

European Parliament
All. du Printemps
F-67070 Strasbourg
France

Subject: Urgent Attention Needed: Human Rights Violations and Systemic Corruption in Serbia

Dear members of the European Parliament,

We are writing to draw your attention to the concerning developments that have been unfolding in Serbia over the past five months. While we are aware that this matter has been addressed previously we believe that the current situation warrants renewed focus and action.

Since your last discussion on the situation in Serbia conditions have further deteriorated. Most notably, during the protest held on March 15th, known as “15th for 15,” Serbian authorities used a sonic weapon against peaceful demonstrators—an alarming escalation in the use of force against citizens exercising their democratic rights.

As Serbia continues its path toward European Union membership, it is imperative that the principles of democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights are being upheld. Unfortunately, we are witnessing ongoing human rights violations and deeply entrenched, systemic corruption that undermine these fundamental values.

Given the increasing severity of the situation, we have decided to reach out to you directly to provide a more detailed account and explanation of the ongoing challenges facing our country.

In light of the European Union's responsibility to uphold and promote these fundamental standards, we strongly urge you to persist in addressing this issue and to leverage all available tools to support efforts focused on confronting these violations and advancing meaningful reforms in Serbia.

I. Context

As a result of the protest- which represents a legitimate expression of civil discontent with the authoritarian practices of the ruling structure, the suppression of pluralism of opinion and serious violations of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly- the situation in Serbia continues to deteriorate.

The media environment is particularly concerning. Independent media outlets face growing pressure and censorship, while the national public broadcaster has remained largely passive, barely mentioning the protests throughout the five months of their duration. Independent journalists are under constant threat—subject to economic blackmail, political interference and, in some cases, direct intimidation for reporting on protests and state-level corruption. Editors and reporters from independent outlets are frequently targeted by smear campaigns orchestrated by pro-government tabloids and public officials. Rather than engaging in meaningful dialogue with the protesters, the authorities have resorted to both legal and extra-legal means to suppress public demonstrations. By instrumentalizing pro-regime media,

they aim to instill fear and routinely insult the population that is peacefully voicing its dissatisfaction.

In Novi Sad, on November 1st 2024, at 11:52, a canopy, that was recently reconstructed for the second time, collapsed. This led to 14 people dying on the spot as well as 3 people being seriously injured. One of the three injured people died on November 17th 2024, while the second person passed away on March 21st 2025, bringing the number of victims to 16.

Due to the inadequate reactions of the institutions and false public statements given by the President of the Republic and authorities—broadcasted on national frequencies—claiming that the canopy had not been reconstructed, citizens took to the streets on November 5th 2024, to publicly express their dissatisfaction. On November 15th 2024, at precisely 11:52, citizens across numerous cities in Serbia began paying tribute to those who lost their lives on November 1st 2024, by holding peaceful commemorations under the name “Zastani, Srbijo” (“Pause, Serbia”), marked by a fourteen-minute silence. As announced, the intention was to honor the victims every Friday—the day of the week on which the canopy collapse occurred.

However, the following tribute lasted fifteen minutes, as another individual tragically passed away on November 17th, two days later. From the very first days after the collapse of the canopy it became evident that this was not a mere accident, but the result of long-standing and deeply entrenched corruption, systemic pressure on professionals to serve political interests, and the complete erosion—and in some cases, absence—of institutional accountability.

On November 22nd 2024, professors and students of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade gathered in the vicinity of the building to pay tribute to the victims. During the gathering, citizens—primarily students and professors—were physically attacked.

The inadequate response from the relevant institutions and public authorities to this violent incident prompted the students of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts to organize the first **plenum**—an informal, inclusive body composed of all students. The plenum was established with the aim of ensuring full participation while preventing political interference by individuals seeking to co-opt the student protests. It also emerged as an alternative to official student parliaments, which are widely perceived as being under the complete control of the ruling political parties that have governed Serbia for the past thirteen years.

At that plenum, held on November 25th 2024, the students voted to initiate a blockade of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts. The blockade entails the suspension of all lectures and examinations until those responsible for the attacks on students and professors are identified, criminally prosecuted, and appropriately sanctioned.

In essence, the students are demanding that judicial authorities fulfill their obligations by conducting an effective investigation into their well-founded claims of ill-treatment—allegedly perpetrated by individuals, many of whom are believed to be state agents, acting under the instruction of ruling political parties. These demands are rooted in both the material and procedural obligations arising under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

In response to the broader social circumstances and incidents that occurred across the country during this period, students from other faculties in Serbia—acting in solidarity with their colleagues from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts—have initiated blockades of their own higher education institutions.

At present, state Universities of Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kragujevac, Nis and Novi Pazar, as well as University of Arts in Belgrade remain under student blockade, which will continue until their demands are met.

