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FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

Ill-treatment of Srdja Popović and other *Otpor* activists in police custody

On 15 December 1998 Srdja Popović, an activist in both the students' opposition movement, *Otpor*, and the Democratic Party was arrested by a group of policemen in the centre of Belgrade. The police officers searched him and then took him to the police station in Majka Jevrosima street which covers the central Belgrade district. Srdja Popović states that he was beaten at the police station for about 20 minutes, mainly with kicks to the lower part of his body, before he was taken to the Belgrade police headquarters in 29 November street.

Three of his colleagues in the *Otpor* movement, Zorana Smiljanić (f), Uroš Urosević and Andrija Stamenković, quickly went to ask about him at the police headquarters. Upon their arrival they saw Srdja Popović being held in handcuffs outside the building while police searched his car. Srdja Popović reportedly called to them to call a lawyer for him on their mobile telephones. According to Zorana Smiljanić they withdrew from the immediate vicinity of the car on the orders of a drugs-squad inspector who was taking part in the vehicle search, but were then arrested by the officers who had originally detained Srdja Popović. One of the officers reportedly hit Uroš Urošević about the head several times with a mobile phone and accused him of trying to use it while being put under arrest. Andrija Stamenković was also reportedly punched once. They were released shortly after.

No reasons were reported for their arrest, except for that of Srdja Popović, in whose case the police claimed that they found a small quantity of cocaine in his car. Srdja Popović has stated that he will sue the police for defamation because of this claim. No criminal charges are reported to have been brought against him. Amnesty International believes that Srdja Popović's political activities are a likely explanation for his arrest.

Amnesty International is concerned about the reported ill-treatment in custody of three of the four students. The organization calls on the Serbian authorities to initiate an independent and impartial investigation into the case and for any police officer found to be responsible for the ill-treatment to be held to account.

Background Information

In May 1998 the Serbian authorities passed a law that gave the central government direct control over the universities, allowing them to appoint the rector and deans of the 28 faculties of the University of Belgrade. Teaching staff were asked to sign a new contract which many of those affected have claimed is in effect an "oath of loyalty". More than 150 teachers from the University of Belgrade have refused to sign and some have already been dismissed. Teachers and students also complain that the curricula have been changed to reflect nationalist sentiments, for example by restricting the study of Croatian literature.

A group of teachers who have been dismissed or threatened with dismissal have recently announced proposals to found a "parallel" university.

Students from the University of Belgrade have formed a movement called *Otpor* ("Resistance") to oppose the restrictions on the university's independence. In recent months they have protested in different ways, including marches and boycotts of classes. The organization has been under pressure from the authorities. In November 1998 four of its members, Teodora Tabački (f), Nikola Vasiljević, Dragana Milinković (f) and Marina Glišić (f), were arrested for spraying anti-government slogans and a picture of a clenched fist (the symbol used by *Otpor*) on a wall. They were quickly sentenced to 10 days' imprisonment for "disturbing public order" and sent immediately to serve their sentences. Amnesty International considers them to have been prisoners of conscience. The Belgrade daily newspaper *Dnevni Telegraph* printed the clenched fist symbol of *Otpor* on its front cover when it reported the students' arrest. As a result the edition was banned under a draconian media law which was introduced in October.

On the night of 29 December 1998 another *Otpor* activist, Boris Karajčić, was reportedly beaten up by three unknown assailants who, as they ran off, told him to "say hello to your friends in *Otpor*". Boris Karajčić was treated in hospital for injuries to his kidneys, ribs and head. None of the assailants have yet been found by police.