



SERBIA'S POLITICAL CRISIS: WHAT MATERIALISED, WHAT DIDN'T, AND WHAT COMES NEXT

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KEY POINTS

- ◆ A hybrid scenario has emerged: Serbia has not followed a single projected pathway but a combination of prolonged political impasse, controlled repression, institutional capture, and managed instability as the regime's governing strategy;
- ◆ The EU has increased pressure but stopped short of decisive action;
- ◆ Socio-political mobilisation has lost momentum;
- ◆ The regime has shifted from reactive crisis management to proactive authoritarian consolidation;
- ◆ The most likely outlook is prolonged managed instability: Future developments will depend less on public dissatisfaction, and more on opposition coordination, electoral dynamics, and whether the EU is prepared to move beyond incremental engagement toward more strategic leverage;
- ◆ Future elections, when they occur, are likely to represent the most critical moment of risk.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2025, the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy published the policy brief [Political and Institutional Crisis in Serbia: Possible Scenarios](#). The brief outlined four scenarios and their corresponding outcomes. These ranged from (1) a prolonged impasse marked by controlled repression and declining protests; (2) an EU-mediated negotiated transition between the government, students, and the opposition, leading to the formation of a technical government and early elections; (3) escalating repression triggering broader instability or regime consolidation; to (4) early elections opening a window for change, albeit under a high risk of manipulation, sabotage, or violence. Across these trajectories, the brief identified four possible outcomes: a political vacuum, a negotiated transition, regime collapse, or further authoritarian consolidation. The scenarios were developed with reference to the period from October 2025 to June 2026, capturing the key dynamics and uncertainties anticipated within that timeframe.

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The initial scenario exercise was not intended to predict a single outcome, but to provide a structured framework for assessing plausible trajectories based on key drivers: the role of the European Union, the dynamics of socio-political mobilisation, and the regime's response, particularly the role of the security apparatus, as well as the influence of foreign powers, notably the United States, Russia, and China. Of these, the first three have remained the most consequential throughout the observed period, and this policy brief focuses primarily on them.

The developments observed between October 2025 and June 2026 point to a hybrid trajectory: a prolonged political impasse maintained through controlled repression, institutional capture, calibrated violence, and the deliberate exhaustion of democratic forces. This is not political drift; it is managed instability as a method of rule.

This policy brief assesses the extent to which elements of the original scenarios have materialised, identifies the dynamics that have remained latent, and examines how their interaction has shaped the trajectory of the crisis. Rather than privileging a single scenario, the analysis points to a hybrid outcome, defined by the overlap and interaction of multiple scenario components. The objective is not retrospective validation, but forward-looking assessment. By situating recent developments within the original scenario framework, this brief identifies the most plausible trajectories beyond June 2026 and outlines their implications for international policy engagement.

SITUATION ANALYSIS BY KEY DRIVERS

The EU: From Cautious Ambiguity to Conditional Pressure

The EU driver materialised largely as anticipated: the Union remained the key external actor in Serbia's political crisis, but its influence was uneven and only partly exercised. The original scenario framework identified EU leverage through political pressure, mediation, financial conditionality, targeted sanctions, and possible suspension of accession negotiations, while warning that this leverage remained underused.

In practice, the EU moved beyond earlier cautious language in an unprecedented way. The European Parliament adopted a strong [resolution](#) in October 2025, followed by an [ad hoc fact-finding mission to Serbia](#) in January 2026, which engaged state institutions, opposition representatives, civil society, media, and student groups. The Council and the Commission increasingly acknowledged the scale of protests and concerns over the rule of law backsliding, electoral conditions, and media freedom. By spring 2026, the Commission signaled a readiness to link financial assistance more directly to democratic standards, [warning](#) that Serbia could lose access to around €1.5 billion in EU funds if backsliding continued. It cited crackdowns on protesters, pressure on independent media, the so-called Mrdić laws undermining judicial independence and the need to align them with the Venice Commission's recommendations, and the need to restore media independence. Several key EU member states backed this position. At the same time, the EU's engagement with domestic actors shifted in subtle but politically meaningful ways. Commissioner Marta Kos [met](#) with the Rector of the University of Belgrade, Vladan Đokić, a widely perceived as close to the political articulation of the student movement. Although formally framed around academic freedom and institutional autonomy, the meeting had broader political significance. It indirectly acknowledged the emergence of a political alternative, something the European Union had previously been cautious to signal explicitly.

