

# FOREWORD EU

Dear reader,

I am honoured to write the foreword for the Foreign Investors Council's (FIC) White Book for the third consecutive time.

I congratulate the FIC on yet another successful White Book publication and would like to underline the White Book's importance as a manual, a blueprint, toward a better business environment and, ultimately, to a more competitive and dynamic economy with a strong focus on EU integration.

In the foreword of this year's White Book, I would like to focus on three crucial issues of great significance for both decision makers and businesses.

**There is an unprecedented window of opportunity to accelerate Serbia's EU integration.** The geopolitical landscape in Europe has changed since Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Enlargement has resurfaced on the top of EU's agenda and there is a growing sense of urgency in the EU to make the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova and other aspiring countries happen. Aspiring EU members should understand this crucial geopolitical juncture and respond to the growing EU desire for enlargement, by delivering on their commitments. We, as a credible and long-standing partner of Serbia, have sent a clear message that we will be ready for an enlarged Union, as confirmed by the EU leaders via the Granada declaration. This is an opportunity that could and should be used to the benefit of Serbia's citizens, its economy and its place in the world. The time is now to step up on all necessary reforms.

**To help Serbia and the region in using that opportunity, this year, together with the Enlargement Package, we also presented a New Growth Plan for the region.** The Plan is built on four mutually reinforcing pillars. Firstly, it aims to bring the Western Balkans closer to the EU Single Market. Secondly, the plan seeks to deepen regional economic integration through the establishment of a common regional market. The third pillar of the Growth Plan is to accelerate fundamental reforms in the Western Balkans. Lastly, with a new Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans the European Commission proposed additional funding to bridge the economic and social gap between EU Member States and accession countries. For this, we have proposed a EUR 6 billion investment package, composed of EUR 2 billion in grants and EUR 4 billion

in loans. The same approach we used in our Next Generation EU instrument for the EU Member States – investment and reforms; the funding will be provided upon delivery of reforms.

The benefits are myriad. Opening the Single Market for goods and services from the Western Balkans, streamlined customs procedures and reduced waiting times at borders, reducing the cost of cross border payments through the single European payment area, opening up the road transport market etc. are just a few examples of measures which would concretely benefit companies and citizens. Simultaneously, a reform agenda, linked to concrete financial support, will ensure that the investment climate continues to improve and provides the conditions necessary for the economy to thrive, businesses to grow and citizens to enjoy a higher quality of life.

This will go in parallel with our ongoing initiatives such the Economic and Investment Plan, through which, together, we are installing broadband internet infrastructure, building renewable energy resources, diversifying gas supply, building roads, railways, waterways; we are creating solar and wind power plants, science and technology parks, supporting Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and much more.

**The EU enlargement process and a clear EU membership perspective has been and remains the key driver toward economic and societal prosperity in Serbia.** It is clear that Serbia's place is in the EU, and nowhere else. That is why it is important that, through reforms in areas such as the rule of law, media freedom, good neighbourly relations, public administration reform, public procurement, State owned enterprises' governance, the green transition, digitalisation and many others, Serbia, along with the countries in the region, continue to progress toward membership in the European Union.

These reforms are the driving forces behind a range of policies which provide local SMEs, foreign investors, financial markets and many other actors with the sense of stability, transparency and predictability they need to operate and grow successfully.

In that respect, I am very happy to note that the White Book's recommendations directly and explicitly work toward facilitating progress in Serbia's EU integration path. They are based on experiences from projects, investments,

business transactions, institutional coordination and many other “real-life” situations that have contributed to what is effectively a blueprint for reform. A blueprint, which can provide valuable guidance for decision makers on the next steps to take: a better investment climate, a stronger and more resilient economy and ultimately membership in the European Union.

Ultimately, it is up to Serbia to make the best use of the opportunities it has in its EU accession path and to implement the necessary reforms that make Serbia a more competitive place for local and foreign investors and a more secure and prosperous place to live for its citizens. Their

proper implementation is what signals Serbia’s value as a place to live, a place to do business and a place to work.

With the EU by far Serbia’s most important trading partner, close to 300,000 employed by EU companies in Serbia and the vast majority of investments in Serbia having originated from the EU, the positive effects of these reforms and the EU integration path are clear.

Serbia’s ongoing commitment to its reform agenda, with the support of civil society and business associations such as the Foreign Investors Council, will determine the extent to which this positive trend will continue.

Sincerely,

**Emanuele Giaufret**  
Ambassador of the European Union  
to the Republic of Serbia