



Three Freedoms Special

Escalation of repression and violence

Violence on the streets across Serbia has escalated in the last two weeks. At first, the SNS supporters started attacking the citizens, and then the police took over the baton and continued with the physical confrontation with the demonstrators. And it all started with a series of connected attacks on citizens of smaller towns in Vojvodina.

One of those events was a photo exhibition. Namely, on **August 9**, in Bački Petrovac, as a contribution to the "Slovak National Celebrations", an exhibition of photographs showing the protests held throughout Vojvodina was to be held, and the intention was to show that citizens of Slovak nationality are part of the protests and the civil society of Serbia. However, on the day of the exhibition, a group of SNS supporters and members gathered with the intention of disrupting the event. Supporters of SNS insulted the crowd and tore up the exhibited photos. Local municipal officials were among that group. The police, who were there, traditionally did not react and let the supporters of the ruling party destroy the exhibition. Two women were injured by violent SNS supporters, and war veterans who came to support the exhibition were also attacked. Nevertheless, the police arrested two war veterans, but not those who prevented the holding of the cultural manifestation. An attempt by the locals to hold the exhibition in the late afternoon failed, because the thugs gathered again. The next day, citizens tried to hold the exhibition again, but strong police forces prevented the arrival of citizens from other parts of the country who wanted to support the residents of Bački Petrovac. However, the police did not prevent the gathering of SNS sympathizers who were preventing the exhibition from taking place. A resident of Bački Petrovac was attacked that evening by thugs with clubs and masks on their faces. On that occasion, the thugs stole his car and broke his phone.

On Sunday, **August 10**, a mass action by SNS sympathizers began in the Novi Sad settlement of Liman. They come without the consent of the tenants and start painting the walls of the buildings in the colors of the Serbian flag. It is believed that this was a response to the fact that the citizens had crossed out the hateful graffiti that had been painted over the neighborhood the night before. A few locals tried to prevent this unauthorized alteration of the appearance of their buildings, but SNS supporters wearing caps and wearing black attacked them. One man states that he was beaten by 10-15 hooligans when they noticed that he was filming them beating another man. Two inspectors watched it all from close range. The director of the Provincial Fund for Pension and Disability Insurance took part in one of the attacks on disgruntled citizens, according to the Zborovi of Novi Sad.

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On **August 10**, a citizen's protest was organized in Vrbas, as well as a counter-protest by SNS supporters and members. At one point, there was a push between the two groups, which were separated by the police. During the protest, SNS supporters pelted citizens with bottles and eggs and disrupted the operation of N1 television by pointing a laser at the journalist and cameraman.

On **August 11**, a protest was held in Bačka Palanka in support of a fellow citizen who was attacked the day before while trying to come to a photo exhibition in Bački Petrovac. He was attacked by men with batons, clubs and knives who got out of unregistered cars. That evening, a counter-meeting of SNS supporters was organized in Bačka Palanka, who threw bottles and eggs at citizens. After the protest, one protester was attacked while returning home by bicycle. He states that he was attacked by local officials. The next day, on August 12, another protest was held by the citizens of Backa Palanka, and this time the situation was more tense. SNS supporters pelted the crowd with bottles, eggs and firecrackers. The police did not react even once. This counter-meeting was announced by the mayor.

A group of about a hundred unknown men in black came to Bački Petrovac in an organized manner on **August 12** and once again prevented the protest from taking place. The citizens' protest was canceled due to security threats, and three journalist teams from Slovakia were also threatened.

SNS supporters began to gather before the protest scheduled in Vrbas also on **August 12**. That evening, supporters of the ruling party began to show their aggression to a higher and more dangerous level. They start firing pyrotechnics at the citizens*: fireworks and firecrackers, throwing stones and frozen bottles of water at them. The police did not react to the violent SNS supporters and did not prevent them from attacking citizens, in which several people were injured and received cuts and wounds from pyrotechnic devices and stones. The citizens of Vrbas showed that they were targeted with different objects such as: tools, nunchucks and laths. An activist from the organization "Student Voice Vrbas" stated that she has information that more than 60 people were admitted to the Emergency Center due to the consequences of the SNS attack. Nevertheless, representatives of the authorities and the police force quickly accused the citizens of allegedly attacking the premises of the SNS, even though the videos clearly show that the first pyrotechnic attack came from the direction where the SNS thugs were gathered. In the SNS attack, the assistant cameraman N1 was injured by stones in the stomach and shoulder, and the editor of the Mašina portal Marko Miletić was injured. On the same evening, the described attack by a group of masked men on citizens in Bačka Palanka took place.

