



Keeping Focus: Reporting development in Serbia

# Protests in Serbia enter a new phase as students officially demand snap elections

## Key points:

- ⊕ Students officially demand parliamentary elections and are preparing an electoral list, relationship with opposition parties remains unclear
- ⊕ New procedure for REM Council appointment launched after a two-week student blockade of the national broadcaster
- ⊕ Serbian president Vučić controversially takes part in the 9 May Victory Day parade after repeated warnings from the EU, turning to both Trump and Putin as pressure from the EU grows

## New government makes no impact on political dynamics

The government of Prime Minister Đuro Macut was sworn in on 16 April 2025, supported by the same coalition which voted for the previous government of Miloš Vučević, led by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and consisting of a total of 155 MPs.<sup>1</sup> Two thirds of the ministers from the previous cabinet remained in the new one.

Among the newcomers were several nominally independent experts close to President Aleksandar Vučić. Some picks were particularly controversial, including the new Minister of Information Boris Bratina, a former member of far-right political organizations, and Minister of Education Dejan Vuk Stanković, known as a pro-government political commentator who advocated the use of force against student blockades. Minister of European Integration Tanja Mišćević, an independent expert, was replaced by SNS member Nemanja Starović.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One MP from a small coalition partner of SNS, Healthy Serbia, who voted for Vučević's government in 2024, this time defected to the opposition.

<sup>2</sup> The choice of Nemanja Starović was controversial due to the fact that he was one of the founding members of the Centre for Social Stability, a GONGO supporting the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). In recent months, this organizations consistently promoted anti-Western narratives regarding the ongoing protests and targeted government critics. Starović is no longer formally associated with this organization.

Prime Minister Macut's lack of political experience and his obscurity among the general public led most political commentators to assume that he would be a marginal figure, overshadowed by the President and other members of the government. These expectations were confirmed during the first weeks of Macut's term, as he was scarcely visible in public. His only significant activity has been closed-door negotiations with the rector and deans of the University of Belgrade regarding the end of the blockades, which have so far failed to yield any breakthrough. Meanwhile, investigative outlet KRIK [reported](#) on 30 April that Macut bought a mansion worth more than a million Euros from a former public official a day before he was elected Prime Minister.

The election of the new government failed to quell the talks about possible early elections. The announcement of the students that they demand early parliamentary elections further raised doubts about the long-term viability of Macut's government.

## **Students request early elections, will nominate an electoral list**

On 5 May, students in the blockade published a unanimous request for early parliamentary elections. According to the announcement, the students' demands remain unfulfilled after months of unprecedentedly massive protests. The students [assessed](#) that "the roots of government's corruption go too deep into the state institutions, which are therefore prevented from independently exercising their authority".

The students clarified that they would not themselves be the candidates in the elections, but that they would support a list of candidates they would nominate. If the elections are not called by the mid-May, so that they could take place by the end of June, the students [announced](#) a "peaceful radicalization of protests", without providing further details.

As of 12 May, the students have not yet announced the full list of candidates nor have they agreed upon the exact criteria of who might be the candidate on the list. The relations between the students and the opposition parties remain a point of controversy, as students have distanced themselves from the opposition at the start of university blockades, not wanting to be associated with any political options. There are speculations that high-ranking opposition members will not be able to stand as candidates on the student lists, but that members of opposition parties will not be automatically excluded. The exact criteria remain unconfirmed.

Opposition parties generally supported the student request for an election, with some, such as Democratic Party (DS), announced that it was ready to fully support

the student list and not run in the elections itself. Other parties, including the People's Movement of Serbia (NPS), Green-Left Front (PSG) and Free Citizens Movement (PSG) supported the student's request, though left the issue of opposition's own participation open.

Freedom and Justice Party (SSP) and Serbia Centre (SRCE) took a position that electoral conditions, such as situation in the media and the voter registry, need to be improved before elections take place. Reacting to this point, student representatives agreed that electoral conditions were unfair, but expressed confidence that the student list could still win an election as it would mobilize a high turnout.

The ruling parties have so far rejected the possibility of early elections. While President Vučić and Speaker of the Assembly Ana Brnabić stated that they could take place, they have not committed to an exact timeframe. On the other hand, other members of the ruling party criticized the proposal, claiming, without evidence, that student would attempt to incite "chaos" on election day.

The hesitation of the ruling party to call early elections represents a sharp contrast to its confident posture about this possibility earlier this year, as well as their longstanding habit of calling opportunistic snap election to reassert their political dominance. Their current reaction has been interpreted as a sign of weakness by political commentators.

