

[April 16th, 2025]

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate for Democracy and Human Dignity

Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations

1049 Brussels, Belgium

Subject: Notification of protests and continued human rights violations in Serbia

Dear Members of the European Commission,

We are writing to draw your attention to the alarming human rights violations taking place in Serbia and to inform you of the ongoing protests that have been taking place for the past five months. These protests, led by students across Serbia and organized with the support of citizens and their widespread backing, reflect deep dissatisfaction with the erosion of democratic principles, political repression, violations of fundamental freedoms in the country, and the abandonment of the rule of law.

During this period, and as is known to the international community, numerous reports have documented the excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies against peaceful protesters, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation tactics against activists, students, journalists, opposition figures, and citizens. The media environment continues to deteriorate, and independent media outlets face increasing pressure and censorship, while the state public service has remained passive to the protests, barely mentioning them in the five months they have been ongoing. The authorities in the Republic of Serbia have resorted to legal and extralegal measures to suppress the protests, and by instrumentalizing pro-regime media, they are seeking to spread fear and consistently insult the entire population expressing their dissatisfaction in peaceful protests.

Namely, as a reminder, in Novi Sad, on November 1, 2024, at 11:52, a recently (twice) reconstructed canopy at the railway station collapsed. When the canopy collapsed, 14 people died on the spot, and 3 people were seriously injured. One of the three injured people died on November 17, 2024, while the other person (a nineteen-year-old young man) lost his fight for life on March 21, 2025, and the number of victims increased to 16. Due to inadequate reactions from institutions and false statements by the President of the Republic and public authorities on national frequencies, there was no reconstruction of the canopy; citizens took to the streets on November 5, 2024, and thereby publicly and strongly expressed their dissatisfaction.

On November 15, 2024, at 11:52, citizens across Serbian cities paid tribute with a fourteen-minute silence at peaceful rallies called "Serbia Stop." The idea was to pay tribute to the victims at the same time every Friday (the day the canopy fell). However, the next tribute lasted 15 minutes, given that two days later, on November 17, another person passed away.

Already in the first days after the canopy fell, it became clear that this tragic event was not just a mere coincidence, but the consequence of long-standing and deeply rooted corrupt practices, the practice of putting pressure on the profession to achieve political goals, and the erosion and absence of all institutions.

Professors and students of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, on November 22, 2024, gathered near the faculty to pay tribute to the victims. On that day, the gathered citizens were physically attacked, among whom were most of the students and professors of this higher education institution. The inadequate reactions of the competent institutions and public authorities to the attack on students and professors led to the students of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts organizing the first plenum. At that plenum, on November 25, 2024, a blockade of this higher education institution was voted.

Physical attacks on students and citizens did not stop, however; they intensified. Every day, we witnessed numerous attacks on students and citizens who gathered to pay tribute to those who died in the collapse of the canopy. Reactions from the competent institutions were, once again, lacking, and the responses to the attacks on students and citizens were not processed or punished. The President of the Republic has constantly relativized violence in the regime media, and the public services (Radio Television of Serbia and Radio Television of Vojvodina) are receiving strong criticism from the authorities for the sake of biases and biased reporting and in relation to those rare situations when public service reported about the protests and in connection with the same.

Given all the social circumstances and incidents that occurred during that period throughout the country, students from other faculties in Serbia, in a sign of solidarity with their colleagues from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, blocked their higher education institutions. Currently, around 40 public higher education institutions throughout Serbia are blocked until the students' demands are met (the students' demands are attached to this letter and form part of it). Also, expressing strong solidarity with the students, general dissatisfaction with the situation in the country and dissatisfaction with the work of institutions, and especially about the prosecution of those responsible for the collapse of the canopy, the educational workers across Serbia in primary and secondary schools and kindergartens, through strike, joined the blockades. Farmers and professional organizations, such as cultural workers, actors, lawyers, and others, also stopped their work (a *de facto* strike).

Despite all the pressure, threats, and blackmail, the people of Serbia continue to peacefully gather across the country, expressing their dissatisfaction with the erosion of institutions, political pressure and control over the work of independent institutions, the absence of any

responsibility for corrupt practices, and the fall of the canopy. Since the fall of the canopy on November 1, 2024, dozens of protests have been organized across Serbia, with the most massive protests being:

1. Protest at Slavija in Belgrade on December 22, 2024.
2. Blockade of Autokomanda in Belgrade on January 27, 2025 , which lasted 24 hours.
3. Blockade of 3 bridges in Novi Sad on February 1, 2025, which lasted 27 hours.
4. Protest in Kragujevac called "Let's Meet on Sretenje" on February 15, 2025, which lasted 15 hours.
5. The protest in Novi Pazar called “Hurry to the Pazar” was held on February 27, 2025.
6. The protest in Niš called "Student Edict" was held on March 1, 2025.
7. The protest in Belgrade called “15 for 15” was held on March 15, 2025. **This protest is considered to be the most massive protest in Serbia.**

In the context of the requirements towards the European Union, we recall that Serbia, as a candidate country for EU membership, is expected to uphold the core values enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, including freedom of expression, assembly, and the rule of law. However, the current situation raises serious concerns regarding the country’s commitment to these principles and the fundamental values of the Union. Given the EU’s role in monitoring progress in the accession process, we call on the European Commission to take concrete steps to identify and address these systematic human rights violations, including:

1. Conducting an independent assessment of the state of human rights and democratic backsliding in Serbia,
2. Pressure on Serbian authorities to respect the rights of peaceful protesters and stop repressive measures,
3. Ensuring that the actions of government bodies in the Republic of Serbia are linked to tangible democratic reforms and the protection of fundamental freedoms.

The Serbian people have shown extraordinary resilience in their quest for justice and democratic accountability. We trust that the European Commission will recognize the urgency of this situation and take appropriate measures to defend human rights and the rule of law.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We remain at your disposal for any further information regarding these issues.

Respectfully,

Students and citizens of Serbia

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.

*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. 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 is 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."