

# Serbia Elections 2024: Can ‘Injections’ of Foreign Money Influence the Election Results?

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*In the Republic of Serbia, repeated local elections will be held on 2 June 2024 for the capital city of Belgrade and local elections in 14 cities and 74 municipalities.*

The International Institute IFIMES recently published an analysis of the pre-election events in Serbia titled “*Serbia 2024: Electoral struggle for Belgrade – Is the opposition seeking power without elections?*” available [here](#) (25 May 2024).

## Serbia and the Western Balkans Back in the EU Spotlight

The Republic of Serbia is a key country for maintaining regional peace and stability. This raises the question of who benefits from instigating chaos in the Balkans and what intentions lie behind it, as certain domestic political forces in the Western Balkans are either acting in favour of or have been instrumentalised to serve foreign interests.

Serbia has recorded the highest growth in foreign direct investment in the region, exceeding six billion euros, and has demonstrated readiness to open nearly all negotiation chapters with the EU. EXPO 2027 represents a significant development opportunity for Serbia and the region. The EU’s new growth plan for the Western Balkans, amounting to six billion euros, including two billion in EU grants, will further boost economic development, with nearly half of these funds earmarked for Serbia.

The EU should be more definitive concerning the enlargement process, as the expansion of the EU cannot be delayed indefinitely. The uncertainty surrounding the EU enlargement process benefits those segments of the public in the Western Balkans that oppose their countries’ EU membership and favours the EU’s rivals.

## Belgrade Becoming a Global Capital

If all projects related to EXPO 2027 are realised, Belgrade will, in many ways, resemble an enlarged version of Switzerland's neutral cities and financial centres. It is evident that the Serbian capital remains one of the few neutral centres in all of Europe. This is further underscored by the soaring property prices, which have reached remarkable levels, surpassing those in cities like Vienna and Munich. Naturally, the greatest beneficiaries of this development will be the residents of Serbia's capital, who will enjoy free or affordable access to all the accompanying infrastructural benefits of one of Europe's top five capitals, which Belgrade is undoubtedly becoming.

Serbia will invest 17.8 billion EUR in EXPO 2027. New communal and road infrastructure will be constructed, alongside new bridges and revitalised facades. Belgrade will be linked by rail to the airport, the fairgrounds, and the new stadium, while the city will also witness the modernisation of its railway and bus stations.

## Vučić Has Significantly Improved the Position of Minority Communities

According to the population census, national minorities constitute approximately 13% of the population of the Republic of Serbia and are represented through 23 national councils.

Within the EU accession process, Serbia has adopted an Action Plan for the realization of the rights of national minorities under Negotiation Chapter 23, which has *"received support and positive evaluation from the European Commission and certain EU member states."*

Key recommendations for enhancing the position of national minorities in Serbia primarily focus on improving the monitoring and assessment processes for implementing the Action Plan for the improvement of the position of national minorities and the plan for Chapter 23.

Resolution CM/ResCMN (2021) on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2021, contains recommendations for the upcoming period, as outlined in the Ombudsman's Report, which provides relevant proposals for improving the position of members of national minorities.

The participation of members of minority communities in government, especially at the local level and in various state institutions, is an indicator of the integration of minority communities into Serbian society and the state, representing a significant improvement.

## Can the 'Injection' of Foreign Money Influence Election Outcomes?

Serbia remains a target of destabilizing forces, despite its critical role in maintaining peace and stability in the Balkans. Over 100 foreign security and intelligence services are known to operate within the country.

The significant involvement of foreign actors consistently stirs up turbulence, aiming to sow instability in Serbia. Some leaders of the Serbian opposition do not even bother to conceal their ties with foreign entities. A notable segment of the opposition in Serbia supports the country's NATO membership and advocates for imposing sanctions on Russia. Notably, Serbia has maintained military neutrality and has progressively distanced itself from subservience to foreign influences over the past 12 years, a trend that peaked during Boris Tadić's administration (DS).

The high turnout in local elections plays a pivotal role as voters perceive these elections as transcending mere local matters. The upcoming local elections in Serbia will once again serve as a test for the confrontation between the influences of domestic patriotic forces and foreign factors.

Voters in Serbia traditionally disfavour external interference in elections, particularly from entities supporting political agendas advocating for Serbia's NATO membership and the imposition of sanctions on Russia. A segment of the Serbian opposition, aligned with NATO membership, enjoys substantial support from Western political entities and significant financial backing. Public opinion polls indicate that the Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska napredna stranka - SNS)), leading the "*Serbia - Tomorrow*" coalition, is the favoured contender in the upcoming elections. Respondents believe that President Aleksandar Vučić (SNS) should continue to lead a patriotic, decisive, and responsible state policy that repositions Serbia's role in the region and the world.

Serbia maintains its position as a regional leader and an engine of European integration, with notable strengths such as high levels of foreign direct investment, a relatively low public debt, accelerated wage growth, low unemployment, a well-developed highway network, robust defence industry, investments in agriculture, youth development, sports infrastructure, resulting in high annual economic growth rates with prospects for further expansion. Particularly noteworthy is Serbia's proactive role during the COVID-19 crisis, extending assistance to neighbouring countries. The hosting of EXPO 2027 is a significant event for Serbia and a stimulus, aligning with President Aleksandar Vučić's vision of achieving a GDP of 100 billion EUR by 2027, compared to the 25 billion EUR GDP before the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) assumed power in 2012.

Analysts argue that the '*injection*' of foreign money poses a threat to democracy in Serbia, particularly due to certain foreign actors' intentions to influence election outcomes by using money to promote political options and individuals aligned with their interests. Such a scenario could have dire consequences for democracy in Serbia.

## Special Operation Belgrade

Despite the dissolution of the largest opposition bloc, "*Serbia Against Violence*," (Srbija protiv nasilja), several parties from the former coalition have chosen to enter the electoral race. Six out of nine opposition parties, formerly part of the "*Serbia Against Violence*" coalition, are vying for seats in the Belgrade city elections and many other local self-governments. However, the leading party in this bloc, Dragan Djilas's Party of Freedom and Justice (Stranka slobode i pravde -SSP), has opted out of the city elections in Belgrade and Niš due to concerns over Djilas's unpopularity in these cities potentially harming the opposition's prospects. Certain foreign "*power centres*" have warned the opposition about this, and devised tactics to "*lull*" the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and its voters into complacency, assuming that the opposition will easily seize control in Belgrade and Niš. This strategy hinges on convincing SNS supporters that the voters in these cities are opposition-oriented and will vote against the SNS rather than for any specific party. This scenario poses a significant risk and potential trap for SNS voters, as their complacency or passivity would play into Djilas's and certain foreign entities' strategies. The overarching goal is to neutralize the coalition supporting the Serbian Progressive Party, known as "*Aleksandar Vučić - Belgrade Tomorrow*" or "*Aleksandar Vučić - Niš Tomorrow*," and consequently gain control of the local government.

Achieving high voter turnout is paramount to ensuring the fairness, legality, and transparency of the electoral process without undue influence on voters. It is imperative that electoral participants renounce violence as a means of political expression and acknowledge the legitimacy of the officially announced election results. These local elections are overshadowed by national issues, which have taken centre stage this time around, contrasting with the usual focus on local concerns.

Analysts believe that the upcoming elections represent the last chance to overthrow Aleksandar Vučić's (SNS) government through a "*special operation*" in Belgrade with the assistance of part of foreign entities, as Belgrade, the capital city, is a crucial pillar for wielding power in Serbia.

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