



Keeping Focus:

Reporting developments in Serbia



Tensions in Serbia keep rising following the historical 15 March protest

Key points:

- ⊕ Serbian government accused of using sonic weapons against peaceful protestors on 15 March to create chaos
- ⊕ Tensions rise across the country as the government manipulates facts to present protests as violent
- ⊕ Repressive measures against government critics intensify
- ⊕ Parliamentary opposition unite in demanding a transitional government of “national trust”, while many students support an “expert government”

Serious allegations of the use of a sonic weapon against the citizens

The largest protest in the history of Serbia, which is estimated to have gathered more than 300,000 citizens in central Belgrade on 15 March, was marked by a serious incident during a peaceful and silent commemoration the 15 victims of the Novi Sad tragedy. Dozens of [disturbing videos](#) show large crowds abruptly running towards the sidewalks of a street in downtown Belgrade. Civil society organizations have collected [thousands](#) of testimonials describing a sound akin to a passing plane or a train descending on them, which caused significant distress and numerous injuries.

This description has led to accusations of the authorities of using a form of acoustic device – specifically the so-called “sound cannon” (Long Range Acoustic Device – LRAD) – against the crowd. The use of such a device as a crowd control weapon is illegal in Serbia. Speculations of the use of [other devices](#), such as vortex cannon or a vortex ring gun, have also been made by CSOs.

The state institutions denied using a “sound cannon”. However, the official story turned out to have had several [inconsistencies](#). The officials claimed that Serbia did not

have these devices at all, which was quickly disproven. Although a formal investigation has been underway since mid-March, no alternative explanation has been provided for the behavior of the citizens. CSOs have submitted a request to the European Court on Human Rights to impose temporary measures against Serbia.

Since 15 March, multiple commentators and journalists have assumed that the potential use of a sonic device was a part of a wider plot of the ruling party to incite chaos at the otherwise peaceful protest. Several incidents which took place around the same time the alleged device was used, involving hooligans widely assumed to be close to the ruling party, were interpreted as a part of this plot. According to this interpretation, large-scale violence was prevented due to luck and quick reaction of the students, who urged the protesters to leave as soon as the incidents began.

Tensions continue, government promotes fake news to paint protesters as violent

A very tense atmosphere has continued in Serbia after the protest on 15 March. Angry citizens are now often using gatherings of SNS members throughout the country as an opportunity to protest against them. At the same time, the ruling party itself is trying to manufacture incidents to present the protesters as violent. Students continue to organize peaceful activities.

Several serious incidents have occurred since 15 March. One of them took place on 21 March, in the city of Niš, where a gathering of the SNS members was scheduled. The protesters threw eggs at the incoming SNS members, and the situation escalated after the meeting, with some protesters chasing SNS members away.

Reacting to the event, President Aleksandar Vučić [blamed](#) the “trio of evil” – opposition leaders Dragan Milić and Đorđe Stanković, as well as the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Niš Natalija Jovanović – for

inciting violence. In the days that followed, Dragan Milić reported that a window at his house was apparently shot by a bullet. He [claimed](#) that this was an assassination attempt. The police started investigating the case, but no perpetrator has been identified. On 30 March, dean Natalija Jovanović was [attacked](#) on the street with a knife by a woman who herself claimed to be mentally ill. The opposition and university condemned Vučić for inspiring the attack.

Another serious incident took place on the night of 28-29 March in Novi Sad, where four students [were attacked](#) by unidentified individuals. One of the students was seriously hurt and ended up in hospital. The students, who are actively participating in the university blockades, are claiming that the attack was politically motivated, which the authorities deny.

At the same time, the ruling party and the media close to are manufacturing narratives about the violent protesters. This trend started even before 15 March, when the officials, including President Vučić, [falsely](#) claimed that students attacked a policeman. Another [manufactured story](#) concerned the supposed attack on Miloš Pavlović, a student close to the ruling party who is protesting against the blockades of the universities. On 22 March, pro-government media also reported that, in the place of Odžaci in northern Serbia, a “protest leader shot a man who was defending the municipality”, which [turned out](#) to be another fabrication.

