



Integrated Country Strategy

Serbia

FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

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1. Chief of Mission Priorities

Successive governments have made clear Serbia's goal is to join the European Union. It is in the interest of the United States that Serbia develops as a modern, prosperous European nation at peace with itself and its neighbors. To achieve this, Serbia must demonstrate full respect for the rule of law and the rights of all of its citizens without regard to ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious affiliation. Continued European Union (EU) and U.S. support will be needed to prevent political, social, and economic shocks, and to strengthen Serbian resiliency to forces that oppose Serbia's western-oriented reforms. Serbia has begun the formal EU accession process, but public support for the onerous process of EU accession is fragile. The Eurozone's economic travails and the ongoing "Brexit" process have raised doubt among some that EU membership would provide clear economic or social benefits. Additionally, Russian influence, ranging from open support for Serbia's stand against Kosovo independence to more subtle influences in the military or energy sector, could sway public opinion against Serbia's EU integration.

Continued normalization of the relationship with Kosovo is the definitive issue governing the pace of Serbia's progress toward EU membership. Close coordination between the United States and the European Union is essential to this process. Despite President Aleksandar Vucic's focus on normalizing relations with Kosovo as the central issue of his presidency, Belgrade and Pristina have struggled to implement signed agreements fully or make real progress on negotiations. The two sides will continue to look to the EU and the United States for support, especially for resolution of the most contentious items still ahead in future rounds of the Dialogue. The Serbian government will also require continued U.S. support and encouragement to work constructively with Kosovo within regional and international bodies.

Ensuring effective rule of law is not only an essential element of the EU accession process, it is also an indispensable enabler of progress in nearly every area important to Serbia's future. In Embassy Belgrade, inter-agency teams are working together to coordinate assistance programs administered by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), in cooperation with the Department of Justice (DOJ)¹, and USAID that support necessary reforms, including strengthening the independence and accountability of Serbia's rule-of-law institutions, improving the legal framework to support these institutions, and developing

¹ There are two components to INL programs in Serbia, which are implemented by the U.S. Department of Justice: (i) the Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development Assistance and Training (OPDAT), and (ii) the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP). Both DOJ programs work in close partnership with, and receive funding for their programs from, the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), as part of INL's broad range of justice sector assistance to Serbia. In the context of Embassy offices and programs, "DOJ" in this document refers to both OPDAT and ICITAP.

Serbian professionals' expertise to plan and implement these reforms. Both USAID and INL/DOJ assist Serbia's leading anti-corruption entities. Corruption is one of the leading factors hindering Serbia's economic and legal reform efforts. INL/DOJ programs also work with police, prosecutors, and judges to implement Serbia's Criminal Procedural Code (CPC) and to further strengthen the ability of these groups to carry out their roles and to collaborate effectively.

Maintaining Serbia's interest and ability to participate in regional security initiatives will require continued U.S. support. Military-to-military engagement is a dynamic element of the overall U.S.-Serbian relationship. Serbian soldiers are deployed as peacekeepers on seven UN missions and four EU missions on three continents. The United States will continue to support Serbia's preparations to contribute troops to UN and EU peacekeeping missions, through training programs on peacekeeping best practices, international humanitarian law, and support for engineer equipment replacement. The United States will continue to support the further development of South Base, a Serbian military facility that offers modern training opportunities for units preparing to deploy abroad in support of peacekeeping and peace-support missions. Capitalizing on the success of a joint military medical deployment to Angola in December 2017, and the first training deployment of the Balkan Military Medical Task Force several months prior, the United States will continue to support opportunities for Serbia to export security within the Balkan region and the world beyond. The State Partnership Program (SPP) with the Ohio National Guard is among the most successful in Europe. Serbia's relationship with NATO continues through Partnership for Peace, but support for engagement with the Alliance remains low amid routine statements from the government that Serbia will never join the Alliance. The Government of Serbia's pursuit of a "balanced" defense policy often sends the wrong message to the EU and to Serbia's NATO partners through participation in Russian-led exercises that focus on military responses to civil disturbances – a disturbing trend regarding the role and nature of the appropriate use for military force, especially considering the global security environment after the Crimea invasion. Because the Government of Serbia does not recognize Kosovo's independence, the Serbian military is often reluctant to participate in multi-lateral training opportunities at which members of the Kosovo Security Force are also present.

Relations between the capital and the Serbian provinces continue to be challenging. Citizens outside of Belgrade are frustrated by the lack of funding and attention that they receive from the central government. Differences over revenue-sharing and the scope of authority of Serbia's Autonomous Province of Vojvodina represent a particular challenge. In regions with large minority populations, including in particular South Serbia and Sandzak, we will continue to engage with government authorities and international community partners to promote economic development, respect for minority rights and religious freedom, as well as to foster the better integration of minority communities into Serbian society.

The health of the Serbian economy is a critical variable that will influence Belgrade's policy choices on issues of concern to the United States. The economy needs more robust growth, economic reforms, large-scale public and foreign investment, and private-sector jobs, but the government is not implementing fully the policies necessary to make Serbia's business environment competitive, including for U.S. investors. Serbian authorities must do more to place Serbia's remaining large state-owned enterprises on sound economic footing, to promote and respect the rule of law, and to speed up legal proceedings. We are working with the relevant authorities to promote the kind of broad-based reforms that will facilitate this process. The government should do more to integrate the Serbian economy into global supply chains, to ensure a transparent and predictable regulatory environment, and to promote better procurement practices. Russia's almost exclusive control over Serbia's hydrocarbon sector undermines Serbia's energy security. Serbia must diversify and liberalize its energy market to comply with Energy Community obligations and reduce Russian influence.

Serbia has made tremendous strides, but still has much work ahead to achieve stability, robust democracy, and prosperity. The country has a talented, multi-lingual, well-educated, and under-employed population, but the government's policies too often have been a drag on the aspirations of the Serbian public. That is starting to change. U.S. support and active engagement will be critical to further progress in moving the country towards a brighter, European future.

2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: Serbia Better Integrated into Euro-Atlantic Institutions

Mission Objective 1.1: Progress on European Union Accession Achieved

Mission Objective 1.2: Accountability of Essential Democratic Institutions Strengthened
(Incorporates CDCS DO 1)

Mission Objective 1.3: Serbia Makes Discernible Efforts to Tackle Corruption

Mission Objective 1.4: Conditions for Broad-based, Inclusive Economic Growth Improved
and Progress Made Toward a Thriving Market Economy (Incorporates CDCS DO 2)

Mission Goal 2: Serbia Consolidates Peace and Stability

Mission Objective 2.1: Serbia Improves Relations with Neighbors

Mission Objective 2.2: Contributions to Global Security Increase

Mission Goal 3: Serbian Public Supports U.S. Policies

Mission Objective 3.1: Public Opinion and Awareness of U.S. Policies Improved

Management Objective 1: Management platform is modernized through improve electronic systems and processes

Management Objective 2: Create a safe environment for the conduct of U.S. diplomacy

Management Objective 3: Serving U.S. citizens in Serbia

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1: Serbia Better Integrated into Euro-Atlantic Institutions

Description and Linkages: EU membership is the best guarantee that Serbia will become a stable, inclusive democracy and reliable partner for U.S. priorities and interests in the region. EU membership also will ensure that the country develops a functioning market economy and can achieve sufficient and sustainable economic growth to make possible a prosperous future for all of its people. Serbia's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions directly supports the 2018-2022 EUR Joint Regional Strategy's (JRS) Goal 1, Strengthen the Western Alliance; and Goal 4, Preserve Western Democratic Principles. Mission Goal One supports the National Security Strategy (NSS) and State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) by ensuring effective coordination on combating terrorist threats and ensuring that systems are in place for a free and fair economic relationship with the United States.