The EU's approach: a preference for maintaining channels of influence rather than decisively confronting the authoritarian trajectory of official Belgrade.

However, the EU did not become the decisive mediator envisaged in negotiated-transition *Scenario 2*. It did not broker a structured dialogue between the government, students, and opposition, nor facilitate an agreement on a technical government or electoral reset. EU efforts to support electoral-law reform and appointments to the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media largely failed because the Serbian government lacked the political will for genuine reform and dialogue.

Crucially, the EU also refrained from using its strongest coercive instruments. Targeted sanctions against human rights violators, identified in the original analysis as a potentially powerful tool and explicitly referenced in the European Parliament's October 2025 resolution calling for "targeted individual sanctions against those responsible for serious violations of law and human rights in Serbia", have not yet entered serious consideration. This contrasts with EU discussions on Georgia, where targeted sanctions are increasingly debated and could establish a precedent for candidate and potential candidate countries gone astray. In Georgia, the Commission suspended visa-free travel for diplomatic service, and official passports holders. Hungary's post-Orbán political shift may eventually reduce internal resistance to such measures, but it has not yet translated into concrete policy toward Serbia, and there are few signs of such a change in the near term.

Similarly, pressure within European party structures has remained extremely limited. The original report highlighted the European People's Party (EPP) monitoring process concerning the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), including possible suspension or expulsion as an indirect political sanction. As of June 2026, this process has effectively stalled, reflecting the EPP's reluctance to fully distance itself from President Vučić and SNS, despite mounting concerns over democratic backsliding. This hesitation reflects the broader pattern of the EU's approach: a preference for maintaining channels of influence rather than decisively confronting the authoritarian trajectory of official Belgrade.

Therefore, the EU driver can be assessed as partially activated but strategically constrained. The Union has increased rhetorical pressure, expanded monitoring, signaled conditionality more clearly than ever before, and cautiously diversified engagement beyond the incumbent authorities. Yet it has stopped short of converting pressure into decisive leverage capable of altering the regime's core calculus.

Current discussions within the EU on opening Cluster 3 with Serbia illustrate the growing tension between the geopolitical and merit-based dimensions of the enlargement policy. The rationale behind such discussions is understandable in light of the Union's broader strategic objective of maintaining momentum in the Western Balkans and preventing Serbia from drifting further away from the European integration process. Nevertheless, if Cluster 3 were to be opened despite the absence of measurable progress in the fundamentals, it would represent a clear departure from the merit-based logic underpinning the revised enlargement methodology.

The EU's calculus is the following: The EU is caught in a strategic bind with Vučić's Serbia: it recognises his steady autocratization but hesitates to impose even stronger consequences for fear of pushing him further into Russia's orbit. Vučić, aware of this reluctance, exploits, periodically stepping back from overt red lines while incrementally deepening authoritarian control, making each rollback partial and the overall democratic erosion increasingly irreversible. This has enabled a dangerous grey-zone equilibrium: Serbia is neither moving toward democratic resolution nor collapsing into open dictatorship. Instead, it is being held in a state of authoritarian suspension: unstable enough to discipline society, but stable enough to reassure external partners that political change is neither imminent nor likely to yield a reliable alternative for the EU and other external partners.

By continuing to extend political leeway to Vučić's government, the European Union risks alienating the very generations that will shape Serbia's future.

A decision to open Cluster 3, would also carry serious domestic political consequences for the European Union itself. Public opinion data indicate that support for Serbia's EU membership is increasingly concentrated among citizens who oppose the current government rather than among its supporters. According to the [latest BCSP survey](#), almost two thirds of citizens supporting EU membership oppose the current authorities, while only a limited share of the SNS electorate – slightly over one quarter – supports Serbia's EU membership. In this context, advancing Serbia's accession process despite continued democratic backsliding would be unlikely to strengthen the EU's standing among regime supporters, whose attitudes towards the Union have remained consistently sceptical. Instead, it would primarily risk alienating the very segment of society that continues to view EU integration positively despite growing disappointment with the Union's response to democratic deterioration. Rather than broadening support for enlargement, such a move could further erode the credibility of the EU among its most pro-European domestic constituency.

A lenient attitude towards the Vučić regime could have a particularly negative impact on younger generations, who are leading the anti-government protests and whose support for the European Union is the strongest. Aforementioned BCSP survey data show that support for EU membership declines steadily with age, from around 60% among those aged 18–24, to 41% among people aged 55–64, falling to just 22% among those aged 65 and over. By continuing to extend political leeway to Vučić's government, the European Union risks alienating the very generations that will shape Serbia's future.