Arrests and deportations intensify

Repressive measures against several groups have also occurred in recent weeks. On 14 March, six opposition members and activists [were arrested](#) in Novi Sad after an audio recording of their discussion about a possible incursion into the buildings of the National Assembly or the public broadcaster during the 15 March protest was leaked by pro-government media. The source of the recording is unknown, and security services are suspected of unlawfully spying on these activists.

The six individuals have remained in custody since then, even though their lawyers [claim](#) that there is no legal basis for their detention, that the evidence against them was obtained illegally, and that their rights as the accused have been violated. A [warrant](#) was issued for an additional six activists who left the country following the recorded meeting.

Dejan Ilić, a prominent journalist and commentator, was [arrested](#) on 10 April and charged with spreading panic, based on comments he made on a morning show on 29 March. Ilić was released the same day. His arrest—12 days after the alleged offense, in which he warned that the political crisis could result in violence and casualties



Ruling party rally in Belgrade, 12 April 2025, Photo FoNet

without a transitional government—was widely condemned as politically motivated. On the same day, four young people were arrested for allegedly causing unrest during the 15 March protest, more than three weeks earlier. They were also released shortly afterward.

Another concerning trend has been the deportation of several foreign nationals labeled as “security threats” to Serbia. Since the beginning of the year, [15 Croatian citizens](#), along with several others from different countries, have been deported. In none of these cases has a public explanation been provided for the “security threat” designation. It appears that some individuals were deported simply for supporting the student protests. The case that drew the most attention involved a Croatian-born woman who had studied in Serbia and started a family there; she was ordered to leave the country. Her case is currently under appeal.

Opposition presents a proposal for a transitional government, student activities continue

Following the announcement of Prime Minister Miloš Vučević’s resignation on 28 January, the ruling majority deliberately delayed confirming the resignation in parliament, eventually doing so on 19 March. On 20 March, the majority of the parliamentary opposition in Serbia [presented](#) a proposal for a transitional government, referred to as the “Government of National Trust.” The proposed government would serve for up to nine months and would be tasked with organizing free elections and implementing the demands of the student movement.

Opposition parties announced they would seek support for the idea—which remains open to modifications—from various social groups. As of mid-April, several faculties participating in the blockade, including a majority from the Universities of Novi Sad, Kragujevac, and Niš, expressed support for the general idea of an expert-led government (though continuing to distance themselves from opposition parties). The ruling majority has rejected all proposals for any form of transitional government.

Since the massive protest on 15 March, faculties involved in the blockade have been organizing smaller-scale activities to maintain pressure on the government. The most notable events in April have included a protest in the majority-Muslim city of Novi Pazar on 12 April, where students symbolically emphasized unity between Serb and Bosniak citizens of Serbia, as well as a [bicycle tour to Strasbourg](#), expected to conclude on 15 April. The students cycling to Strasbourg intend to present their proposals to institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Ruling party intends to form a new government, organizes a counter-rally

Rejecting proposals of the opposition and the students, President Aleksandar Vučić named Đuro Macut, an endocrinologist, as the new Prime Minister on 6 April. He is expected to be supported in the parliament by the old ruling majority composed of the Serbian Progressive Party, Socialist Party of Serbia and smaller partners. Macut has no previous political experience and [is not expected](#) to have a significant political impact. The proposals for the ministers in his government were revealed on 14 April. Most of the ministers from the previous government will remain, though several nominally independent experts close to President Vučić were nominated as well.

As a part of its counter-mobilization campaign, the ruling party organized a rally in Belgrade on 12 April. Thousands of people were bused to the capital from across the country. According to NGO *Arhiv javnih skupova*, there were around 55,000 people at the protest, which is about six times less than the student protest on 15 March. During his speech, President Vučić announced [his own demands](#) (mirroring student demands), in which he called to judiciary to prosecute people for vaguely formulated activities connected with the protests. This was interpreted as a political threat by the commentators.

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