



Inicijativa
Ne davimo Beograd
Dositejeva 13
11000 Beograd, Serbia

Mr Charles Michel
Presidency of the European Council
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 175
B-1048 Brussels
Belgium

Belgrade, May 5, 2020

DO NOT LET SERBIA SHIFT INTO AN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

Dear President Michel,

The EU-Western Balkans summit under the Croatian EU Presidency scheduled for 6 May in Zagreb is now due to the pandemic taking place as a video conference. In view of this meeting, we are addressing you as a part of a large citizens' platform in Serbia, gathering together individuals from all parts of the country, who stand for values of solidarity, equality and democracy. We write this open letter to urge you to take immediate steps to stop the rapidly increasing chaos and dangerous polarisation of the population pushed by the ruling party in Serbia.

Our societies are going through an unprecedented crisis in Europe in times of peace. The Covid-19 crisis urged national leaders to take measures dictated by the emergency. However, some States have used the exceptional situation to restrict rights of their citizens with measures not medically required. At the same time, they have allowed themselves extended powers.

This is especially the case in Serbia, where President Vucic and Prime Minister Brnabic introduced an emergency law, in contradiction with the Constitution. Since then, civil liberties are being repeatedly violated. Journalists critical towards the management of the crisis are being taken into custody for allegedly spreading fake news. While equipment is lacking in many hospitals and health centres, the city of Belgrade spends public money in distributing 20.000 Serbian flags to residents. In a moment when citizens have no choice but to stay home, controversial construction works are resuming, despite the curfew imposed on the whole nation. Moreover, President Vucic uses the crisis for his own political credit, with parliamentary elections scheduled for 21 June. In the meantime, opposition is constantly ignored and even attacked via media. The Parliament did not meet to declare the state of emergency as stipulated by the constitution for 7 weeks.

While EU leaders are about to sign an aid package to the Western Balkans, we believe this should not be a blank check for their leaders to continue the dismantling of Democracy. When the European Parliament and several Member States have openly questioned the respect of fundamental values by some member states, we fear that being outside the EU we might encounter even harsher measures.



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In your capacity as President of the European Council, we are calling upon you to:

- **Condition any support to Western Balkans countries to respect of EU fundamental values of democracy, equality, Rule of Law and respect for Human rights;**
- **Urge candidate countries to stop attacks and intimidations on independent journalists;**
- **Insist on a swift rehabilitation of democratic checks and balances and limit abuses of emergency measures to promote their political agendas;**
- **Integrate the needs of independent actors, especially NGOs, in the support packages to the region;**
- **Urge candidate countries to commit to implementing ambitious environmental measures in exchange for support, based on the proposals of the European Green Deal.**

We remain at your disposal to provide any data or information needed to support your work.

On behalf of Inicijativa Ne Da(vi)mo Beograd,

With kind regards,

Dobrica Veselinovic