

# Repression against defenders of human rights

## Attacks against Women in Black



May – November 2014

Dossier nr. 3

Women in Black are an activist group and network of feminist-antimilitarist orientation, it consists of women of different generations and ethnicities, educational levels, social status, life styles and sexual choices. Women in Black was founded on October 9<sup>th</sup> 1991 in Belgrade.

Since the beginning of their work (1991), Women in Black have been confronted with various forms of repression, by both state and non-state actors.

Ever since our inception, we have all too frequently been the targets of attacks, because we advocate human rights of the others and the different (in ethnic, political, sexual aspects). Nevertheless, as a women's peace group, we have had most problems because of our insisting on all levels of responsibilities for war and war crimes committed in our name. This occurred also during 2014, after our action on March 26<sup>th</sup> 2014 "We remember the crimes in Kosovo", which we reported in File nr. 1 (April 2014), as well as in Dossier nr. 2 (September 2014).

Let us remind: spokesman of the counter-terrorist unit of the Ministry of Police Radomir Počuča called (on March 25<sup>th</sup> 2014) hooligans in his Facebook status to clash with Women in Black, following our commemoration of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of war crimes of Serbian forces against Kosovo Albanians.

Ultra-right-wing movement "Srpski sabor Zavetnici"/"Serbian Convocation Patrons" held a protest in support to Radomir Počuča and against Women in Black, in the vicinity of Women in Black premises.

Police abused the freedom of public gathering by allowing a protest whose motive was to defend the call for lynch. This caused fear and uncertainty for WIB activists, as well as for tenants of the building in which WIB premises are located, with whom we have otherwise always had very fair relations since we moved into those premises (in 1997). Excessive powers of the police (harassment of tenants by police during the protest) caused resentment with some of the tenants and induced their petition for eviction of WIB, which is still ongoing. This additionally augments social exclusion, fear, unsafety and certainly the continuation of the media lynch (above all through social networks) against WIB activists.

Previous report on this case (Dossier no. 1, April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014) presents the facts about the attack, about the reaction of local and international organizations for human rights, and the political context in which the violence took place, etc. Report File nr. 2 contains short overview of the situation in the period from March to September 2014.

In this File/report, we bring the overview of relevant facts about this case, as well as about other attacks against WIB activists, about our security situation, reaction of state authorities, support and solidarity, etc.



## I Chronology/overview of the events

**Call for lynch of Women in Black:** on his Facebook status, “Boris Knežević” wrote on March 29<sup>th</sup>, which we were informed about by the police on May 13<sup>th</sup> 2014: “I call all brothers, wherever they see those whores in black, to lynch and burn them on the spot!!! Justice for Počuča” etc. and hundreds of threats appeared as a direct consequence of public lynch called upon by R. Počuča.

### Attack against Women in Black in Valjevo, July 8th 2014

On the occasion of 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of genocide in Srebrenica, Women in Black and participants of the initiative “Peace activism – activist cycling – Srebrenica 2014” organized on the main city square in Valjevo, in silence and in black, the peace action “We will never forget the genocide in Srebrenica”. From the very beginning of the action, a group of men wearing T-shirts bearing the slogan “Četinci Valjeva”/“Chetniks of Valjevo” as well as T-shirts with pictures of Ratko Mladić (charged with genocide in Srebrenica, and against whom there is an ongoing trial at the Hague Tribunal) sent nationalist-militaristic-misogyneous insults and threats, by “savagely shouting, swearing, spitting, throwing eggs at activists. At the same time, the atmosphere of hate was heating up, and they were getting more and more brutal, by the end it had indisputably turned into an atmosphere of lynch. As the number of members of pro-fascist group was increasing, the number of policemen securing the meeting was growing as well. But, police did not manage to prevent the breaking of the picket lines by the pro-fascist group and during the attack in an atmosphere of lynch and call for destruction, the following activists were injured: Staša Zajović, Ljiljana Radovanović, Miloš Urošević, Dejan Gašić”.<sup>1</sup>

Police eventually managed to evacuate the activists, and for security reasons all participants of the action returned to Belgrade with police escort.