## **New public call for members of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media announced following a blockade of Radio-Television of Serbia**

One of the major political issues in the second half of April was a blockade of the building of Radio-Television of Serbia (RTS) by students, who demanded the "new public call for the members of the Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM)". Following the decision of the parliamentary Committee on culture and information to issue a new public call, the blockade of RTS was concluded on 28 April, after two weeks.

During the blockade, RTS broadcasted its program with limitations from an undisclosed location, and journalists were prevented from entering the premises by the protesters. Ruling party and pro-government media repeatedly condemned and criticized the action, but the government appeared unwilling to use full police force to disperse the protesters.

The reporting of RTS and the work of REM have been criticized by the opposition for more than a decade, while students have also criticized RTS for its coverage of the ongoing protests. RTS has been accused of a pro-

government bias, while REM has been criticized – including by international election observers – for not being independent from the government. Critics have argued that REM was not exercising its authority of sanctioning the reporting of the private television stations regularly engaging in smear campaigns against government opponents. REM also has the authority of electing the governing bodies of RTS.

According to the new Law on Electronic Media, adopted in October 2023, a new Council of REM should have been elected by the beginning of November 2024. However, the ruling party delayed the process, and the open call for candidates was not announced until November—by which time the new Council should have already been in place. The bulk of the procedure took place in January.

However, in February, 7 out of 19 candidates withdrew, citing irregularities in the nomination process. According to an [analysis](#) carried out by the Civic Initiatives, a number of candidates and nominating organizations did not meet legal criteria for being considered in the process. Of the remaining 12 candidates, a majority of them were perceived by the public to be close to the ruling party.

The future of the election process of the Council of REM was unknown from February until the end of April, when it was announced that the whole procedure would be repeated. The new open call was announced on 8 May. Opposition parties have warned that there is no guarantee that the new procedure would be any more regular and called for additional public pressure on the ruling parties to implement it properly.

## Facing pressure from the EU, Vučić visits United States and Russia

President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić visited Florida at the beginning of May, with the pro-government media announcing a meeting with President Donald Trump. However, after two days during which Vučić met with no current members of the US administration, his visit was abruptly cut short due to health problems on 3 May. Upon returning to Serbia, he was diagnosed with chest pain and high blood pressure, which he experienced in Florida, and recommended rest for several days.

Many government critics expressed suspicion over the official version of the story, pointing out that there was no confirmation from the Trump administration that a meeting was going to take place and that it was illogical for President Vučić to immediately board a plane after feeling cardiac problems. An assumption that Vučić failed to secure the announced meeting with Trump has been widely circulated, though the details of the visit remain unknown.

As soon as Vučić returned to work on 7 May, he flew to Moscow to attend the Victory Day Parade on 9 May. His plane flew over Turkey and Azerbaijan, as the Baltic countries refused to allow passage. In Moscow, Vučić held meetings with President of Russia Vladimir Putin and President of China Xi Jinping, announcing that he had discussed energy and economic cooperation, among other things.

Vučić, together with other leaders, was repeatedly warned not to go to Moscow by the EU officials in the weeks leading up to the visit. Currently, there seem to be no direct consequences for the visit, though Vučić announced that he expected criticism from the EU leaders in the coming period and [asked](#) them to “punish him, not Serbia”.

Vučić’s visit to Florida and Moscow took place in the aftermath of a rising pressure from Brussels for Serbia to deliver on the reforms associated with the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. These reforms include the election of the new Council of REM, as well as the adoption of new media and electoral laws. Serbia has been late with these reforms for months, and has also been unable to open Cluster 3 in negotiations with the EU as a result.

During Vučić’s meeting with Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa in March, these reforms were highlighted as a priority, while in late April, European Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos visited Serbia and met with protesting students, [stating](#) that “what the EU asks from Serbia closely aligns with the demands of the citizens protesting”.

On 7 May, European Parliament adopted an annual report on Serbia, which harshly criticized the state of democracy and the rule of law in the country, as well as lack of alignment with the EU on policy towards Russia.

### IMPRESSUM

#### Publisher

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)  
Belgrade Office  
Dositejeva 51/1, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia

#### Author

Centre for Contemporary Politics  
Makedonska 21, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia

The opinions expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the FES. Commercial use of all media published by the FES is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

May 2025

[serbia.fes.de](http://serbia.fes.de)

[centarsavremenepolitike.rs](http://centarsavremenepolitike.rs)