The Socio-Political Mobilisation: From Peak Momentum to Fragmentation and Strategic Drift

Socio-political mobilisation has remained a central driver of the crisis, but its trajectory since the summer and autumn of 2025 has diverged sharply from the initial phase of mass protests. While the period between November 2024 and 15 March 2025 was marked by sustained, large-scale mobilisation capable of shaping the political agenda, the subsequent phase has been characterised by fragmentation, declining intensity, and reduced capacity to impose visible political costs on the regime.

In its early phase, mobilisation was broad-based, cross-sectoral, and symbolically powerful, driven in large part by the student movement and supported by segments of civil society, professional groups, and parts of the opposition. This created a temporary inversion of political dynamics: the regime was reactive, while protest actors were setting the pace and framing the narrative. However, by mid-2025 and into 2026, this dynamic has largely reversed. President Vučić has reasserted agenda-setting control, not through democratic renewal or genuine political persuasion, but through the familiar authoritarian repertoire of intimidation and use of violence by institutional and criminal actors, media domination, state capture, clientelist mobilisation, and the deliberate exhaustion of protest energy. Opposition actors and the student movement have increasingly been pushed into a reactive position, responding to developments orchestrated by the regime rather than shaping the political developments themselves.

At the same time, electoral developments point to a more nuanced picture of regime strength. The results of the local elections in November 2025 and [29 March 2026](#) indicate that the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) has experienced a decline in support compared to previous electoral cycles, suggesting growing difficulties in securing a future stable parliamentary majority. However, these losses should be interpreted cautiously. While they reflect erosion in the regime's electoral base, they do not yet amount to a decisive shift in the balance of power. On the contrary, available evidence suggests that Vučić has largely stabilised his core support since autumn 2025, indicating a consolidation phase following earlier decline; this is reflected not only in public opinion research, but also in visible manifestations of regained confidence and control, such as the organisation of larger-scale SNS rallies, more assertive and unhindered presence in public spaces, and similar displays of political mobilisation.

These displays should not be read as evidence of normal political recovery, but as signs of an authoritarian apparatus regaining operational confidence: the ruling party's capacity to occupy public space, mobilise dependent constituencies, signal impunity, and project inevitability of the regime staying in power. Such activities had been notably constrained prior to the spring of 2026, when fear, uncertainty, and the scale of public anger limited the regime's ability to perform dominance so openly.

A key factor in the changing mobilisation landscape has been the internal evolution of the student movement. While it remains an important symbolic and organisational actor – as demonstrated by the [23 May 2026 Belgrade protest](#) – there are growing indications of strategic overreach. This suggests a gap between the movement's political ambitions and its current ability to generate consistent pressure on the regime. Public opinion trends further indicate that while the student movement retains legitimacy, it has struggled to expand or maintain the breadth of support seen during its peak phase. The weakening should also be understood in the context of hostile political environment in which the regime has sought to delegitimise, surveil, intimidate, and divide protest actors, while using its control over institutions and pro-government media to portray civic mobilisation as instability, foreign interference or anti-state activity. The decline in momentum also appears to have coincided with the student movement's increasingly firm positions on Kosovo, which may have reduced the level of political receptiveness among parts of the EU.

Although the protests initially seized the political initiative, by mid-2025 the regime had regained it.

The broader opposition landscape remains highly fragmented, despite several attempts at coordination and coalition-building. An initial effort was made through the so-called "EU-5", an informal grouping of five pro-European opposition parties seeking to coordinate around EU integration and democratic reforms. However, disagreements and differing political calculations within the opposition camp prevented the initiative from developing into a more durable political platform. More recently, several opposition parties have opted to support the student movement and its demands rather than pursue a separate political strategy. Whether this alignment will endure, particularly in the context of a future electoral contest, remains uncertain.

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At present, four parties and movements – the Movement of Free Citizens (PSG), the Party of Freedom and Justice (SSP), SRCE, and the extra-parliamentary movement Solidarnost – have, under the auspices of the European Movement in Serbia (EMinS), effectively established the nucleus of a pro-European political coalition. They have also invited other political actors, civic initiatives, and public figures to join this emerging platform. Nevertheless, cooperation between opposition parties and the student movement has so far proven difficult. Given the students' insistence on maintaining political autonomy and their reluctance to associate directly with existing political parties, it appears unlikely at this stage that this pro-European grouping and the student movement would contest future elections on a joint list or within a formal coalition. The relationship between the two may therefore remain one of parallel but distinct political mobilisation rather than direct electoral cooperation.

