

Protests Against Corruption in Serbia: A Review of Events and Institutional Response

Introduction

On November 1, 2024, a canopy at the recently reconstructed Railway Station in Novi Sad, Serbia's second-largest city, collapsed, resulting in the deaths of 15 individuals. Protests erupted across Serbia in response, with citizens demanding that the responsible authorities find and punish those accountable for the tragedy. During one such protest, students from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, who were peacefully paying their respects to the victims, were attacked. It was revealed that the attackers were members of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and officials from local bodies and state-owned enterprises. This attack on students sparked the beginning of student blockades at universities nationwide, gaining broad support from various sectors of society, including teachers, workers, farmers, lawyers, artists, and others. Young people initiated a wave of protests against corruption and for the rule of law. Their demands are clear: they call for independent and accountable institutions that are expected to simply do their jobs and punish those responsible for the deaths of 15 individuals, as well as those who attack students and citizens engaged in peaceful protests. The student blockades began on November 22, 2024, and in the following months, numerous attacks and institutional pressures were applied on the students and their supporters. The repressive mechanisms employed by the government have proven ineffective, as students continue to courageously demand the fulfillment of their demands.

Timeline of Events (Selected)

November 1, 2024: The canopy at the Railway Station in Novi Sad collapsed, resulting in the death of 14 people on the spot, with one more person later succumbing to their injuries.

November 5, 2024: The first large protest in Novi Sad (according to Civic Initiatives, 15 people were arrested, all were later released); Minister of Construction, Transport, and Infrastructure Goran Vesić resigned.

November 20, 2024: Minister of Foreign and Domestic Trade Tomislav Momirović resigned; Jelena Tanasković, Acting Director General of "Infrastructure Railways of Serbia", also resigned.

November 21, 2024: A blockade in front of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts – the first attack on students (direct trigger for the start of student blockades); Goran Vesić arrested.

November 25, 2024: Announcement of faculty blockades.

November 27, 2024: Goran Vesić's detention was revoked.

December 11, 2024: The government begins publishing documents related to the reconstruction of the Railway Station in Novi Sad.

December 13, 2024: It was announced that the government has published all documents related to the reconstruction.

December 22, 2024: A large protest at Slavija Square, with an estimated 100,000 citizens present, according to the Public Gatherings Archive.

December 30, 2024: The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad indicted 13 individuals, including former Minister of Transport Goran Vesić and former director of Infrastructure Railways of Serbia Jelena Tanasković.

December 31, 2024: The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad released additional documentation regarding the canopy collapse at the Railway Station in Novi Sad; students and citizens in Belgrade welcomed the New Year in silence, with a 15-minute protest of silence for the victims.

January 31, 2025: Students from Serbia nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

January 16, 2025: A student was seriously injured after being hit by a car during a blockade.

January 17, 2025: A large protest in front of the RTS (Radio Television of Serbia) building, with an estimated 50,000 people present.

January 23, 2025: Counter-mitigation rally by Aleksandar Vučić in Jagodina.

January 24, 2025: General strike (over 700 legal entities suspended work); another student seriously injured after being hit by a car.

January 26, 2025: Prime Minister Vučević announces that additional documentation regarding the canopy collapse will be released, although he previously stated in December that all documents had already been published; on the same day, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad releases a file titled "Remaining Documentation Part 3."

January 27, 2025: A 24-hour blockade at Autokomanda, Belgrade.

January 28, 2025: In the early morning hours, a group of men exited the premises of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party in Novi Sad and attacked two groups of students, one of the students was severely injured with a baton; Prime Minister Vučević resigned; Novi Sad Mayor Milan Đurić also resigned.

January 30, 2025: Students from Belgrade begin their walk to Novi Sad.

February 1, 2025: A large protest in Novi Sad and a blockade of three bridges, marking three months since the canopy collapse, with a 27-hour blockade at the Freedom Bridge.

February 12, 2025: Students block the Student Cultural Center and send a message to "SKC belongs to students."

February 14, 2025: Students arrive in Kragujevac, some having walked or cycled from Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Novi Pazar, Kraljevo, Čačak, and other cities across the country.

February 15, 2025: A large rally of students and citizens in Kragujevac, marking Statehood Day (Sretenje); a Serbian Progressive Party rally in Sremska Mitrovica, with citizens bused in from across Serbia and the Republic of Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Canopy Collapse

The recently reconstructed canopy at the entrance to the Novi Sad Railway Station collapsed on November 1, 2024. Fourteen people died at the scene, and three others were severely injured. Two weeks after the collapse, another person passed away from their injuries.

The reconstruction of the Railway Station began in 2021, and the station was ceremonially opened twice. The first ceremony took place during the 2022 pre-election campaign, with President Aleksandar Vučić and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in attendance. The second opening, two years later, was attended by Novi Sad Mayor Milan Đurić, Minister of Transport Goran Vesić, and the President of the Government of Vojvodina, Maja Gojković. The main contractor for the reconstruction was a consortium of Chinese companies. In January 2024, the Ministry of Transport refused to respond to a request for public information submitted by an online media portal, denying access to documents regarding the station's reconstruction. The Ministry cited that the Chinese contractor did not want this information to be made public before the completion of the project.

In the hours following the canopy collapse, pro-government tabloids and media outlets simultaneously published articles claiming that the old part of the station had collapsed, which, according to their statements, had not been part of the reconstruction - although this information was inaccurate. Nevertheless, this attempt to deflect responsibility from the current government officials was unsuccessful.

Citizens across the country began demanding that those responsible for the reconstruction and the commissioning of a station that was not safe for use - including the highest state officials - be prosecuted and held accountable. The influence of the executive branch over all other branches, including the judiciary, led to citizens being forced to seek answers on the streets in recent years. This is how the protests began, followed by fifteen-minute "Stop, Serbia" actions - traffic blockades in cities across Serbia where citizens paid tribute to the victims and demanded accountability. The protests started due to the corruption that led to the canopy collapse. In parallel, the government responded to the protests with institutional pressures, campaigns of intimidation and targeting, physical and verbal attacks, and tabloid campaigns.

Protests, Pressures, and the Demand for Accountability

Citizen protests against corruption and the lack of independent institutions to conduct investigations began shortly after the tragic incident in Novi Sad. The government immediately launched a counteroffensive, even resorting to violent actions against protest participants. Young people - students - did not remain silent in response to extreme provocations and serious physical assaults orchestrated by the ruling party.

The initial protests were organized by citizens and informal groups. Ahead of the first protest related to the canopy collapse, [Nikola Ristić, an activist from the SviĆe group, was detained in Belgrade](#). Plainclothes police officers initially refused to reveal where they would take Ristić and prevented another SviĆe activist from recording the event, but under pressure, they announced that the activist would be transferred to a police station in the Savski Venac municipality of Belgrade. Ristić was released later that day and stated that the police had informed him they had received an order from the High-Tech Crime Prosecutor's Office, based on indications that he had committed [a criminal act of calling for violent change of the constitutional order under Article 309](#), Paragraph 1, and Article 320, Paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code.¹ The actions of the plainclothes police officers during the protests following the canopy collapse violated numerous legal provisions and police regulations for handling such situations. The police did not identify themselves to the citizens they detained, nor did they show their badges.