The European Commission's February 2018 Strategy for the Western Balkans confirmed that Serbia is on a clear path toward membership in the European Union, and with strong political will, sustained reforms, and resolution of disputes with neighbors, could be ready for membership in a 2025 perspective. To best position itself, Serbia needs urgently to demonstrate genuine commitment in word and deed to meet the European Union's membership criteria, particularly on issues related to rule of law, judicial reform, human rights, and regional reconciliation, including normalizing the relationship with Kosovo.

Europe is one of the primary markets for U.S. goods, and European countries are important partners in supporting and enforcing U.S.-led structures that underpin America's security and prosperity. U.S. efforts to establish the rule of law, improve the business environment, and reduce corruption decrease risks to U.S. businesses and level the playing field so that U.S. comparative advantages can thrive; strengthen good governance; and build the foundation for Serbia to play a greater role in sharing global burdens and supporting efforts that make the United States more secure and economically stronger.

Unfortunately, Serbia's EU path is not yet irreversible. According to government polling of the Serbian public in December 2017, 42% of respondents considered Serbia's potential membership in the European Union to be positive, while other data suggest that support is particularly weak among the young. The difficult reforms, coupled with a weak Serbian government strategy outlining the benefits of EU membership, tempt many in Serbia to seek other, less demanding partners. Serbia's efforts to develop a new media strategy also bear careful observation. The government has gone backwards in some areas, including with reform of the governance of the National Bank of Serbia (NBS).

To help Serbia in its EU path, the U.S. will foster improved regional relations (Mission Objective 2.1). U.S. assistance programs and diplomatic encouragement will assist Serbia's independent agencies to strengthen their operations and public outreach; improve the parliament's ability to act as an independent branch of government responsive to citizens' needs; foster more transparent political processes; strengthen civil society; increase the respect of human rights and protection of vulnerable groups among its citizens as well as those of neighboring countries; and support anti-corruption efforts. Greater accountability for public officials and increased transparency of political processes as a result of heightened governmental and non-governmental oversight will raise governance standards as well as improve the climate for the resolution of protracted regional disputes on refugees and borders. Efforts indicated in 2.2.2 will also deepen Serbia's security relationship with Euro-Atlantic partners as another means of meeting the European Union's membership criteria and promoting alignment of values.

Mission Objective 1.1 Progress on European Union Accession Achieved

Justification: The Serbian government needs to demonstrate complete commitment to EU accession and meeting the EU's membership criteria. Adopting and implementing a communications strategy clarifying the benefits of EU accession for Serbia is critical to gaining public support for difficult reforms. Currently public opinion improves when chapters are opened or closed but lags in the meantime. The government of Serbia will also need to demonstrate it is prepared to open new chapters on highly technical areas dealing with the environment and agriculture. Serbia will need to increase its alignment with EU foreign and security policy, including its sanctions policy. Leading EU member states are looking for Serbia to conclude a normalization agreement with Kosovo urgently and improve relations with other neighbors. Serbia has much work to do in guaranteeing protections for its more than 20 national minorities. Without making progress in its EU accession, Serbia risks losing public support for its stated strategic goal and reducing its chances that it will ultimately achieve that goal. See also paragraph 2 of the Strategic Contingency Planning annex.

Mission Objective 1.2 Accountability of Essential Democratic Institutions Strengthened (CDCS DO 1)

Justification: Serbia lacks adequate checks and balances on central authority and sufficient opportunities for citizens to engage in decision making processes or to hold elected officials accountable. Enhancing accountable and representative governance will help to strengthen and sustain Serbia's democratic transformation.

To strengthen the accountability of its democratic institutions, Serbia needs to make improvements in four strategic areas: (1) reform and independence of the judiciary and legislature; (2) independent, consistent, and professional application of the rule of law; (3) transparent and representative governance; and (4) increased acceptance and expectations that citizens (including civil society and media) will participate in the governing process. All four areas require greater government capacity to respond to citizens' demands and a greater capability of citizens to organize, identify, and articulate their interests to elected officials and the appropriate institutions.

By strengthening institutions essential to democratic governance, Serbia can improve the administration of the country and the delivery of services to the public, advancing domestic support and stability. If Serbia does not succeed in strengthening its institutions, it risks slowing or stopping progress in its EU accession process as well as losing public faith in the government. See also paragraph 5 of the Strategic Contingency Planning annex.

Mission Objective 1.3 Serbia Makes Discernible Efforts to Tackle Corruption

Justification: The next three years will continue to be a time of critical importance for Serbia when it comes to the fight against corruption. In July 2016, the EU opened Chapters 23 (Justice and fundamental rights) and 24 (Justice, freedom, and security) of the EU Acquis and published interim benchmarks that cover a wide range of issues, including enhancing the rule of law, and tackling corruption and organized crime.

Serbia faces rampant corruption, particularly in the public sector. Corruption is not only detrimental to institutional, economic and social development, but it directly undermines the rule of law and Serbia's western alignment. Petty or bureaucratic corruption affects most Serbians, usually in form of bribes or payments to traffic police, customs officers, medical professionals, business inspectors, and other public servants. Such corruption creates public apathy and distrust in government institutions. Corruption and weak rule of law give outside actors more opportunity to exercise influence within Serbia's government and over its economy. Moreover, opaque foreign investment has raised serious concerns about a lack of transparency and unchecked cash flow into Serbia without the necessary regulations and safeguards expected in the global financial system. This environment fosters nationalism and Euroscepticism, which in turn cause disaffected citizens in Serbia to question their commitment to the European Union and the West.

Serbia's Organized Crime Prosecutor's Office (OCPO) will continue to handle the most significant corruption cases concerning elected and appointed public officials. The National Assembly in 2016, passed legislation, which introduced several significant institutional reforms and amended Serbia's Criminal Code, which greatly expanded the list of corruption-related and economic offenses. These reforms—which took effect on March 1, 2018—are aimed at tackling corruption by employing a whole-of-the-government approach to the problem, including specialized units and task forces of prosecutors and police investigators leading anti-corruption investigation, and using the expertise and competencies of relevant government agencies to support criminal investigations and prosecutions. Through INL, OPDAT assumed a leading role in helping to train prosecutors, police investigators, judges, and liaison officers assigned to these new units. Moving forward, ICITAP and OPDAT will also continue to support Serbia's newly formed, specialized anti-corruption prosecutorial and police units and judicial departments, which will be integral to Serbia's fight against corruption. If Serbia does not make progress in its efforts to combat corruption, it risks undermining progress across a range of reforms, as well as in its EU accession process. See also paragraph 5 of the Strategic Contingency Planning annex.

(Note: Work under Mission Objectives 1.2 and 1.4 also contributes to reducing corruption. Assistance to strengthen oversight institutions and to enforce their findings makes it more difficult to abuse public resources. Reforms to the business-enabling environment often streamline regulations and licensing and make processes more transparent. This eliminates opportunities for corruption.)

Mission Objective 1.4 Conditions for Broad-Based, Inclusive Economic Growth Improved and Progress Made Toward a Thriving Market Economy

Justification: Serbia's business environment and the predominance of state-owned enterprises discourage investment, impair the competitiveness of Serbian firms, and hinder job creation. If entrepreneurs and small- and medium-sized enterprises have equal opportunity to enter the market, access to capital, and skilled labor; if they can operate within a fair and predictable business environment; and if the State's extensive role in the economy can be reduced to the benefit of the private sector; then Serbia should experience economic growth that provides for sustained increases in employment and incomes. In doing so, Serbia will consolidate the economic conditions that will contribute to political and societal stability.

By eliminating critical barriers in the national business-enabling environment (i.e., improved economic governance and fewer state-owned enterprises dominating the economy), Serbia can attract investment, improve the productivity of firms, and, in conjunction with the other economic reforms that are underway, increase private sector-led growth throughout the country. Furthermore, Serbian firms need to become more competitive in local, regional, and international markets. While improvements in the business-enabling environment will spur investments that will enable them to grow, Serbian firms also need to develop inter-firm relationships and partnerships with institutions that drive research, innovate, and foster value-chain development.