STUDENT REQUESTS

Demands of students of the University of Novi Sad:

1. Publication of all documentation regarding the reconstruction of the Novi Sad railway station, which is currently unavailable to the public.
2. Undertaking criminal prosecution and conducting criminal proceedings against legal and natural persons responsible for the collapse of the railway station canopy in Novi Sad, in accordance with the law.
3. Resignation and determination of criminal liability of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, Miloš Vučević, and the Mayor of Novi Sad, Milan Đurić.
4. Undertake criminal prosecution and conduct criminal proceedings against all persons responsible for attacks on participants, students, and construction during peaceful demonstrations, in accordance with the law.
5. Undertake criminal prosecution and conduct criminal proceedings against the police officers responsible for the attack and injury to Ilija Kostic, in accordance with the law.

Requirements of students of the University of Belgrade:

1. Publication of all documentation regarding the reconstruction of the Novi Sad railway station, which is currently unavailable to the public.

*Specification: We would like to point out that the goal of this request is not only to make the documentation available to the public but also to encourage the Prosecutor's Office to review it within its operating system and then take the steps required by law.

2. Request for confirmation by the competent authorities of the identity of all persons suspected of having physically attacked students and professors, as well as the initiation of criminal proceedings against them. Also, the dismissal of the aforementioned persons is requested if it is shown that they are public officials.

*Specification: The aforementioned request applies to both the listed persons and any future person who physically attacks students and professors and all other persons participating in peaceful civic gatherings.

3. Dismissal of criminal charges against students arrested and detained during protests, as well as suspension of criminal proceedings already initiated.

*Specification: Release from detention does not guarantee that these persons will not be prosecuted, nor that a conviction will not be issued against them. In accordance with the above, we demand that criminal charges against all students and professors

participating in civil protests be dismissed, and if criminal proceedings are ongoing, that they be suspended.

4. Increase the budget for higher education by 20%.

*Specification: Amendments to the Law on the Budget of the Republic of Serbia, amendments to the Law on Higher Education.

5. Investigation by the relevant authorities into the incident that caused panic on March 15, 2025, at 7:11 PM during a peaceful protest on Kralja Milana Street.

*Specification: During the peaceful protest and 15 minutes of silence on Kralja Milana Street, a loud and unidentified sound was heard, causing panic, people to flee, and several injuries.

6. An urgent investigation and the dismissal of the UKCS management are demanded, including the director of the Emergency Center and the head of intensive care, due to the unauthorized entry of media and individuals into the ICU without protective equipment, and the recording of patients, which violates their health, privacy, and dignity. Additionally, misdemeanor proceedings are requested against the institution and responsible staff for breaching data protection laws, an extraordinary inspection with public access to the report, and oversight by the Commissioner for Personal Data Protection. Transparency regarding ICU protocols is also demanded, along with an urgent session of the Ethics Committee to assess whether ethical codes were violated on March 17, and an investigation by the Ombudsman into potential violations of patients' rights to health and life on that date.

Demands of students of the State University in Novi Pazar:

1. They have uniform requirements with the first four requirements of Belgrade universities.

In addition to these four requirements, there are two more that are local.

2. The fifth demand of the DUNP students in consideration of Hernandez Bakan's case by the Supreme Court and adoption of a binding opinion on treating a driver's youth as an aggravating circumstance.
3. The sixth demand is: Administration Compulsory (pro tempore).

Demands of students of the University of Kragujevac:

1. Students at the University of Kragujevac have uniform requirements with the first three requirements of Belgrade universities.
2. The fourth demand reads, "We demand that the revenues that would be directed to foreign universities through the adoption of the proposed amendment to the Law on Higher Education be redirected to the financing of officially accredited faculties."

With that said, the physical attacks on students and citizens have not ceased—on the contrary, they have intensified. Over the past five months, we have witnessed numerous instances of violence targeting students and citizens who gathered peacefully to honor those who lost their lives in the canopy collapse.

The response of the competent institutions was, once again, absent. The authorities failed to investigate or prosecute the attacks on students and citizens, falling short of the obligations stemming from the procedural limb of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

The President of the Republic of Serbia has continually downplayed and relativized acts of violence through regime-affiliated media outlets—including Informer, Kurir, Alo, Večernje Novosti, B92, Prva TV, Happy TV, Pink, and other de facto state-controlled platforms—as well as through the public broadcasters, Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) and Radio Television of Vojvodina (RTV). Together with other high-ranking political figures, he has publicly targeted students, professors, and individuals or groups expressing support for the protests. Both RTS and RTV have since faced significant criticism for their biased and selective reporting.