* The first pyrotechnic attack on citizens by SNS supporters was recorded in May 2025 in the town of Kula in Vojvodina, when unknown men roamed the town in large groups all day and intimidated citizens. As a reaction to that, citizens gathered in protest, and then men, including SNS municipal officials, threw pyrotechnics and stones at them. We reported on this in our report Three freedoms under Magnifying Glass.

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That evening, citizens spontaneously started to gather in other cities of Serbia as a reaction to the violence recorded in Vrbas and Bačka Palanka. In Novi Sad, citizens gathered in front of the SNS premises. At one point, men came out of the party premises and started throwing different objects at the crowd, even chairs. They did this while a line of police stood in front of them and did not prevent them from violent actions. Among the sympathizers of SNS, there were people with a criminal background, and even a man who was convicted of the attempted murder of a former policeman. Citizens gathered in Belgrade as well, but a police cordon in equipment to break up demonstrations began to suppress the citizens. At the protest, the moment when the policeman slaps a woman who was holding on to the policeman's shield because he previously pushed her daughter was recorded. After these events, protests began to take place every evening, as well as police violence against demonstrators.

The following evening, **August 13**, tensions rose. Citizens gather in Belgrade, but the brother of the President of the Republic, Andrej Vučić, brings a large group of men to Pionirski Park as well. Among those gathered in Pionirski Park, which has become known as "Ćaciland" since SNS supporters live there, was also seen a man convicted of the murder of French citizen and football fan Brice Taton. Bottles and pyrotechnic devices flew from "Ćaciland" towards the citizens, but the police reacted only towards the demonstrators. Several citizens were detained, one student was hit several times by the police, and the case of the violent detention of two protesters who were forced to kneel by the policemen and hit them was recorded. Citizens also gathered in New Belgrade, and members of the gendarmerie stopped the citizens and prevented them from reaching the SNS premises. At one point, citizens clashed with the police, and tear gas was fired. During the night, the president of the state addressed his supporters twice on the street. While staying in Ćaciland, he accused the media of allegedly "the dirtiest campaign", and then journalist Danica Ilić was attacked in front of the premises of SNS in the center of Belgrade while she was trying to get a statement from the president. The security guards of the party premises took the phone from her and threw it on the ground, and then they stepped on the journalist's hands while she was trying to reach the thrown phone. A rally was also organized in Niš, where the police also violently suppressed the citizens and on that occasion brutally beat and detained a student. Dramatic scenes were recorded that evening in Novi Sad. During the night, masked men with clubs were seen moving towards the gathering place of citizens. The thugs attacked a citizen they came across on the street, and then in front of the premises of SNS they started shooting pyrotechnics at the gathered demonstrators. At one point, members of the Cobra special units were also in front of the premises of the ruling party, and one of them took out a gun and shot into the air, because, as he later explained, he allegedly felt threatened. In the incidents in Novi Sad, journalists Nikola Bilić from the Novi Sad portal 192 and Žarko Bogosavljević, editor of the Razglas news portal, were attacked. Bilić was beaten and ended up in the Emergency Center of the Clinical Center of Vojvodina, and Bogosavljević was hit in the head with a bat, but fortunately he was wearing a helmet and was not injured.

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Perhaps the most terrible examples of police brutality came the following night, **August 14**, from Valjevo. The police began to disperse the crowd and brutally beat the citizens of Valjevo, including minors. One video shows a large number of police officers kicking and hitting two men lying on the ground with batons. One video shows the severe beating of a minor boy whose health is still unknown. At the third location, policemen beat another man who was lying on the ground, and one of the policemen hit him in the area between the legs. During the beating of another man in Valjevo, a policeman is heard asking him the question "Are you an oppositionist?". According to testimonies, police officers attacked people in locations throughout the city, and more than 60 citizens who were attacked by the police were admitted to the hospital.