Improving the conditions for broad-based, inclusive economic growth also will enable Serbia to benefit from the opportunities of being part of the EU, to better withstand the increased competition that comes with EU accession, and to meet the needs of its population with regard to employment and income-generation opportunities and improved public services.

Strengthening the presence of U.S. companies in the Serbian market through increased trade and investment also can contribute significantly to economic stability and growth. U.S. investments create new jobs, transfer new technologies, introduce modern management techniques, and set positive examples for corporate social responsibility. Increased bilateral trade boosts U.S. exports pursuant to the U.S.'s National Export Initiative and, on the Serbian side, educates Serbian firms in exploiting trade opportunities while strengthening their balance sheets and capacity to compete in advance of EU accession.

Integrating Serbia into international economic institutions, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), will help anchor Serbia in the global trade and financial system. Serbia's accession to the WTO, which was in an advanced stage but ran into stumbling blocks, will bring Serbia into a global, rules-based trading system that will open new export markets while spurring greater competitiveness in domestic industries. WTO accession, a necessary step in Serbia's EU accession, thereby contributing to MO 1.1, will promote Serbia's economic stability and boost investor confidence.

Diversifying Serbia's energy supply, as well as improving its energy efficiency, are important components of creating a thriving market economy. Energy diversity and efficiency will allow for new investment opportunities, particularly in the area of renewables, and will help break up the state- and Russian-owned monopolies that plague Serbia's energy sector. Amending Serbia's energy policies will prevent rent-seeking behavior, make businesses more competitive, and make Serbia less susceptible to malign influence.

If Serbia does not make progress in its economic reforms, it risks undermining popular support for the entire government program, including EU accession. See also paragraph 3 of the Strategic Contingency Planning annex.

Mission Goal 2: Serbia Consolidates Peace and Stability

Description and Linkages: A Europe whole, free, and at peace is essential to maintaining and enhancing Europe's role as a source of stability and prosperity that benefits the United States. Mission Goal Two supports the NSS's regional strategy for Europe by supporting a strong and free Europe, in addition to supporting both the NSS Pillar I and JSP Goal 1 of protecting America's people and security. Serbia's peace and stability directly supports the EUR JRS Goal 3 to Secure and Stabilize the Eastern and Southern Frontiers.

Serbia, as the region's most populous country, has a unique leadership role in the Western Balkans. It must take proactive steps toward reconciliation and improved relations with all of its neighbors, including in particular Kosovo, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The significance of Serbia's role is reinforced by the large Serb minorities in neighboring countries, which look to Belgrade for assistance and guidance. Thus, the U.S. goal of seeing Serbia consolidate peace and stability will make Serbia a stronger U.S. partner and support U.S. interests in the region and Europe as whole.

Serbia's efforts to promote regional reconciliation – in particular its efforts to normalize relations with Kosovo – are also a key component of its EU accession process (Mission Objective 1.1).

Mission Objective 2.1 Serbia Improves Relations with Neighbors

Justification: A democratic Serbia that is pursuing EU integration and has good relations with neighboring states, strengthens regional stability and fosters an environment to realize U.S. objectives. The EU has stated that regional reconciliation, good neighborly relations, and regional cooperation are prerequisites for progress on Serbia's EU path, including an effective and comprehensive normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. We will work also to encourage Serbia to prioritize state-to-state — vs. state-to-entity, Republika Srpska (RS) — contacts between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) that will buttress BiH's territorial integrity and improve regional cooperation, and support Serbia's efforts to improve relations with Croatia through bilateral working groups.

Serbia must engage constructively with all of its neighbors — especially Croatia, BiH, and Kosovo — to resolve outstanding border demarcation, refugee, war crimes, and property restitution issues to ensure that Serbia can move beyond the historical legacy embodied in these lingering disputes to build a common European future with its neighbors.

We will build on Serbia's recent cooperation with neighboring states — BiH, Croatia, Hungary, and others — in efforts to counter transnational organized crime, human smuggling, trafficking in persons (TIP), and narcotics trafficking. The five-year regional refugee housing program to which the U.S. contributed \$10 million in FY15 offers a suitable mechanism and forum to promote regional cooperation, while also contributing directly to resolution of potentially destabilizing disputes. If Serbia does not improve its regional relations, it risks increasing isolation, reduced economic opportunities, derailment of its EU accession process, and even actual conflict. See also paragraph 1 of the Strategic Contingency Planning annex.