[Greater unrest and clashes with the police](#) were recorded during the protest in Novi Sad on November 5. On that date, Goran Vesić, five days after the accident, [resigned from his position](#) as Minister of Construction, Transport, and Infrastructure. At the press conference, he stated, "I cannot accept responsibility for the death of 14 people, as neither I nor the people working with me bear any responsibility for the tragedy that occurred." Fifteen days later, Minister of Foreign and Internal Trade [Tomislav Momirović](#) (who was the former Minister of Construction), and [Jelena Tanasković](#), the acting director of Infrastructure Railways Serbia, resigned. Neither of them stated that they were resigning because of the canopy collapse, but they thanked Aleksandar Vučić for the cooperation.

The gathering in Novi Sad on November 5 began near the Railway Station, and later, citizens headed toward the City Hall, where police forces equipped for riot control were stationed. At

¹ A large number of citizens and activists during the ecological protests against Rio Tinto in 2024 were summoned for informational interviews or detained due to their posts on social media, with security services invoking the same article of the law.

one point, a large group of masked men began breaking the windows of the City Hall with sticks and throwing firecrackers into the building. Opposition representatives claimed that these were hooligans and members of fan groups who were “[planted](#)” by the government [to provoke unrest](#). Allegations of “infiltrators” have appeared in the past after large anti-government protests. On several occasions, during anti-government, ecological, and other protests, groups of men dressed in black with caps and masks have been seen among the protestors. These groups are believed to be linked to football fan groups and hired to undermine the legitimacy and peaceful nature of protests, as well as to provoke a police response. The police, provoked by the violent behavior of the masked men, would then attack the citizens, while avoiding the men in black who instigated the violent incidents.² Groups of unidentified young men also [vandalized other locations](#) in Novi Sad during the protest on November 5. However, the plainclothes police, often without showing identification, did not arrest members of the violent group but instead detained peacefully gathered citizens. According to Civic Initiatives, from November 3, 2024, to January 21, 2025, 51 individuals (including citizens, activists, and opposition politicians) were detained and/or arrested at protests related to the Novi Sad tragedy.

After the protest in Novi Sad, [activist Ivan Bjelić was detained](#). A plainclothes police officer showed his badge and stated that there was footage of Bjelić throwing “stones and paint at the assembly”. Bjelić was released from detention 23 days later. During the same protest, [Miran Pogačar](#), a member of the “Bravo” movement, was detained while attempting to approach the SNS offices, where President Vučić was addressing party members. After questioning, he was released from detention. [Miša Bačulov](#), an opposition activist, was also detained for 48 hours for allegedly releasing feces from a tanker in front of the Novi Sad City Hall, which was said to have endangered public health. He remained in detention until November 22, after it was revealed that the substance released was water from Zrenjanin, a city facing a 20-years long water access issue. [Goran Ješić, an opposition politician, was detained](#) for pushing a man who was dragging a young man. It turned out the young man was being taken by plainclothes police officers who had not identified themselves or shown their badges. Ješić is being prosecuted for

² A similar clash with the police was recorded on December 24, 2023, during protests held due to allegations of electoral fraud. The protest rally continued on December 24, after the Republic Electoral Commission (REM), in front of the Belgrade City Assembly building, when opposition MPs attempted to enter the building. Their entry was blocked by heavy police forces securing the building. Shortly after, a group of men wearing hoodies threw stones at the entrance. Opposition parties stated that these were hooligans planted by the government to provoke unrest at the protest. The police then threw smoke bombs and pepper spray at the gathered citizens and began breaking up the protest. Numerous examples of police violence against protesters were captured on video and photographs, and during the police charge, [several people were injured](#). Several journalistic teams were attacked during the protest as well. [Thirty-eight people were arrested](#), including [four students](#), who were taken by armed individuals into a civilian vehicle.

assaulting a police officer, but he was released on November 22. On the same day, the young man Ješić tried to protect was also released. The morning after the protest, activists who had peacefully protested were detained. Branislav Đorđević, an activist of the Stav group, was detained for taking down a flag from the SNS premises. The prosecution later determined that there were no grounds for criminal prosecution. Numerous attacks on journalistic teams were recorded during the protest. [N1's team was attacked](#) by masked men who broke the camera and verbally attacked journalist Žaklina Tatalović. During the broadcast, [another N1 journalist was verbally attacked and shoved](#) by an SNS supporter, who was accompanied by SNS MP Biljana Pantić Pilja, who came to Novi Sad with Vučić and other MPs for a counter-assembly. Reporters from the 021.rs portal were [hit with red paint and plastic packaging](#). An Euronews cameraman was also attacked in front of the Serbian Progressive Party premises. Attacks on journalists during protests in Serbia were condemned by [Reporters Without Borders](#), stating that journalists "were subjected to physical attacks by the police and supporters of President Vučić during anti-corruption protests."

Detentions continued at later protests. Pavle Cicvarić, a student and member of the Borba group, [was detained](#) when he attempted to enter the University of Belgrade Rectorate. A group of students had gathered to attend the Student Day event. It was announced that President Vučić would attend the event, so Borba called on young people to express dissatisfaction with the lack of institutional response after the collapse of the roof. The president's visit was canceled due to an emergency session of the National Security Council. The gathered students were not allowed to enter the building because their names were not on a special list. Two police officers asked Cicvarić to identify himself, and a third officer appeared, insisting that he show his ID again, even though the student had already done so. At that moment, the officer twisted the student's arm. Cicvarić spent about an hour in the police station before rejoining the group outside the Rectorate.

Before the start of another protest in Novi Sad on November 8, 2024, [activists Mila Pajić and Doroteja Antić were detained](#). Six men approached them, who did not identify themselves, and it was later revealed that they were members of the security services. The activists refused to go with them because they could not clearly see police insignia or badge numbers. This led to an aggressive reaction from these men, who lifted the activists and shoved them into a black car without plates or other markings. The activists described this as a kidnapping, as they did not know who was taking them or where. On the same day, [Miran Pogačar was detained again](#) by the Security Information Agency (BIA) just before the start of a blockade. Nikola Končarević, arrested the day before, was also released from detention before the protest and [fined 25,000](#)

[dinars for disturbing public peace and order](#). Bojan Terzić, a member of the Solidarity platform, who [spent 20 hours in solitary confinement](#) on charges of destroying and damaging someone else's property, was also released when it was determined that there was no evidence for the charge.

Under pressure from the protests, the prosecution finally ordered the arrest of the suspects, 20 days after the roof collapse. On December 30, the Novi Sad Higher Public Prosecutor's Office raised charges against 13 people, including former Minister of Transport Goran Vesić and former director of Infrastructure Serbian Railways Jelena Tanasković.

Due to the Novi Sad accident and the repression against activists, opposition MPs and councilors [blocked the Novi Sad Higher Public Prosecutor's Office](#) for several days. Every day, there were pushing [incidents](#) with police in full gear securing the prosecutor's office. During these incidents, MPs were pushed. One MP was arrested, and a criminal complaint was filed against him for attacking a police officer. An elderly man was [arrested](#) during a protest in front of the Prosecutor's Office on November 21 for spraying a police officer with pepper spray. The arrested pensioner (74) was later [beaten in the police station](#), requiring surgery a few days later, during which part of his body was removed.

After the initial protests, citizens across Serbia began daily "Stop, Serbia" actions. These are commemorative traffic blockages lasting 15 minutes (from 11:52 to 12:07) in memory of those killed in the roof collapse. Parallel to the beginning of these 15-minute traffic blockades, physical and verbal attacks on peaceful protesters began. Institutional pressure from the top of the government continued, supported by a powerful tabloid media machine.

Attacks on the "Stop, Serbia" actions

After the initial protests, citizens began holding 15-minute traffic blockages every Friday and later every day. This form of protest is protected under international law, specifically General Comment No. 37, which relates to the freedom of peaceful assembly guaranteed by Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The General Comment states that even if a protest is not in accordance with domestic legal provisions, it still enjoys protection as long as it remains peaceful. However, the peaceful nature of the protests was disrupted by aggressive individuals, often allegedly random passersby or drivers, many of whom were later found to be members or close associates of the ruling party, SNS.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) is obligated to ensure the peaceful nature of protests and protect participants, as well as redirect traffic to accessible routes. However, the number of recorded incidents showed a lack of intent from the MUP to protect peaceful protesters. After several serious incidents, including young female students suffering severe physical injuries, the MUP visibly increased its presence at protests and blockades. In addition to plainclothes police officers, traffic police began to secure the protests, a response to public outcry over these numerous incidents.

During one of the blockades in front of the RTS building, a confrontation occurred with a group of men. Media reports indicated that some of these men were [municipal employees](#) from the ruling party. On the same day, November 22, an individual [punched a protester](#) in Loznica. Members of the Kikinda city council verbally attacked the assembled protesters. In Novi Sad, a [taxi driver drove into the group](#) of citizens, and the taxi association later stated that the driver would be sanctioned. Attacks on protesters continued in subsequent days. On another protest on November 29 in front of the RTS building, a [driver attempted to drive through the crowd](#). A similar incident took place in Valjevo, where an unknown driver tried to drive through protesters at an intersection but was stopped.

This kind of violence was also seen in Požarevac, where [a driver carried an elderly protester on the hood of his car](#). After this incident, [President Aleksandar Vučić made a statement](#) effectively justifying the behavior of drivers hitting protesters, claiming, "If someone jumps on the hood of a car because the person wanted to pass, how can we arrest the driver? The person was just going their way." This statement seemed to legitimize the violence directed at protesters.

Allegations of the ruling party's involvement in organizing attacks on protest participants were further supported by a leaked video in which Novi Sad councilor [Damir Zobenica](#) is heard instructing SNS members on how to provoke citizens paying tribute to victims of the Novi Sad tragedy. Initially, President Vučić [dismissed the video as fake](#), but Zobenica [eventually resigned](#) from his position as Vice President of the Assembly of Vojvodina and as a member of the provincial parliament two weeks after the video surfaced.

SNS members were spotted among provocateurs at subsequent traffic blockades. One of the [provocateurs](#) seen at a "Stop, Serbia" protest in Sombor on November 29 had also been present at an earlier protest in Belgrade, where citizens opposing the demolition of the Old Sava Bridge were attacked. On November 29, in Loznica, a [man attacked a female protester with a baton](#). Municipal officials from SNS [verbally attacked](#) citizens in Zrenjanin, and [local SNS officials](#)

[obstructed citizens](#) in Kula. Two members of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra were [injured](#) when a man drove his car through the intersection that protesters had blocked. The driver was later [arrested](#).

On December 13, 2024, during a street blockade in Novi Sad, four individuals drove through the protest, parked their car, and began physically assaulting the protesters. Two participants were injured, and the four men were arrested. One of the men was later found to be a police officer. This was not the only case of violent behavior. On January 3, 2025, in Novi Sad, a man exited his vehicle and attacked protesters. Another man got out of the other car and sprayed the attacker with pepper spray and was subsequently arrested. The Novi Sad Higher Court accepted a plea agreement in which the individual who sprayed the attacker with pepper spray was found guilty of violent behavior during a public gathering or protest. There is no known indication that the violent attacker faced any consequences for his actions.

In Belgrade's Karaburma neighborhood, on January 30, bricks were thrown at protesters from a nearby building, but fortunately, no one was injured. A few days later, in the same neighbourhood, firecrackers were thrown at protesters during a peaceful protest march. On January 31, in front of the Institute for Mental Health in Belgrade, a car ran into two female doctors during the blockade, but they sustained only minor injuries. However, the fact that cars continued to pass through the blocked areas, despite increased police presence, underscores the need for better police protection of public gatherings.

On February 6 and 7, two incidents were recorded in Novi Sad, where a driver drove into one protester who was standing on a pedestrian path, and the following day, an elderly couple attempted to break through a blockade in the same city. They verbally attacked the protesters after being stopped. These continued incidents indicate a lack of sufficient enforcement of safety for peaceful assemblies, raising concerns about the safety of future protests.

The Beginning of Student Blockades

Among the numerous attacks on participants of the "Stop Serbia" actions, one particularly stands out. It refers to an attack that occurred in front of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts (FDU) in Belgrade. On November 22, 2024, a group of supposedly random traffic participants got out of their cars in front of FDU and attacked the gathered citizens, including students. Soon, the public discovered that these "random passersby" were actually members and officials of the

Serbian Progressive Party: Milija Koldžić, a member of the New Belgrade City Council, Ivan Stanišić, Aleksandar Jokić, Dušan Kostić, and Milena Aleksić. Following this attack, FDU students announced they would begin a blockade of the faculty and set forth specific demands. They requested that the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) file criminal charges with the competent prosecutor's office against the individuals who attacked the students during the street action on November 22, 2024, and that the police confirm the attackers' identities. They also demanded the dismissal of Milija Koldžić from his position as a member of the New Belgrade City Council and the initiation of disciplinary proceedings against Aleksandar Jokić, coordinator of the distribution area of Elektrodistribucija Belgrade. No dismissal occurred, but Milija Koldžić resigned from his position as a member of the New Belgrade City Council, and Aleksandar Jokić resigned from his position as Coordinator for the distribution area of ED Belgrade a month after the incident. FDU students were soon joined by their peers from other faculties, and by December 13, 2024, nearly all faculties in Belgrade and Novi Sad had joined the blockade. By December 16, 2024, all faculties in Niš were also blocked. According to the latest information from December 26, 2024, a total of 85 faculties, 84 of which were public, were in blockade, and after the winter break, 73 high schools also joined the protests. Only 28 faculties in the entire country remained unblocked.

The demands of the students included:

1. The publication of complete documentation on the reconstruction of the Railway Station in Novi Sad.
2. Dismissal of criminal charges against arrested and detained students at protests
3. Confirmation by the competent authorities on the identity of all persons suspected of physical assault on students and professors, the initiation of criminal proceedings against them and their dismissal from public office if it is determined that they are holding it
4. Increasing the budget for higher education by 20 percent.

Thus began a unique student movement that profoundly changed Serbia's social landscape. Students took over the faculties, and their demands were supported by their professors as well as the University of Belgrade and Niš. In addition to educators, the student demands received support from farmers, workers, pensioners, lawyers, artists, and other citizens throughout Serbia. This led to daily fifteen-minute traffic blockades, with students making decisions collectively in plenums. The emerging student movement was characterized by solidarity, unity, and collective care. They demonstrated persistence in achieving their goals, with the primary objective being the liberation of captured institutions to ensure they operate independently and

in the public, not private interest. The students chose to act collectively, without highlighting individuals within their ranks.

