



Ohio Adjutant General's Department

Mike DeWine, Governor

Major General John C. Harris Jr., Adjutant General

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Ohio-Serbia State Partnership: Successful military pairing helps expand to economic, cultural cooperation

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COLUMBUS, Ohio — Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić led a delegation that met with Ohio National Guard, political, academic and business leaders to promote mutual relations and discuss areas of potential economic cooperation during a visit this week to Ohio's capital.

"Based on our partnership with the Ohio National Guard, which for some time has really expanded to where it's not just military-to-military, it's not just military-to-civilian cooperation, we came to the idea to build on this fantastic friendship and partnership that we have to cooperate in areas of economy, trade, agriculture, but also culture and education," Brnabić said.

Ohio and Serbia share a number of compatible manufacturing and agricultural industries wherein areas of potential partnerships have been identified and explored. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted met with Brnabić at the Ohio Statehouse to discuss future cooperation. Talks also focused on agriculture and the food industry, including fruit processing, which plays a significant role in Serbia's economy. Serbia is a world-leading producer of raspberries and plums. Representatives from the J.M. Smucker Co., headquartered in Orrville, Ohio, met with the prime minister to discuss potential business projects.

"The prime minister is a very forward-thinking leader," said Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., Ohio adjutant general. "If given the opportunity, I can assure you she'll create some partnerships between the Republic of Serbia and Ohio, businesses that will flourish and create positive things for years into the future."

The Ohio National Guard and the Serbian Armed Forces have partnered to promote regional stability and develop civil-military relationships since 2006, under the U.S. Department of Defense's State Partnership Program (SPP), managed by the National Guard Bureau. The Ohio National Guard participates in about 25 events annually with the Serbian Armed Forces, most of which take place in Serbia. The SPP was launched in the early 1990s as part of

Defense Department and U.S. European Command initiatives to engage with the newly independent nations of the Baltics, Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. All 54 state/territorial National Guard entities now have partnerships with nearly 80 different nations.

The prime minister's visit was a culmination of previous visits and ongoing civilian engagements. The SPP has carried out a directive to increase and expand civilian opportunities in both countries. For example, Serbian Ambassador to the U.S. Djerdj Matković met with the SPP, the Ohio Development Services Agency and JobsOhio in March 2018 to discuss areas of possible cooperation, with a focus on food and agriculture.

As part of the Jan. 28 visit, the Serbian delegation met with leaders of The Ohio State University's College of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Sciences and visited Ohio State's Hilandar Research Library Exhibition that houses a collection of Serbian manuscripts and documents.

When first established, the SPP's focus was on developing a military partnership between the Ohio National Guard and Serbian Armed Forces, but the partnership has now clearly gone beyond military training into military-to-civilian and civilian-to-civilian relationships. Harris believes the prime minister's visit is a key moment in the history of the Serbia-Ohio partnership that will stimulate further cooperation.

"Now it's time for that next step," he said. "It's time to leverage the brand that Ohio's built in the Republic of Serbia, the goodwill and trust that we've built there. It's time to open doors for Ohio businesses, to do business there and vice versa, for Serbian businesses to do business here in Ohio. It's time to build those partnerships, and it's not just about business. It's about higher education. It's about culture. It's about agriculture. It's about any industry that may have an opportunity for global expansion. Serbia is right for that."

-30-

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EDITOR'S NOTE: High-resolution photos to support this story are available on the [Defense Video Imagery Distribution Site \(DVIDS\)](#). Click on photos under the "Connected Media" section, located on the right-hand side of the page.

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