Even though it had been previously planned for cyclists to spend the night in Valjevo and then go on with the cycling tour to Srebrenica, the action continued the following day, along a somewhat changed route. “Peace activism – activist cycling – Srebrenica 2014” action was organized for the second time year: nine cyclists started off from Belgrade. Participants of this cycling campaign this wanted to remind the inhabitants of the West Serbia and Podrinje about the role of Serbia in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the war in Bosnia and Hercegovina, the mentioned area was often used as logistic support for the campaigns by various military and paramilitary formations, who went to fight in the war in territory of Bosnia and Hezegovina.<sup>2</sup>

It needs to be mentioned that despite attacks and threats, Women in Black conducted all their activities planned as part of the commemoration of 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica.

### Assault on Staša Zajović, Women in Black , 22nd July 2014:

“Around 14:00 at the bus stop, in the vicinity of the main Post office (nearby the flower shop “Jelena”) in Zemun, a corpulent man, tall and with dark hair, between 30 and 40 years of age, hurled insults and threats at me, continuously. “I know you, you are Staša Zajović from Women in Black. Be aware, there is no place for you in Serbia”. To my question: “Who are you?” he did not answer and he went on: “Are you afraid for your own safety? For the safety of your family? You need to be afraid, because you hate Serbs and work for the Muslims... And so you know, I won’t tell you my name. We are invisible, we come out of the dark and work in the dark, we are everywhere...The American commandos won’t be able to save you ...” He kept repeating that I “work for Muslims” and that I “won’t be saved by American commandos...”. Then the bus 84 arrived and I boarded it and got off at Zelene Venac”.<sup>3</sup>



1 Announcement by the Women in Black, July 9th 2014

2 “Peace activism – activist cycling – Srebrenica 2014”

3 From information by Staša Zajović, July 22nd 2014

## II Legal protective measures undertaken by Women in Black and the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights /Yucom

The following actions were initiated in order to establish responsibility of the state authorities for the violence against WIB and in direction of legal protection:

- *July 21<sup>st</sup>, request submitted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs:* as we consider that police performed a series of omissions, Women in Black, invoking the Law on free access to information (article 15 paragraph 1) submitted a request<sup>4</sup> to the Ministry of Internal Affairs to provide the group with information on all relevant facts/data related to the rally held on April 5<sup>th</sup> 2014, on registration of the rally etc. We again submitted our request to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in October.<sup>5</sup>
- *July 21<sup>st</sup>, request to Ministry of Internal Affairs:* as we consider that police of Ministry of Internal Affairs interprets public procedures in a biased way, Women in Black addressed the above mentioned institution in relation to another rally which was held – the rally in support of election of the new government (April 27<sup>th</sup> 2014) in front of the National Parliament. Given the fact that “the rally was not registered in accordance with the Law, its taking place is disputable from the legal aspect. Outside the parliament building, the stage was set, from which the Prime Minister addressed the citizens. The Law on public gathering of the citizens explicitly states that a public rally cannot be held in vicinity of the parliament “immediately before or after sessions”.<sup>6</sup> At our request <sup>7</sup> we asked for information on all relevant facts about the mentioned rally. It should be mentioned that registrations of public manifestations (street actions etc.), which are submitted by Women in Black and related organizations to authorities in charge, are very complicated and they take an enormous effort, while in case of other non-state actors (mainly ultra-right-wing) it seems to be ultimately simple, which brings into question the elementary condition for democracy – equality before the Law. We submitted the same request again on October 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>8</sup>
- *July 21<sup>st</sup>, request submitted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs concerning the assault against WIB in Valjevo, on July 8<sup>th</sup>:* Invoking the Law on free access to information (article 15, paragraph 1), Women in Black submitted a request to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, to be provided with information on all the relevant data/information related to the assault in Valjevo: “Information related to formal and informal rally of multiple persons against Women in Black rally/action of solidarity with victims of the genocide in Srebrenica, held on July 8<sup>th</sup> 2014 in Valjevo”. Information was requested on: “registration of the counter-rally – if the rally was registered; which measures were undertaken after the rally; has the Ministry of Internal Affairs filed any criminal charges, and if so, on how many persons”, etc. We submitted the same request to the Ministry of Internal Affairs again on October 1<sup>st</sup>.
- *July 22<sup>nd</sup>, public letter by Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights/YUCOM:* YUCOM submitted on March 28<sup>th</sup> the criminal charge to the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office for the criminal offense *Racial and other discrimination*. Nevertheless, by the end of April 2014, the Prosecutor's Office amended this charge into the criminal offense *Endangering safety*. It is important to mention that the qualification of criminal offense was modified into the criminal offense of endangering safety, which is punishable with a smaller possible sentence than the criminal offense stated in the charge pressed by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights in the name of Women in Black. The Lawyers Committee reminds that “as a consequence of the call for violence against WIB by R. Počuča, the protest of right-wing organizations was held, which also resulted in a petition by the building tenants for eviction of Women in Black from their premises”. YUCOM also warns that “so far the practice of impunity opened space for such extremist actions, targeting all individuals and organizations who and which advocate tolerance and promotion of human rights in their work”.<sup>9</sup>