At the same time, the authorities took steps to suppress the new wave of protests. The rhetoric of top government officials fluctuated over time, but targeting remained a constant feature. Initially, harsh and violent rhetoric opposing the protests, supported by a campaign in pro-regime media, inevitably led to an increase in violence on the streets faced by students and citizens supporting them. Government representatives simultaneously launched an already seen campaign against civil society organizations, with typical accusations that the protests were funded by foreign powers “seeking to overthrow Serbia and President Vučić.” In January 2025, the highest government officials, including the president, began to claim that the demands had been met, and in February, in a letter forwarded by the Serbian government to Serbian embassies in European countries, it was stated that the demands of the students were justified. In the same letter, which the Serbian government instructed embassies to distribute across European countries, it was emphasized that “Serbia has no intention to expel or ban any NGO organization. On the contrary, Serbia welcomes and expects their active participation in the reforms the country is committed to carrying out. A strong and engaged civil society is essential for a clear and unambiguous European path and the successful implementation of reforms.” However, simultaneously, the campaign against students, citizens, and the civil sector continued, with the president regularly mentioning that “colored revolutions” were taking place in Serbia. The campaign against non-governmental organizations intensified particularly after the closure of USAID.

With the onset of student blockades, a significant number of attacks on students and citizens participating in the blockades were recorded. In addition to physical and verbal assaults on the gathered individuals, frequent incidents included vehicles driving through the crowd, which particularly endangered citizens and caused severe injuries to some. These attacks were not only uncondemned by top government officials, but many, including the president, justified them in their public appearances. SNS MP Vladimir Đukanović, appearing on a national television channel, stated, “Those who protest want to be beaten.” He also added, “People are angry, they want to take batons, they want to break them like a straw. We are barely holding back our membership that would gladly let them through their hands and beat them.” The president of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), member of parliament, and war criminal Vojislav Šešelj, speaking about the student blockades, said, “I think it’s finally time they received such a beating that it would never cross their minds again.” However, the most serious threatening statement came from the president himself. On two separate occasions within a few days, he

stated that he had never thought about bringing out cobras³ to the streets that could "scatter them all," referring to the protesters, and that "it wouldn't take more than 6 or 7 seconds." Everyone understood this message as a clear threat meant to deter people from supporting the students. This rhetoric undoubtedly influenced individuals to resort to violence against those exercising their right to protest.

At the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad on December 10, students participating in the blockade and the N1 journalist team were attacked. They were attacked by young men close to the SNS. At the blockade near the Faculty of Electrical Engineering in Belgrade, on the same day, a violent man attacked the students. He got out of the vehicle, got in the face of one student, and then hit another student. It was later reported that the man had been arrested. A day later, the gathered students of technical faculties in Novi Sad, as well as the journalist N1, were insulted by the director of Sarajevo gas, otherwise a close associate of Milorad Dodik, the president of the Bosnian entity of Republika Srpska. The students were not only attacked by those who were seemingly dissatisfied with the traffic blockade. In certain situations, they also faced police reaction. After the address of the President of the State on December 12, the police brigade pushed the gathered students in front of the presidency. Namely, by making noise, the students wanted their voice to be heard at least in that way on all televisions with a national frequency.

Many incidents of vehicles driving through gathered students and citizens have been recorded. On December 15, in front of the Faculty of Agriculture, a driver drove through the crowd, hitting several people. During the blockades on December 16, a driver drove through the crowd in front of the Faculty of Security Studies in Belgrade, and two days earlier, a similar incident occurred in front of the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, injuring a young man. Another case of a vehicle driving through blockade participants was recorded on December 19 in front of the Faculty of Pharmacy, where a woman was hit. After a large protest at Slavija Square in Belgrade, a taxi driver hit a young man and fled the scene, but was later detained for 48 hours. The student and citizen protest at Slavija on December 22 gathered between 100,000 and 102,000 people, according to the Public Assembly Archive, making it the largest public gathering since October 5, 2000. On December 27, during a blockade in front of the Faculty of Economics, a woman drove with a student on the hood of her car; the student was later taken to the Emergency Center. The driver fled the scene. Near Kalemegdan, a man drove his car into a group of students from the Faculty of Fine Arts and the Faculty of Applied Arts. A similar

³ A special purpose military police unit responsible for counter-terrorist activities, special operations, close protection of military and civilian political figures representing the state, who are also engaged in the security of the President of the Republic.

incident occurred the same day at a blockade near the Faculties of Veterinary Medicine, Medicine, and Dentistry in Belgrade. During the New Year's student protest, a white van drove through the gathered crowd in front of the Rectorate. It did not stop, but no injuries were reported.

The most shocking attack on protesting students occurred on January 16. Cameras captured a disturbing moment when a driver forcefully hit a young woman just before a blockade on Roosevelt Street. The victim, a law student, sustained severe injuries, including a skull base fracture and internal bleeding. She was released for home care four days after the incident. The police announced that the driver was arrested, placed in 30-day detention, and charged with attempted aggravated murder. Law students were also victims of another violent attack. On the night between January 13 and 14, a group of individuals stormed the Faculty of Law, physically assaulting students while shouting slogans in support of the Serbian president. Seven students sustained minor injuries. The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office reported that four people were detained for the attack, despite students claiming that there were six assailants. The suspects were placed in 30-day detention.

The safety of students at blockades has also been threatened by verbal attacks and threats from so-called "random passersby" and individuals who hide their identities under hoods, caps, and scarves. On January 15, the Faculty of Agriculture in Novi Sad announced on its social media that an unknown man in a car had warned one of their colleagues not to attend the blockades anymore. During the protest blockades on January 17, 2025, another incident occurred near the Faculty of Law. Just before the silent standing action was set to begin, a driver attempted to break through the blockade but was surrounded by students. Throughout the action, the driver kept shouting provocations, trying to incite a reaction from the students who were peacefully paying tribute to the victims in Novi Sad. That same day, an older man brandished a knife at a student from the Faculty of Medicine in Novi Sad. Fortunately, students managed to stop him, and no one was injured. A younger man drew offensive graffiti featuring a middle finger on the building of the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering in Belgrade, biting a security guard and hitting a student in the process. On January 25, a man wielding a knife tore down student banners in front of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade. The next day, another man physically attacked a law student in Novi Sad. At the celebration of Saint Sava's Day at Matica Srpska in Novi Sad, students who wished to recite a poem were attacked by men dressed in black, presumed to be security personnel. However, the next day, the Matica Srpska Presidency stated that those who removed the students and physically assaulted one of them were not part of the institution's official security. This was followed by a smear campaign in pro-government media,

portraying students as desecrators of a sacred day and as promoters of "anti-Serbian" sentiment-an all-too-familiar nationalist and chauvinist propaganda tactic used by the ruling regime. On the night before January 21, calls to paint middle finger silhouettes appeared across social media. This action followed after SNS officials began displaying this vulgar symbol on their social media accounts. The red fist showing the middle finger was the SNS response to the protest symbol: a red hand with the message "Your hands are bloody." In the morning hours, activists and students attempted to remove shameful banners featuring the red fist with an extended middle finger, which had been placed on overpasses above major roads and bridges in Belgrade. At Mostar Interchange, an incident occurred when two activists removed one such banner. A so-called "guard" of the banner twisted one activist's arm, while another activist had their phone smashed and thrown off the overpass. A citizen trying to remove a similar banner on the Blue Bridge was also attacked.

During the student blockade in New Belgrade on January 24th, during the General Strike, a woman ran into and hit a group of stewards with a car. One of the female students who was a steward at the time hit her head on the curb and suffered neurosurgical head injuries, an epidural hematoma, a skull fracture, and brain contusion. This is the second serious case of injury to female students during blockades due to cars driving through the gathered protesters. The woman who was driving the car was detained for up to 30 days. After a 24-hour blockade of the Autokomanda area in Belgrade, another serious attack occurred in Novi Sad, where a female student was injured. This points to a high level of violence against young women actively involved in student protests and blockades. In Novi Sad, on the night between January 27th and 28th, two groups of students were attacked, and one of the female students sustained severe bodily injuries, requiring treatment at the Vojvodina Clinical Center. Initially, two men attacked a student and a female student who were sticking stickers on a trash can in front of the SNS premise. At that moment, two men came out of the SNS offices and physically assaulted the student and the female student. When the students managed to escape and began to run, the men came out with bats and chased them in a car throughout the city. The same two men, along with two others, later attacked another group of students in front of a school, and during that attack, they inflicted minor injuries on one student with baseball bats, while the female student was seriously injured. The men hit her on the head and legs with baseball bats, dislocated her jaw, and caused injuries all over her body. All of this happened after President Aleksandar Vučić made a public statement calling for dialogue and conversation, while just a few hours later, the assailants left the SNS offices and beat up young people. The Novi Sad police announced that they had arrested four men, suspected of being involved in the attack. The morning after the thugs with bats came out of the SNS offices, Serbian Prime Minister

Miloš Vučević and Novi Sad Mayor Milan Đurić resigned. Vučević stated: "The Mayor of Novi Sad and I consider ourselves objectively responsible for what happened in Novi Sad, and in that regard, we are willingly paying the political price

In addition to students, the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš also experienced the attack. Dean Natalija Jovanović was verbally and physically attacked during a student and civil protest on February 7. On one Boulevard in Niš, an elderly woman physically assaulted Dean Jovanović, telling her the words "we will kill you" and "you will pay for everything". Dean Jovanović received wider public attention because of the support she provides to students.

In addition to students, high school students also joined the blockades. They were not spared attacks and targeting either. During the blockade on November 29, 2024 in Sremski Karlovci in which high school students participated, a group of men insulted the gathered students. In the days that followed, a tabloid and campaign by state officials was conducted against the Karlovac high schoolers who participated in the blockade. The campaign was started by the Prime Minister of Serbia, Miloš Vučević, belittling young people and questioning their ability to think independently. Vučević falsely claimed in public that his son, a student of the aforementioned Gymnasium, was forced to come to the protest. The attacks on the students of the Karlovac High School did not end there. Several masked men threw firecrackers (a type of cannon fire) during a peaceful protest by students of this high school on December 18. The professors of the Gymnasium emphasized in [the statement](#) that: "Students were in a state of shock and fear, while they hugged each other and tried to calm down. Fortunately, there were no injuries, but the fear they endured has serious consequences." During the action "Stop, Serbia" held on December 23 in Šabac, [a taxi driver ran into the students](#) and hit a student and a teacher. The insult to the high school student also came from the top of the ruling party. Vladimir Đukanović, a prominent member of the SNS, stated that "[children up to the age of 18 are the property of the state](#)", thus disputing all the rights of children guaranteed in numerous domestic and international documents. Students of the Eighth Belgrade High School were [attacked by a man](#) at the blockade held on January 23. The day before, in New Belgrade, a man came out of the window of his apartment and [attacked the gathered students and professors](#) of the Graphic and Media School with a bat. In Novi Sad, on February 3, in front of the "Bogdan Šuput" Design School, a [man tried to drive his car through a line of male and female students](#). On that occasion, he tried to attack a professor, but he was prevented from doing so by a high school student who was a steward at the gathering. On February 12, a [driver drove a car](#) into high school students in Bečej, while the students organized a blockade of the intersection in that city.

However, in addition to all the listed incidents, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade announced on January 27 that [only eight criminal proceedings](#) are being conducted due to criminal offenses within the jurisdiction of this prosecution committed during student blockades and protests in the previous period, while one criminal proceeding was concluded with a final verdict based on the agreement on the recognition of the criminal offense. Proceedings are being conducted regarding: "the incident in front of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts on November 22, against the suspect who hit the members of the Philharmonic at the gathering on December 6, regarding the allegation by students of the Faculty of Economics on December 27, 2024 that during their blockade in Karađorđeva Street, a vehicle broke through the blockade, hit one student and carried him on the hood." The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade sent a request to the police to collect the necessary information in order to determine the factual situation, regarding the incident in Slavija after the large gathering on December 22, and against the man who brutally hit a student of the Faculty of Law in Rooseveltova Street. Proceedings have been initiated against the woman who hit and seriously injured a student with a car on the day of the General Strike. Only the proceedings against the man who hit a student at a rally in front of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering on December 12 have been completed.

Institutional pressures

In addition to direct physical attacks on the participants of the blockades, various institutional mechanisms of repression were also undertaken with the aim of intimidating and preventing students and citizens from participating in protests and blockades.

During these months, the students in the blockade were repeatedly invited to the premises of the BIA for informative interviews. They were [threatened with arrest](#) if they continued to go to the protests. They were also called from unknown phone numbers, and the callers posed as BIA agents. In the invitations, the students were threatened to end the blockades or face the consequences. Filip Ubović, a fourth-year student at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences, received a call like this from a hidden number where, as he said, someone introduced himself as an inspector, after which he was told "Filip, don't play around, [stay away until Friday or we will beat you up](#)." Members of the BIA also threatened some parents. The mother of a student of the Faculty of Law in Novi Sad was visited by two BIA agents at her work, trying to have a "friendly and unofficial" conversation. Also, on December 24, the BIA [contacted the father of Lazar Stojaković](#), a student at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences, with a recommendation

that his son "make peace" regarding student blockades and protests. The next day, he and his son Lazar were required to appear in the BIA office at the Ministry of the Interior, for a "friendly" informational interview. However, none of the inspectors appeared, and the "friendly" conversation was not even held.

In addition to the students, their parents, professors, teachers, farmers and workers in the energy sector who provided support to the students are also exposed to pressure. In the Novi Sad branch of the Institute for Health Protection of Employees of "Serbian Railways", [five employees were suspended](#) for participating in the commemorative action for the victims of the fall of the canopy. The security information agency [reacted to the farmers' announcement](#) that they would join the announced student protest with a threat. The BIA, according to the Initiative for the Survival of Serbian Farmers, threatened to confiscate the tractors of farmers if they decide to join the protest. Arrests, lawsuits, targeting campaigns, dismissals, job demotions and threats are the only response of the authorities to the determination of citizens to no longer suffer and remain silent on injustice, corruption, non-transparency and all illegal actions of the highest state officials. Several workers and trade unionists from the energy sector faced pressure for supporting the protests. A worker of the Kolubara [mining basin was detained](#) due to a Facebook status in which he called on his colleagues to stop work. Also because of Facebook comments, [police inspectors](#) came to the property of a farmer and questioned him for allegedly "causing general danger". The commissioner of the EPS union "Nezavisnost" as well as one of the leaders of the work body "Jedinstvo Kolubara" [received a warning before dismissal](#). Two workers spoke at the EPS employee protest and openly supported the student demands. The threat was fulfilled on February 12, so the commissioner of the EPS "Nezavisnost" trade union Dragoslav Ljubičić [was fired](#). On that occasion, Ljubičić [filed a lawsuit](#) for reinstatement in EPS.