On the same evening, incidents also broke out in Belgrade. The same scenario again, men in black with bats shoot pyrotechnic devices at the citizens, the police do not react to it, but then when the citizens retaliate, they start to arrest and detain the protesters. In an attack by hooligans that night, an opposition MP was also injured when 7-8 masked hooligans hit him on the head and hands with bats. That evening, several arrests of citizens were recorded, but the arrests carried out by members of the Special Unit for the Security of Certain Persons and Objects (JZO) stand out. Namely, they arrested several persons in the center of Belgrade, among them students whose whereabouts were unknown until the next day. After the release, disturbing statements about the treatment of the detainees are coming to the public. Student Nikolina Sindelić, who was among those detained, who were taken by members of the JZO to the garage of the Government of Serbia, states that the commander of this unit, Marko Kričak, beat her and threatened her with rape. Like the majority of women victims of gender-based violence in Serbia, the Ministry of Interior did not believe Nikolina either, but immediately issued a statement in which they denied that there was "the use of coercion, binding, insults or any kind of mistreatment." Such a statement, and the degradation to which Nikolina was exposed days after this incident - intimate photos of her taken when she was a minor were published and shown on pro-regime television and in tabloids, are an indication of the deep-rooted misogyny that this government in Serbia nurtures. Women suffer violence from the police themselves, to whom they should turn in case they experience violence. The state stands behind the abuser, and the victim continues to suffer pressure for speaking out about the violence she experienced. The violence carried out by members of the state authorities is aimed at expelling women from public spaces and represents the re-pushing of women outside the sphere of socio-political sphere. Student Dušan Cvetković also testified about the violent behavior during the detention, also detained without any reason by the JZO while he was standing on the street. Dušan testified about the beatings he received and threats from a policeman who said that "they will shoot him".

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That evening, revolted by the violence carried out by supporters of SNS and the selective response of the police, the citizens demolished the premises of SNS in Novi Sad, which were empty. The clash between citizens and SNS supporters also broke out in Čačak, where two groups threw bottles and eggs at each other.

On the night of **August 15**, the police in Belgrade also took armored vehicles to the street. Tear gas was thrown at the citizens, and several citizens were attacked by the police. The police once again showed their brutality towards the demonstrators, but in the case when the SNS beaters drag the citizen on the street, they calmly observe and do not react. Police brutality is reserved only for protesting students and citizens. Aware of what they are doing, the police begin to prevent citizens and the media from filming their violent apprehensions. In addition, some police officers directly attack journalists. While he was standing with his friends and colleagues at the protest on Friday evening near the General Staff, journalist Vuk Cvijić was approached from behind by a policeman in armor and sprayed with some chemical agent, as a result of which Cvijić was almost blind for an hour. However, some recordings still reach the public, such as the case of the arrest of civil activist Draško Darijević from Čačak. Two police officers are detaining him on the video, when at one point the chief of police from that city approaches them and punches Draško in the stomach.

On Saturday, **August 16**, a large protest was held in Valjevo. Citizens from numerous cities came to express their revolt because of the brutal police violence that was carried out in that city during the protest held two nights earlier. Some participants in the protest broke the windows of the SNS premises, and the police later suppressed the citizens in another part of the city. A protest was also held in Belgrade on the same night, where the police once again used tear gas to disperse the crowd. Armored vehicles were also on the street this evening, and one person with a badge pulled out a gun on the citizens. At the city center, police officers beat a group of young men, which is why they were transferred to an ambulance. The policemen also reacted violently when they saw that citizens were filming them during one of the arrests. Chaos on the streets of Belgrade was also recorded on **August 18**. Shock bombs, tear gas and pyrotechnics flew, and several people broke the window of the SNS premises.

In the following days, the situation calmed down relatively, but protests continued due to the large number of arrested and detained people. The police indiscriminately arrested peaceful citizens, while not a single case of arrest of SNS supporters who attacked citizens is known. According to the Ministry of Interior, 223 people were arrested in four nights of incidents. In Novi Sad, citizens block the Court demanding the release of 6 persons arrested for the alleged attack on members of Cobra at the protest on August 13. During the blockades, there was an intervention by the police, who arrested members of the opposition party Movement of Free Citizens and once again ordered the detention of PSG activists and professor Radivoje Jovović. During the intervention of the police, a journalist from N1 was injured and a journalist from the Razglas news portal was attacked.