Mission Objective 2.2 Contributions to Global Security Increase

Justification: We will engage Serbia's military so that it becomes an enduring factor of stability within the Euro-Atlantic security structure. A peaceful Serbia that works constructively with neighboring states to maintain stability in the Balkans (Mission Objective 2.1) and that contributes effectively to global peace support operations is essential to our long term interests. We will work with Serbia to improve its security relations with its neighbors, the United States, and Euro-Atlantic partners. We will continue a defense transformation geared toward creating a cost-efficient, NATO-interoperable force, capable of assuming a greater role in international peace support operations throughout the world. Enabling Serbia to increase its contributions to global security simultaneously enhances U.S. security and provides a mechanism through which we can enhance our bilateral relationship. Supported by the Global Peace Operation Initiative (GPOI), Serbia has expressed ambitions to further increase its contributions to peace-keeping operations. As Serbia works to bring its export control regime to an international standard and maintain more effective control over its excess and aging munitions stockpiles, we will continue to use Department of State programs to help build institutional capacity and reduce the threat of accidents and proliferation.

Strengthening Serbia's law enforcement response to transnational crime and terrorism will continue to be a priority. The region struggles with both internal and regional organized crime and other global threats. In addition to our diplomatic engagement (Mission Objective 2.1), INL/ICITAP and the Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) will continue to provide expert support and assistance through consultation and specialized training and, limited resources permitting, specific investigative equipment necessary to combat transnational crime. INL, through ICITAP and OPDAT, in cooperation with American and external partners (also see Mission Objective 1.1), will provide assistance in criminal justice areas, including by enhancing investigative techniques; combatting money laundering and economic crimes; implementing criminal procedure revisions; enhancing Serbia's capacity to seize and forfeit illegal assets and contraband; improving investigations into corruption, transnational crime, and organized crime; enhancing efforts to stem the illegal flow of firearms, ammunition, and munitions into Western Europe that have armed criminals and terrorist groups; supporting Serbia's efforts to combat human smuggling and trafficking in persons; increasing Serbia's use of taskforces and multi-disciplinary teams to investigate and prosecute crimes; and expanding international cooperation. EXBS will provide seminars, expert consultations, equipment, and technical support to assist Serbia in developing the capability to control trade in WMD-related materials and conventional arms and interdict illicit trafficking in these strategic commodities. EXBS will also promote increased cross-border and regional cooperation to further contribute to the fight against the proliferation of arms.

If Serbia does not increase, or at least maintain, its contributions to global security, it risks political isolation as well more immediate transnational threats.

Mission Goal 3: Serbian Public Supports U.S. Policies

Description and Linkages: There is little support in Serbia for the United States, and little awareness of bilateral cooperation and assistance programs. Continuing U.S. support for Kosovo's independence and perceptions of the U.S. role in the Western Balkans in the 1990s, as well as Serbia's difficult economic and social conditions, contribute to the poor image of the U.S. in Serbia. Anti-U.S. sentiment remains high among all age groups despite generally positive overall relations. Exacerbating these already challenging operating conditions are the increased propaganda efforts by Russia-friendly media outlets peddling anti-Western, anti-American, anti-NATO, and anti-EU narratives to Serbian audiences. The result is that the Serbian public is often unaware of U.S. policy on most issues of importance and opposes those policies with which it is somewhat familiar.

Mission Goal Three is critical in effectively supporting the EUR JRS Goal 4, Preserve Western Democratic Principles; NSS Pillar IV, Advance American Influence; and JSP's Goal 3, Promote American Leadership through Balanced Engagement.