Taken together, these dynamics point to a transition from high-intensity mobilisation to fragmented and strategically diffused activism. While mobilisation has not disappeared, and retains the potential for reactivation in the event of another black swan – such as the collapse of the canopy or [the May 2023 mass shootings](#) – it no longer functions as a dominant driver capable of independently shifting the balance of power. Instead, its impact has become contingent on interactions with other drivers, particularly the regime's strategic responses and the level of external (EU) engagement.

The weakening of mobilisation and fragmentation of the opposition has enabled the regime to regain the initiative. Rather than being forced into reactive concessions, it has been able to selectively manage dissent, absorb pressure, and reframe political developments on its own terms.

A further critical limitation of the current mobilisation dynamic lies in the absence of a visible shift in the perceived balance of political power. Without a visible rebalancing of political gravity, where the expectation of change becomes socially dominant, even well-coordinated electoral efforts are unlikely to produce a decisive breakthrough. Crucially, the weakening of mobilisation and fragmentation of the opposition has enabled the regime to regain the initiative. Rather than being forced into reactive concessions, it has been able to selectively manage dissent, absorb pressure, and reframe political developments on its own terms. In this sense, the socio-political mobilisation driver remains present but currently subordinated: it reveals growing vulnerabilities in the regime's support base, yet lacks the cohesion, scale, and political translation necessary to convert these vulnerabilities into decisive political change.

Regime's Response: Controlled Cycles of Repression

The regime's activities in the previous period have been aimed at consolidating power through the establishment of full political control over the state's repressive apparatus, strengthening coordination with parapolitical and violent criminal structures close to the ruling party, and intimidating political opponents, students, and civic activists in order to preserve political dominance and influence electoral processes. Although repression remains widespread, it has become more focused on periods and events the regime considers politically crucial, primarily elections. The authorities are clearly aware of the serious loss of social and political legitimacy, which is why they seek to present electoral victory at any cost as proof of their own legitimacy. As a result, repression is increasingly directed at activists, students, and citizens directly involved in electoral processes, election monitoring, and political mobilisation on the ground.

The regime has sought to achieve these goals through purges and personnel changes within the police and judiciary, appointing highly loyal individuals ("super loyalists") to key positions regardless of professional criteria. Amendments to police job classification regulations (e.g. in special units and criminal police) enabled the replacement of commanders and the appointment of personnel who, during protests, demonstrated a strong willingness to act unlawfully and brutally toward peaceful demonstrators.

At the same time, the so-called "[Mrđić laws](#)" were adopted, strengthening political control over the judiciary and significantly obstructing the work of the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime, which handles major corruption and criminal investigations involving state officials. The reforms also subordinated the High-Tech Crime Prosecutor's Office (VTK) to the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade under Nenad Stefanović, turning it into a direct instrument for politically motivated arrests over online speech. Through the security-intelligence agency BIA, the regime also influenced the selection of members of the High Prosecutorial Council to secure a pro-regime majority within the body.

Alongside institutional changes, the regime used aggressive rhetoric toward students and the opposition, amplified by pro-government media, creating an atmosphere in which physical violence was portrayed as legitimate. President Vučić even [referred to students as "Taliban"](#) explaining that this word means student. This violence manifested in organised attacks, beatings, threats, and intimidation during local elections and public gatherings, usually accompanied by police passivity or direct protection of the attackers. The aim of such attacks was to influence electoral outcomes through the intimidation of citizens and obstruction of free voting, as well as to discourage activists from further political and social engagement.

Repression against activists constituted a coordinated policy of containment combining four mutually reinforcing instruments: the criminalisation of protest leaders through charges related to the "constitutional order" and terrorism offences; tolerated counter-mobilisation and physical attacks by ruling-party supporters; the systematic failure to investigate attacks against journalists; and selective law enforcement targeting opposition actors. The authorities continued to pressure the teaching and academic community, particularly individuals who publicly supported student demands. Across Serbia, teachers faced dismissals and contract terminations, while some left their positions due to sustained pressure.

