

**Letter of Concern to the EU Institutions
on the Serbian Regime's Oppression against EU, Regional and Serbian Citizens
co-signed by 374 civil society organisations from 27 countries**

Brussels, January 24, 2025

with great concern, we, the undersigned **374 citizens' association from 27 countries across the European continent**, have received alarming news about the overnight detention and unjust deportation of nationals from Croatia (4 people), Slovenia (1 person), Romania (1 person), Austria (1 person), 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 during the night of January 22, 2025, with a vague explanation that they endangered the safety and security of Serbia under the Article 9 of the Serbian Law on Foreigners, 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 this summer, the repression against Serbian civil society and grassroots activists and students protesting peacefully 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 Serbian citizens, foreign civic activists and journalists nationals. 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 individual citizens, 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 the neighbouring 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!

Sincerely,

On behalf of the 374 signatory organisations from 27 countries representing a common position of the European civil society,

Balazs Denes, Executive Director
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