Professors, teachers and students are dominantly exposed to pressure. The threats of an inspection announced by the outgoing Prime Minister Miloš Vučević and the Minister of Education Slavica Đukić Dejanović have come true. The inspection has so far visited as many as 83 schools, and disciplinary proceedings have been initiated against dozens of educators who are on suspension. The Minister of Education also sent a letter to schools [ordering a reduction in the wages](#) of those on strike. President Vučić also joined the threats, and on February 10, he addressed the teachers on television and declared: "In January, you all received your full salaries, and for February it will be how much you worked."

There were also several attempts to prevent educators from striking and protesting in accordance with their rights. Those who came to the protest of educators on January 20 in Belgrade, [the police stopped them on the road and prevented them from coming](#), which directly violated their freedom of movement and assembly, as well as their legally guaranteed rights related to the strike. Several people came to the Seventh Belgrade High School, where classes were suspended, who introduced themselves as employees of the Zvezdara Municipality and who announced that they had come to [talk to the director](#) about why there are no classes at the school. This is clearly another attempt to intimidate teachers in schools. A man who introduced himself as a parent entered the hall of the elementary school on Vidikovac in Belgrade and started [threatening to kill the teachers](#). [Threats](#) were also received on teachers' private phones, and [teachers](#) and [students](#) are continuously the target of tabloid harassment. In the media close to the authorities, at the national and local level, teachers and professors who provided support to their students were targeted.

Media campaign against students, citizens and the civil sector

Since the beginning of the protests, after the canopy collapsed and the start of the student blockades, pro-regime media have begun spreading propaganda rhetoric aimed at discrediting the protests. The biggest problem for the ruling party is that the student movement was built as a leaderless movement, meaning there were no individual figures they could target and discredit. Despite this, they still ran a campaign against certain students who gave statements to the media. The absence of movement leaders led the government to turn to "traditional" enemies, and in an attempt to crush the student rebellion, they labeled non-governmental organizations as alleged organizers of the protests, claiming their goal was to overthrow Vučić with the help of foreign powers. Government representatives consistently claimed that this was an attempt to carry out a "color revolution" with the help of "foreign forces."

The most serious form of targeting individual students was the publication of their personal documents. Specifically, ["Novosti" published photos of the passports of students](#) Lazar and Luka Stojaković. The two students have dual citizenship, and "Novosti" attempted to insinuate the involvement of Croatian services in the student protests. The [Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection](#), Milan Marinović, stated that efforts were underway to determine who had provided the media with the passport information of the two students. It is clear that the passport photos could have only come from institutions, and this

kind of targeting not only violated legal norms regarding the protection of personal data but also severely endangered the safety of the students. Nevertheless, pro-regime media continued violating journalistic codes, even publishing the [name and address of one student](#) who participated in the protest in Novi Sad, which led to threats against this student.

Such a poor media example was also followed by some unknown individuals who posted “wanted” posters with personal details of certain students. In Novi Sad, so-called [“wanted” posters](#) appeared with the [personal data of as many as 23 students](#) from the Faculty of Technical Sciences in the city. What is especially concerning is that the targeting of students and high schoolers involved not only anonymous individuals but also officials from the ruling Serbian Progressive Party. [The mayor of Leskovac](#), Goran Cvetanović, publicly commented on the grades of students from the Gymnasium in this city. [The mayor of Kraljevo](#), Predrag Terzić, posted photos of certain students on social media, on which Nazi and fascist symbols were digitally added. The mayor of Kraljevo practically called for the lynching of three students from Novi Sad University, calling them fascist and political activists of "leading anti-Serbian organizations," whose "only motive is to destroy Serbia." Terzić did not stop at targeting, which provoked a reaction from citizens, who, in response to the opposition’s call on February 20th, [blocked three intersections](#) in the city for five hours and demanded the mayor's resignation. The example of SNS officials was followed by the [mayor of Zaječar](#), Boško Ničić, who insulted and attacked a student on his Facebook profile.

Certain tabloids were forced to [remove over 100 articles](#) in which they presented unsubstantiated information or spread hate speech against participants in the blockades and protests. This was done at the request of the services through which their portals operate, due to violations of EU and Serbian laws. Over 100 articles were deleted from the portals of Alo, B92, Informer, and Srpski Telegraf. Between November 22 and December 17, [181 articles](#) about the student protests and blockades were published across these four tabloids. However, in the meantime, they found a way to avoid complying with the law and journalistic codes. Specifically, after the removal of articles in December, Informer.rs and Republika.rs (the portal of Srpski Telegraf) [started using the server of Telekom Serbia](#), while Alo.rs and Novosti.rs began using the server of Data Cloud Technology, a company that is 100% owned by the Republic of Serbia.

In addition to private media, the Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) also does not report adequately on the protests. Over nearly three months, the protests were covered by short segments in the daily news, often presented in an extremely negative context. For example, in one broadcast, the president's statement was aired, [suggesting that students were receiving](#)

[money for the protests](#) (a protest in front of RTS was organized on January 17 in response to this report). In another case, [a statement from Israeli historian Efraim Zuroff](#) was broadcast, in which he linked Serbian actors who supported the students to supporters of Hamas (because, at the end of a performance, the actors raised their hands painted in red, which is actually a symbol of the protest after the canopy collapse, not Hamas or any other group). The first longer report in RTS's central news broadcast was aired after the blockade of three bridges in Novi Sad on February 1, 2025. However, the [SNS immediately reacted](#), stating in a press release that "RTS scandalously reports on the protest" and that "by doing so, they violated all the rules and values of objective and impartial journalism," even though it was, in fact, the first time in three months that state television had reported on the protests in a neutral manner. In response to the lack of objectivity from the public broadcaster, [students from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts](#) created their own news program, with the first episode airing on February 20.

Since the beginning of the civil protests against corruption after the canopy collapse, and since the start of the student blockades, the authorities in Serbia have been attempting to discredit the protests and present the image to their voters that foreign forces (with a particular focus on Croatia⁴) and "pro-Western" NGOs are behind the protests. The government is especially affected by the fact that there are no leaders or figures to discredit in the authentic student protest (even though there are active attempts to target any student speaking publicly through pro-government media in the most vile ways).

In the absence of a way to discredit the student fight against corruption, representatives of the SNS are resorting to the old, created enemy. Members of the ruling party are trying to present non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as the ones behind the student protests, as they have spent decades undermining the reputation of NGOs in Serbia. Among the organizations particularly targeted are Civic Initiatives, CRTA, and the Trag Foundation, and numerous articles have been published in pro-government media where these organizations are presented as the organizers of the protests. Individuals from the civil sector, such as Maja Stojanović, the director of Civic Initiatives, Dragan Popović from the Center for Practical Politics, and Igor Bandović, the director of the Belgrade Center for Security Policy, have also been targeted and labeled as the

⁴ [The Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia, Ana Brnabić](#), stated in December 2024 that the blockades of faculties in Serbia are being carried out "according to the recipe of the 'Blockade Cookbook'," which is a student document describing the blockade of the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb in 2009. Ana Brnabić also stated, "It is clear that Croatian intelligence services are behind many things happening not only at this moment but also over the past ten years, especially since 2017 when Vučić became president." In pro-regime media and from the highest-ranking government officials, a synchronized campaign was heard accusing Croatia and its citizens of working to undermine Serbia.

["black trio"](#) allegedly behind the protests. The campaign against the NGO sector intensified after U.S. President Donald Trump shut down USAID (the U.S. Agency for International Development). High-ranking state officials, led by the president, and tabloids began attacking all organizations that received funding from this agency, convincing citizens that this money was used to conduct a "color revolution" in Serbia and that the agency's funds came from Mexican drug cartels. Officials labeled USAID and the NGOs in Serbia funded by this agency as a ["criminal group"](#) completely disregarding the fact that USAID has had long-term cooperation with the Serbian authorities, with donations from the agency amounting to 1.2 billion dollars primarily directed to the Serbian government. The president announced that [he would write a book](#) on how he "defeated the color revolution." At the Serbian Progressive Party's gathering in Sremska Mitrovica, he further stated, "I will destroy you worldwide, because my book on how I defeated the 'color revolution' will be the most-read bestseller globally. It will be sold in China, all over the world. Now I know you to the core, every euro and dollar you invest is for the purpose of destroying the country."

Pro-regime media have published a large number of articles claiming that a "color revolution" is being implemented in Serbia, supposedly orchestrated by NGOs. These articles suggest that students have been instructed and manipulated by the NGO sector. Numerous organizations working on democracy, human rights, transparency, electoral conditions, and other issues have been targeted. Civic Initiatives has been accused of being the logistical organizer of the protests and allegedly influencing students through ProGlas. The executive director of Civic Initiatives has been mentioned as the leader of an "extremist organization" and as an "agent." What is especially concerning is that government representatives themselves are labeling NGOs as the alleged organizers of the protests. In one of the press conferences, Aleksandar Vučić stated, "The involvement of NGOs in Autokomanda projects is no secret," and that "they are not interested in human lives in the NGO sector, but rather see tragedy as their opportunity." In response to the targeting of the director of Civic Initiatives and her family, the [National Convention on the EU](#) and a group of NGOs issued a statement. In addition to Civic Initiatives, CRTA and the Trag Foundation have also been targeted. By name, Vukosava Crnjanski Sabović, the founder and director of CRTA, and Biljana Dakić Đorđević, the former director of the Trag Foundation and currently at Partners Global, [have been targeted](#). Several articles with [dangerous and inaccurate claims](#) have been published, including one in Alo tabloid, which claims that "the Trag Foundation is financing protests with dirty money from drugs."

In addition to tabloids, state authorities have also joined in targeting civil sector activists, thus violating Serbian laws. On February 6, Radar weekly revealed that the [Anti-Money Laundering](#)

[Administration had requested account checks](#) from all banks in Serbia for five activists: Maja Stojanović (Civic Initiatives), Katarina Đukić (ProGlas), Sofija Todorović (Youth Initiative for Human Rights), Predrag Voštinić (Local Front), and Nebojša Petković (Ne Damo Jadar). Signed by Željko Radovanović, the acting director of the Administration, citing the Law on Preventing Money Laundering and Financing Terrorism, this is yet another abuse of a state institution for the purposes of the ruling party to deal with dissenters. In 2019, the administration unlawfully requested banking data on 57 individuals and organizations (the "List" case). The [UN Special Rapporteurs](#) and MoneyVal, a key organization for evaluating the implementation of laws in this area, responded to the situation, stating that the Serbian authorities had abused the law to target critics. The new account checks come amid the anti-corruption protests and the government's attack on NGOs, and it is expected that the data collected will, as in the "List" case, be misused for continuing the campaign and attempts to discredit the protests and activists.

In light of these circumstances, NGOs that are members of the Council for Creating an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development of the Serbian Government announced on January 25, 2025, that they had unanimously decided to suspend their participation in this body. The organizations, in a joint statement, said: "Membership in this body of the Government of Serbia will be frozen until the circumstances that led to the endangerment of civil society operations in Serbia and violations of domestic and international regulations and planning documents in this area are addressed." Furthermore, due to the government's persistent attempts to suppress the student protests and avoid fulfilling the demands essential for the functioning of the rule of law, a group of 28 NGOs and media associations announced that they would [suspend all cooperation](#) with legislative and executive authorities in Serbia, withdrawing from all working groups and bodies they were part of, evaluating that the government is falsifying democratic processes and undermining the rule of law.

Are the demands fulfilled?

At a press conference on January 27, 2025, [Aleksandar Vučić stated](#) that all student demands had been met and called on the students for dialogue. However, at the same conference, he announced that further documentation regarding the collapse of the canopy would be published, even though he had claimed in December that all documents had already been released. He also stated that he was ready to sign a pardon for all students and professors facing

criminal charges, despite the fact that a pardon can only be issued after individuals have been convicted.

Vučić, during his address, announced the publication of the "complete documentation" for the third time, even though on December 11, 2024, he stated that all documents received by the prosecution regarding the collapse of the canopy at the Railway Station in Novi Sad would be publicly released the following day (December 12) by noon, thereby fulfilling the main demand of the students blocking the faculties. However, despite his claim that the "complete documentation" was published on December 12, additional documents were released by the Novi Sad prosecution on two more occasions (December 31 and January 26), which had not been published previously. This raised doubts among experts about the authenticity of the documents that were published later. Furthermore, since the president initially claimed that everything had been released, and then documents were published in two stages, the question arises whether there is still documentation that has not been published. The Serbian National Assembly itself, in a letter sent to Serbian embassies in the European Union on February 10 to spread further, stated that there are ["an additional 925 documents ready for publication"](#).

Regarding the arrested activists and citizens, Vučić, on January 29, issued [13 decisions on pardoning](#), granting relief from criminal prosecution. [The dean of the Faculty of Philosophy](#) in Niš, one of the pardoned individuals, stated that "no criminal proceedings are being conducted against her and she does not know why she was pardoned." One of the pardoned individuals, [Professor Radivoje Jovović](#), stated that Vučić "used the term pardon to make it seem as if we were already guilty, as if we had already been convicted." Jovović also said, "We actually want to defend ourselves in court, to prove our innocence and clear our honor." Activist Ivan Bjelić, one of the pardoned individuals, noted that "on the other hand, no one has apologized to us for being in prison for thirty days for no reason, without any justification." Therefore, this demand of the students has not been fulfilled either, as students have consistently requested that institutions do their job, not that everything in the country be decided by the president, who does not have constitutional authority in these matters.