Additionally, the police conducted a [raid on the Rectorate building](#) without prior notice, accompanied by cameras from pro-government media outlets, allegedly as part of an investigation into the death of a female student. However, the scope and staging of the operation suggested a broader political purpose: to intimidate and criminalise the university leadership and the student movement, including the rector, who is widely seen as a representative of the student movement and a potential presidential candidate or head of the student list in parliamentary elections. Additionally, this police operation was used to target civil society representatives, opposition leaders, experts, journalists, and others who had publicly reported on or analysed the alleged use of a [sonic weapon](#) against demonstrators during the protests of March 15, 2025. The authorities built this narrative around the minutes of a student meeting, in which participants had discussed a hypothetical scenario involving police use of such a weapon two months before the largest demonstrations in Serbia's history.

While the government publicly declared its willingness to work in partnership with civil society organisations on reforming the media environment and improving media freedom, contradictory developments were unfolding beneath the surface during the observed period. Several local media outlets changed ownership and were placed under the management of the company Insajder tim, the publisher of Informer – the regime's main propaganda outlet. At the same time, a major shift occurred when Alpac Capital, the owner of Euronews, has reached an [agreement to acquire](#) Adria News Network, which includes N1, Nova S, Radar, Danas and other regional media. The development risks placing the two remaining independent television stations and newspapers under regime-aligned control, similar to the role already played by Euronews in Serbia.

However, despite efforts to completely consolidate power, the regime has not fully achieved these objectives. Personnel purges and the centralisation of control over the police have led to serious demotivation, internal dissatisfaction, and the departure of experienced personnel.

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The influx of politically loyal but insufficiently qualified personnel, as well as the scandals involving the police that continue to emerge on a regular basis, have resulted in unprofessional and often counterproductive police conduct, further increasing public dissatisfaction. [The latest public opinion survey](#) conducted by BCSP in May found that a majority of Serbian citizens do not trust the police. Specifically, 43% of respondents expressed a lack of trust in the police, compared to 39% who stated that they do trust the institution. The police raid on the Faculty of Philosophy and actions targeting students and citizens have demonstrated a low level of professionalism and deepened the social and political crisis instead of strengthening the government's legitimacy. BCSP latest public opinion poll showed that only 35% of Serbian citizens support the ruling majority led by the President of the Republic, Aleksandar Vučić, while 47% oppose the current government. The findings also indicate that the present administration lacks long-term political prospects, as opposition to the government is disproportionately strong among younger citizens, whereas support is disproportionately concentrated among those aged 65 and above.

Likewise, the so-called "Mrdić laws" have provoked strong backlash within the judiciary, among legal experts, and the wider public, while the EU has explicitly called for their withdrawal and for the remediation of the harm they caused. The regime is still trying to consolidate its power and legitimacy within Serbia as well as toward the EU. A particularly damaging incident for the regime was the international [scandal](#) in early June, when Montenegrin authorities deported 87 men from Serbia from Tivat airport, many of whom were linked to the criminal underworld. The ruling party in Serbia engaged them to organise rallies in support of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić during the EU–Western Balkans Summit in Montenegro, in order to present the impression that Vučić enjoys overwhelming support among citizens of Montenegro and that he is able to influence political developments in the country and, ultimately, destabilise it. Montenegrin authorities described this as an attempt by the Serbian government to conduct hybrid activities in Montenegro.

FUTURE PROSPECTS: MANAGING TIME, CONTROLLING RISK

Serbia's political crisis has entered a phase in which time itself has become one of regime's most important instruments. Unless early elections are called, parliamentary elections must be held no later than January 2028, while the presidential elections must take place before May 2027. This gives the authorities a broad window in which to manage the political field, consolidate loyal structures, use laws to further alter the level playing field in the elections (e.g. Aleksandar Vulin's [proposal](#) for automatic citizenship and voting rights based on ethnic self-identification), and decide when elections would be least risky.

Vučić's [27 June rally](#) in Belgrade should be read in this context. His statement that he would resign "within weeks" and call early elections may prove consequential, but it should also be treated with caution: similar announcements or hints of withdrawal in the past have not necessarily materialised. More importantly, the announcement shows that the regime has moved from the more reactive posture seen in the first phase of the protests to a more proactive strategy in which Vučić is again seeking to control the tempo, frame the political agenda, and decide the timing of confrontation. In that context, the regime's core strategy is unlikely to be a rapid resolution of the crisis. Rather, it is to draw its own ranks together, weaken, divide and disorient its opponents, exhaust social mobilisation, and deepen fragmentation within the democratic camp. As long as the latter remains divided, Vučić can continue to govern even with reduced margins of support.