Mission Objective 3.1 Public Opinion and Awareness of U.S. Policies Improved

Justification: Serbia has a quickly aging population and a negative population growth rate. More alarming, though, is the growth in nationalist, anti-American views among young people. These views are shaped and fed by the current one-sided, mostly-negative discussion of Euro-Atlantic issues in Serbia. The reasons for the one-sided nature of the discussion are complex, but approaches to solutions need not be. All segments of the population look to opinion leaders in formulating their views on the issues of the day. Young people do as well, though many can be more open to alternative views if they are exposed to them. The main requirement, however, is that the issues be discussed and debated in public fora. The Embassy has therefore prioritized efforts to empower and motivate opinion leaders to say in public what they often say in private; to discuss and explain U.S. policy with young leaders directly; and to promote and support objective discussions of U.S. policy in public fora.

The Embassy has prioritized youth throughout the country, particularly those who are self-motivated and who one day will be Serbia's leaders, as a key audience. Other audiences are NGO, media, and business leaders who have a stake in creating a prosperous, European Serbia. Although the capital dominates the media landscape, almost half of all Serbians live away from urban centers, highlighting the need to reach out beyond the urban core into rural areas. Central Serbia harbors some of the highest levels of anti-American sentiment springing from U.S. identification with the 1999 NATO intervention and U.S. support for Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008.

While these conditions complicate our efforts to reach the Serbian public, they also make those efforts more urgent. Led by the Public Affairs Section (PAS), all Mission sections will engage the Serbian government, media, opinion leaders, youth, and other key interlocutors, to accurately explain U.S. positions and programs, and highlight our extensive bilateral cooperation, and encourage all to, in turn, engage their fellow Serbians on these topics to diverse audiences. If public awareness and opinion of U.S. policies and programs do not improve, the United States risks losing the ability to advocate for the broad scope of reforms we see as beneficial to Serbia, and Serbia risks slowing or stopping progress on its EU accession process. See also paragraph 4 of the Strategic Contingency Planning annex.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1 Management platform is modernized through improved electronic systems and processes.

Justification: Much of the work of the management platform is still performed in the paper- and work-intensive processes of the twentieth century. Electronic records and routing have the potential to simplify these processes while providing greater transparency and providing performance metrics that can be used to monitor and further improve operations. If the Embassy does not modernize the platform, it risks losing efficiency as well as falling behind the rest of the Department in its processes.

Management Objective 2 Create a safe environment for the conduct of U.S. diplomacy.

Justification: Recent years have been marked by productive law enforcement and security cooperation with the Serbian government, with regular information sharing and operational assistance between the U.S. and Serbia on criminal investigations. The Ministry of Interior, the Embassy's main interlocutor on issues of security, is usually extremely responsive to requests for assistance. However, the country's history of political violence, coupled with an observable undercurrent of xenophobia and anti-U.S. sentiment, reinforces the necessity for Mission Belgrade to make security planning a core function of its operations.

While the security relationship with the government is positive, the threat environment continues to present challenges. The Security Environment Threat List (SETL) crime level of Belgrade is HIGH as a result of residential break-ins, assaults and other crimes. Political protests occur on a regular basis and are often related to key policy questions regarding Kosovo, with which the Embassy is actively engaged, creating the possibility that these protests could be focused against the Embassy. This underscores the need for RSO to continue to work on traditional security programs, such as residential physical security upgrades, protection of the Ambassador and visiting American dignitaries, and managing the operations of the LGF, MSG Detachment, and SD Team. RSO will also continue to use these security assets to monitor the local media, protests, and security incidents to identify security trends and threats. If the Embassy does not create a safe environment, it risks the safety of all staff as well as the ability of the U.S. government to operate in Serbia.

Management Objective 3 Serving U.S. citizens in Serbia

Justification: The protection of U.S. citizens in Serbia is one of the Mission's highest priorities. The consular section will work to maintain high customer service standards for non-emergency services to U.S. citizens, including passports and reports of birth abroad, keep U.S. citizens informed about threats to their safety and security, and increase the Mission's readiness to assist U.S. citizens during and after an emergency. If the Embassy does not adequately serve U.S. citizens, it risks leaving our fellow citizens unsupported in a foreign country.