Under greater public pressure, hearings related to the attack on students in front of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts were concluded only on January 30, 2025, two months after the attack took place and two months after the protests began. Earlier, on December 13, [Milija Koldžić](#) resigned from his position as a member of the Council of the New Belgrade City Municipality, and Aleksandar Jokić resigned from his position as Coordinator for the Distribution Area of ED Belgrade. However, since the first attack on students in front of the FDU, there have been

dozens of attacks on students and citizens participating in the blockades. The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade announced that it had initiated [eight criminal proceedings](#) for crimes committed during student blockades and protests. At the press conference, Vučić said that proceedings were initiated against 37 persons, which is again not within the competence of the president.

Although the government initially tried to "bribe" the students by offering favorable housing loans for young people, the demand for an increase in funding for faculties by 20% has not been met. On January 21, Ana Brnabić, at a session of the Committee for Education, Science, Technological Development, and Information Society, [threatened students](#) that if they did not meet the requirements for the academic year due to the current blockades, they would lose their scholarships, dormitory places, and have to repay loans. By the end of January, the rhetoric of government officials changed in this regard, and [Finance Minister Siniša Mali](#) announced that an additional 12.01 billion dinars (around 102.4 million euros) had been secured for higher education, adding that this funding would reduce student tuition fees by 50%. However, there have been no legal amendments or budget increases for higher education yet.

The students maintain that their demands have not been met and that they will continue their actions, reiterating that their address is not the president of the country, who does not have jurisdiction over the demands they have set, but that they are exclusively addressing the relevant institutions. Also, it is important to emphasize that students' position is that their plenums are the only ones who have the legitimacy necessary to decide on the status of fulfillment of their demands.

International reaction

Since the beginning of the student blockades, numerous global media outlets have reported on the student movement, which is unprecedented in Europe since the 1960s. Among the media outlets covering the protests are [The Guardian](#), [CNN](#), [The New York Times](#), [Deutsche Welle](#), and others.

However, what has been lacking is a stronger response from the international community, particularly the European Union, regarding the human rights violations in Serbia. On January 28,

a [European Commission spokesperson](#) stated: "We are concerned about the incidents against demonstrators, for which we expect a swift investigation by the Serbian authorities. Considering the reports of another attack, the escape, and other cases of injured students, including last night's attack in Novi Sad, we remind that according to European human rights law, authorities must protect participants in gatherings from injury or violence by others who oppose or seek to disrupt or obstruct the gathering." Apart from expressing "concern" and "carefully monitoring the situation," there were no other clearer statements from European leadership. More specific messages were given by Tonino Picula, the [EU Special Rapporteur for Serbia](#). In his report, he condemned the violent attacks on students and expressed concern that some of them had been arrested and legal proceedings had been initiated. He also condemned "the claims made by Serbian authorities without evidence that EU member states were involved in organizing the student protests to provoke a 'colored revolution,'" adding that he also condemned the expulsions of EU citizens.⁵ Additionally, some Members of the European Parliament openly supported the student demands and protests. On the initiative of the Social Democrats in the European Parliament, a debate on the situation in Serbia was held in the institution on February 11. Slovenian [MEP Irena Joveva](#), during the debate, stated that young people have been the driving force in Serbia for several months and that they are not alone on that path. MEPs from the Liberals and the Left sent similar messages, while Greens' MEP Gordan Bosanac called on the EU Commission to stop supporting "autocrat Vučić." His colleague Vladimir Prebilič urged Europe not to remain silent.

The National Convention on the European Union⁶ sent a [letter to European Commission President](#) Ursula von der Leyen, pointing out that the student and citizen protests do not represent an attempt at "violent regime change" or a "colored revolution" and that "the EU should not turn its back on the citizens of Serbia."

⁵ As many as 13 participants from non-governmental organizations, who took part in the Erste Stiftung workshop held in Belgrade, [were detained](#) late in the evening by plainclothes policemen on January 21. They were taken to the police, they were interrogated until the early hours of the morning, and then they were handed a document in Cyrillic that the participants did not understand and had to sign. Thus, 13 citizens from Croatia, Slovenia, North Macedonia, Albania, Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Moldova and Austria were declared a "security risk for Serbia" and were banned from entering the country for a year. Zagreb sent a note of protest to Serbia over the deportation of Croatian women, and Albania and Romania demanded an explanation from the authorities in Serbia for the expulsion of their citizens. In the [statement of a group of non-governmental organizations](#) from Serbia, it is stated that: "The cowardly, illegal and vile treatment of colleagues from the civil sector from countries in our neighborhood is a dangerous attempt to strengthen the narrative about foreign agents, mercenaries and secret services whose intention is to intimidate the citizens of Serbia." The expulsion is a continuation of the pressure exerted by the country's secret services on domestic regional activists and happened in the midst of the government's campaign against legitimate student protests and the government's attempt to present the protests as an attempt to interfere with foreign factors in internal affairs.

⁶ The National Convention on the EU is an alliance of associations (with over 850 members) created with the aim of maintaining and improving dialogue between representatives of the state administration, political parties, non-governmental organizations, experts, business, trade unions and professional organizations on Serbia's accession to the European Union.

Regarding the student protests and the political crisis in Serbia, [the Council of Europe](#) has also issued a statement. Co-rapporteurs for Serbia from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Axel Schäfer and Victoria Tiplom, expressed their deep concern about the political climate in Serbia and called on the Serbian government, political leaders, and institutions to address the legitimate demands of the protesters and to avoid the use of force. They also commented on the deteriorating conditions for the work of civil society organizations and the situation of human rights defenders, as well as the campaigns of intimidation and targeting against non-governmental organizations. They called on the authorities in Serbia to end "derogatory rhetoric and restrictive and arbitrary practices, and to respect international obligations and protect freedom of expression, assembly, and association."

Other international actors have also commented on the situation in Serbia. On January 31, the [Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) issued a brief statement expressing that it expects Belgrade to resolve the situation in the country concerning the protests. In [diplomatic meetings](#) between the two countries in February, clearer messages of support for the government in Serbia were voiced from the Russian side. Specifically, Serbia's Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vulin and the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Sergey Shoigu, met in Moscow. In their joint statement, they noted that they would "intensify dialogue in order to counter 'colored revolutions.'" The day after this meeting, the foreign ministers of the two countries, Marko Đurić and Sergey Lavrov, also met. After their meeting, Lavrov stated that "Russia condemns the interference of others, primarily Western countries, in the internal political processes in Serbia." This statement provoked a response from the European Union. On February 17, a European Commission spokesperson stated that Serbia, as a candidate country for EU membership, should refrain from actions and statements that contradict the EU's foreign policy. U.S. officials also issued statements regarding the protests in Serbia. Richard Grenell, [the special envoy of U.S. President Donald Trump](#), stated that the U.S. "does not support those who violently seize government buildings" and that "everyone must condemn violence and adhere to peaceful protests." Grenell did not specify who was attempting to "violently seize government buildings," as no such attempts were made during the protests.

The lack of clear international support, however, did not discourage the students and citizens of Serbia who are fighting for the rule of law and against corruption, nor did it deter their fight for the identification and prosecution of those responsible for the collapse of the canopy in Novi Sad, which resulted in 15 fatalities. By February 14, 2025, protests in memory of the victims of the canopy collapse and protests supporting the students were held at over 300 locations across



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Serbia (from large cities to small, remote places where such citizen engagement had almost never been seen before).