At the same time, the political system is expected to remain structurally unstable. While large-scale mobilisation has declined, the potential for renewed protests remains as demonstrated on 23 May 2026, particularly in the event of an unexpected shock. Previous experience suggests that such events can rapidly transform latent dissatisfaction into visible political pressure. However, without a coordinated political framework capable of channeling this pressure, mobilisation alone is unlikely to produce lasting change.

Elections, when they occur, are likely to represent the most critical moment of risk. The patterns observed during recent local elections indicate that future contests will not be treated as routine democratic processes, but as high-stakes political events. The use of administrative pressure, intimidation, and control over electoral conditions suggests a high likelihood of contestation, particularly in the event of a close result. In such a scenario, the risk of post-election instability would increase significantly.

The key variable shaping future developments will not be the level of public dissatisfaction, which remains high, but the degree of coordination among actors seeking political change. Without a minimum level of strategic alignment – whether through formal cooperation or informal coordination – the students, the opposition and broader democratic camp are unlikely to convert social discontent into a viable political alternative. Conversely, even limited coordination could significantly alter the balance of power, particularly in a context where the regime's support base shows signs of erosion.

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Without a minimum level of strategic alignment – whether through formal cooperation or informal coordination – the students, the opposition and broader democratic camp are unlikely to convert social discontent into a viable political alternative.

External actors, and especially the European Union, will continue to play an important but constrained role. The EU is likely to maintain pressure through conditionality and monitoring, while avoiding more disruptive measures that could destabilise the region. This suggests that external influence will shape the margins of the crisis, but not determine its outcome.

In sum, the most plausible outlook is not a rapid resolution, but a prolonged period of managed instability, punctuated by moments of heightened tension. The direction of change will depend less on structural conditions, which are already well established, and more on timing, coordination, and the ability of key actors to respond to critical political moments.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EU POLICY TOWARDS SERBIA: WAITING FOR STABILITY, ENABLING STAGNATION

The current trajectory in Serbia presents a set of challenges that the European Union and its member states are likely to face in the coming period, particularly in balancing stability concerns with democratic standards. First, the EU should expect a continued pattern of strategic delay by the Serbian authorities. Rather than moving toward resolution, the Serbian government is likely to prolong the current state of controlled political stagnation, avoiding decisive concessions while maintaining formal engagement with European institutions and key member states. This will require the EU to operate in an environment where reforms are selectively adopted, delayed, reversed, or subjected to reform brinkmanship, whereby the withdrawal of deliberately regressive measures is rewarded as progress.

Second, electoral processes are likely to become increasingly contested. The experience of local elections held in June and November 2025, and more recently March 2026, suggests that future parliamentary or presidential elections will not represent routine democratic exercises, but high-risk political moments. The EU and its member states should therefore anticipate disputes over electoral conditions, allegations of irregularities, and potential post-election instability, particularly in the case of a close result. Third, the risk of escalation, while currently contained, cannot be excluded. Previous crises in Serbia have demonstrated the potential for sudden shifts from relative stability to mass mobilisation, especially following unexpected triggering events. In such circumstances, the absence of a structured engagement framework – both at the EU level and among key member states – could significantly limit the ability to respond effectively and in a coordinated manner.

At the same time, the EU's current approach – combining rhetorical pressure with limited conditionality – has proven insufficient to alter the regime's strategic calculus. Divergences among member states, as well as a preference for maintaining bilateral channels of influence, have further constrained the emergence of a unified and decisive EU position. Without a more consistent and coordinated use of leverage across both EU institutions and member states, the Union is likely to continue shaping the margins of the crisis rather than its direction.

CONCLUSION

Serbia's political crisis has not moved toward resolution, but toward a prolonged phase of managed instability. The regime has retained control without restoring legitimacy, while opposition actors have not yet been able to convert social discontent into coordinated political change. In this context, the direction of future developments will depend less on structural conditions, which are already well established, and more on timing, coordination, and the response of key actors to critical political moments.

For the European Union and its member states, this means operating in a context where influence exists, but is not decisive. Without a more consistent, unified, and strategic use of leverage, the EU risks remaining a secondary factor in shaping outcomes. At the same time, the absence of credible domestic coordination limits the transformative impact of external pressure. The most plausible near-term trajectory is therefore neither rapid transition nor sudden collapse, but a continuation of a controlled and contested political environment, in which the outcome will ultimately depend on the interaction between internal political dynamics and the readiness of external actors – both at EU and member state level – to move beyond incremental engagement.

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