In strong solidarity with the students, and expressing widespread dissatisfaction with the overall situation in the country—particularly the inaction of institutions and the lack of accountability for the collapse of the canopy—educational workers across Serbia, including those in primary, secondary schools and kindergartens, have also gone on strike and suspended their work.

Farmers, agricultural workers, and professional associations—including cultural workers, actors, lawyers, and others—have likewise halted their activities. Despite ongoing pressure, threats, and blackmail, citizens across Serbia continue to gather peacefully, voicing their discontent with the erosion of institutional integrity, political interference, lack of independence in public bodies, and the total absence of accountability for corrupt practices and the tragic collapse of the canopy.

The demands related to the collapse of the canopy are nothing more than a call to action for the relevant judicial authorities to fulfill their procedural obligations under Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) by conducting a thorough and effective investigation into all individuals responsible for the violation of the right to life of 16 innocent victims.

Since the fall of the canopy on November 1st 2024, dozens of protests have been organized throughout Serbia, with the most massive protests being:

1. Protest on the streets of Novi Sad was held on November 5, 2024.
2. Protest at Slavija in Belgrade on December 22, 2024.
3. 24-hour blockade of Autokomanda in Belgrade on January 27, 2025.
4. 24-hour blockade of 3 bridges in Novi Sad on February 1, 2025
5. 15-hour protest in Kragujevac named "Sretnimo se na Sretenje" (Let's meet on Sretenje) on February 15, 2025.
6. The protest in Novi Pazar named "Pohitaj u Pazar" (Hurry to Pazar) was held on February 27, 2025.

7. The protest in Niš named "Studentski edikt" (Student Edict) was held on March 1, 2025.
8. The protest in Belgrade named "15th for 15" was held on March 15, 2025. is considered the most massive protest in the history of Serbia.
9. The protest in Novi Pazar named "Sloboda vlada čaršijom" (Freedom reigns in the streets) was held on April 12, 2025.

Officials persistently ignore citizens' demands for transparency in the work of institutions, while the public space is contaminated with political propaganda and manipulations aimed at discrediting anyone who criticizes the regime.

II. Instances of human rights violations

During this period, as widely reported by the international public, numerous accounts have documented the excessive use of force by law enforcement against peaceful protesters, instances of arbitrary detention, staged criminal and misdemeanor proceedings, and informal invitations by the Security Information Agency for so-called 'friendly talks'—all of which constitute intimidation tactics directed at activists, students, journalists, opposition figures, and ordinary citizens.

We hereby enclose a summary of some of the more significant human rights violations:

- Physical attacks on students of Faculty of Dramatic Art
- Assault on members of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra
- Staged criminal proceedings and pre-trial detention of a student in Novi Sad
- Use of a sound cannon, currently under examination by European Court of Human Rights under Rule 39 procedure
- Deliberate use of motor vehicles to endanger and harm civilians
- Public disclosure of personal information of students who also hold Croatian citizenship
- Defamation campaigns by pro-government tabloids, including **Informer**
- Informal summons for "friendly talks" issued by Security Intelligence Agency, used as an intimidation tool
- Statements by the executive branch calling for the arrest of individuals allegedly "spreading panic"
- Physical assault on journalist Saša Dragojlo during a protest orchestrated by pro-government activists
- Declaration of an anti-corruption campaign by a body lacking the legal mandate or jurisdiction to undertake such actions
- Severe physical assault in Novi Sad resulting in a fractured jaw of a student from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts
- Baton strikes inflicted on students and citizens during the protest in front of the National Assembly
- Attack on students of Faculty of Economy, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Sport and Physical Education
- Police intervention at the Medical Faculty of the city Niš
- Government's decree on the acquittal of teacher's salaries

- Violence and arrest of political opponents and members of the opposing party
- Attorney and ruling party official Vladimir Đukanović asserted that children are to be regarded as the property of the state until they reach the age of maturity, thereby endorsing the notion of extensive state authority over minors and raising serious concerns regarding parental rights, individual liberties, and the potential abuse of state power
- Attorney Đukanović additionally encouraged police to arrest students participating in faculty blockades, thereby endorsing the use of coercive measures against peaceful forms of academic dissent
- The Public Prosecutor's Office has ordered the arrest of engineer Zoran Đajić on suspicion of endangering the security of President Vučić based on a social media post
- The expulsion and one-year entry ban imposed on Italian pianist Davide Martello, who performed in solidarity with students during the five-hour bridge blockade in Niš, based on the alleged suspicion that he would not use his tourist visit for its declared purpose, represents an unjustified restriction on freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly
- Physical attack on students of Sport and Physical Education on the streets of Novi Sad
- An armed assault on the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš by individuals supportive of the current regime
- Arrest of STAV and PSG activists who are political prisoners.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Students of Serbia