

ENGLISH

Statement - for media and general public

European Civil Society's Alert

Oppression Without Borders: Serbian Regime Harasses EU, Regional and Serbian Civic Activists!

We are alarmed by the detention and unjust deportation of civic activists from Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, Albania, and North Macedonia, who were participating in the Erste Stiftung NGO Academy in Belgrade. These individuals were detained overnight, interrogated without evidence, labeled as “national security threats,” and banned from entering Serbia for a year. This follows a pattern of harassment, with two similar expulsions of Croatian nationals in recent weeks and a number of repressive actions against Serbian peaceful protesters. Since Summer 2024, the repression against Serbian civil society organisations, grassroots activists, high school and University students has intensified through the use of [surveillance documented by Amnesty International](#), detentions and unpunished violence by para-state groups. This time, the regime focused on an international group of civic activists sponsored by a reputable Austria-based foundation promoting regional cooperation and learning.

These actions, targeting respected professionals and international cooperation initiatives, signal the Serbian Government's growing hostility toward civic activists and journalists. This oppression occurs amid massive student protests against corruption and mismanagement, which the regime seems eager to suppress by scapegoating foreign nationals and fostering animosity toward neighboring countries and the EU.

We urge Serbian authorities to explain these unjust actions and ensure respect for human rights and freedoms. EU institutions and member states must hold Serbia accountable and demand adherence to democratic values, particularly as an EU candidate country.

We stand in solidarity with all victims of this regime and call for a united Europe-wide response to protect civic space, peace and human rights in Serbia.

Sincerely,

[List of Supporting Organizations]

Longer version - to be sent as a letter to EESC, European Parliament, European Commission

European Civil Society Alert on the Vučić Regime's Oppression against EU, Regional and Serbian Civic Activists

With great concern, we have received news about the overnight detention and unjust deportation of nationals from Croatia (4 people), Slovenia (1 person), Romania (2 people), Albania (2 people), and North Macedonia (1 person), who were in Belgrade on a study visit to [Erste Stiftung's NGO Academy program](#), which educates young professionals working in NGOs. These civic activists and NGO professionals were held overnight and expelled from the country with a vague explanation that they endangered the safety and security of Serbia, without any proof or investigation to support these accusations. All the expelled individuals received a one-year ban on entering Serbia. They were stalked in front of the hotel and taken to the police station by an unmarked police car, exposed to hostile interrogation through the night and forced to sign a barely legible document in Cyrillic pronouncing them the “national security threat”. Over the past month, two similar expulsions of Croatian nationals have taken place, and earlier this year similar bans were made against Bosnian activists and writers who published statements in support of protests in Serbia.

Since Summer 2024, the repression against Serbian civil society organisations grassroots activists, high school and University students protesting peacefully as well as independent journalists has intensified through the use of [surveillance documented by Amnesty International](#), detentions and unpunished violence by para-state groups. This time, the regime focused on an international group of civic activists sponsored by a reputable Austria-based foundation promoting regional cooperation and learning.

This incident reflects a troubling pattern of a rising hostility of the Serbian Government against both domestic and foreign citizens. Evidently, these oppressive actions are undertaken in the context of massive student protests across Serbia against corruption, mismanagement of public services and abuse of power, which the regime views as a true threat. This most recent incident raises serious concerns about the respect for human rights and freedoms in Serbia, especially about the safety and security of people and organizations engaged in human rights activism domestically and region-wide.

Moreover and equally concerning, the actions taken by the authorities appear to be part of a broader strategy to incite animosity against neighbouring countries and EU as a whole. The **Vučić regime is obviously looking for an “external enemy” to divert attention and avoid responsibility for the problems with public safety and access to public services** which have generated widespread and rising domestic criticism led by students across Serbia.

We strongly urge the Serbian authorities to provide a transparent explanation for these unreasonable and illegitimate actions against civic activists from EU member and candidate countries, and to ensure that such unjust treatment does not occur again. It is crucial that the rights of all individuals, especially those working towards positive societal change, are upheld and protected.

We call on the EU institutions and EU member states to take these human rights violations undertaken by the Serbian Government seriously and use political and institutional means to hold the Serbian Government accountable for its actions against its own and the citizens of

neighboring countries, who are facing violations of civic rights, as widely evidenced by international human rights organisations. As a candidate country, the Government of the Republic of Serbia is expected to put the European values enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in practice. Instead of hostility, paranoia and international tensions, a government that claims democratic legitimacy is supposed to foster civic dialogue, cooperation and mutual respect - both within Serbia and across the Western Balkan region.

We stand in solidarity with all the victims of the Vučić regime - both domestic and foreign - and call for a Europe-wide action to protect civic space, peace and security in Serbia. Let us join our voices for free and safe Serbia!

For background info please read:

<https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/policajci-u-civilu-upali-u-hotel-u-beogradu-izveli-pet-hrvatica-cijelu-noc-ih-ispitali-i-ujutro-deportirali-znate-li-sto-smo-morali-potpisati-bijesni-smo-15545358>

<https://nezavisnakultura.net/2025/01/22/saopstenje-povodom-privodenja-i-zabrane-ulaska-u-zemlju-nasih-koleginica-i-kolega-iz-susednih-zemalja>

Sincerely,

List of organizations supporting the alert: