social media.

Among numerous topics of concern raised in the European Parliament’s report, several relate to journalism and the media. The Parliament indicates “serious concern” about the state of freedom of expression and media independence and “urges” Serbia to “improve and protect media professionalism, diversity and media pluralism”, “to increase the transparency of media ownership and financing” and to ensure the independence of REM. It also “condemns” the opening of an RT office in Belgrade and the launch of its online news service in Serbian and “calls for pro-Russian reporting across the media spectrum to be abandoned”. In the context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the Parliament is “deeply concerned” about the spread of disinformation on the conflict.

REPORT on the 2022 Commission Report on Serbia

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0172_EN.html#_section1

Serbia Report 2022

https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/serbia-report-2022_en

Serbia - Presidential and early parliamentary elections - ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report

<https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/serbia/524385>