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4 Request for information of public relevance, July 21st 2014

5 Request for information of public relevance, October 1st 2014

6 Danas, May 3rd/4th 2014

7 Request for information of public relevance, July 21st 2014

8 Request for information of public relevance, October 1st 2014

9 Announcement by YUCOM, July 22nd 2014

- July 27 – Yucom submitted the criminal charge to the Third Public Prosecutor’s Office: for the criminal offense *Racial and other discrimination* concerning the assault against Staša Zajović (22.07.2014.). To date we have not been informed on any further undertaken actions.<sup>10</sup>
- September 29<sup>th</sup> – request by WIB to the Basic Public Prosecutor Valjevo/OJT Valjevo: of actions undertaken in relation to the assault on July 8<sup>th</sup> 2014, given the fact that on the same day WIB activists gave their statements in OJT premises in status of witnesses, and since that day we have not been informed on any further undertaken actions.<sup>11</sup>
- September 29<sup>th</sup> – request to the Prosecutor’s Office of the Higher Court in Belgrade: given the fact that the defendant R. Počuča, ex-spokesman of the counter-terrorist unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, wrote on his Facebook profile in mid-September that he “left to Ukraine to fight on the side of pro-Russian forces”, WIB asked the Prosecutor’s Office the following questions regarding this case: has the Court verified the statement that the defendant is located in Ukraine? Have measures been undertaken in order to bring the defendant to trial scheduled for October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014? Has the Court issued an order to detain the defendant? Has the Court ordered the measure of confiscation of the travel documents and the measure of ban on leaving the country? Has the arrest warrant for Počuča been announced?<sup>12</sup> The Higher Prosecutor’s Office replied on October 6<sup>th</sup> 2014 that it was “unable to provide you with the requested information, given that the case is in the accusation phase and that it is located in the Higher Court in Belgrade with the proceeding judge, who is the only person able to provide you with data upon your questions asked”.<sup>13</sup>
- September 29<sup>th</sup> – request by YUCOM to Ministry of Internal Affairs, Administration for City of Belgrade: for information on actions undertaken regarding calls for lynch by B. Knežević/Hasanović.<sup>14</sup>
- October 10<sup>th</sup> – request by WIB to the Higher Court in Belgrade: to allow the “access to and copying of scripts in this court’s case, pending against R. Počuča”, etc.<sup>15</sup>
- October 29<sup>th</sup> – request to the Basic Public Prosecutor in Valjevo/OJT Valjevo: we submitted again our request for information in relation to the counter-rally on July 8<sup>th</sup> 2014. Namely, the Ministry of Internal Affairs – Police Administration Valjevo sent a reply to our request, but the reply was related to the rally on July 16<sup>th</sup> 2014, which we never asked for, we requested information on the counter-rally, and on the assault against WIB (July 8<sup>th</sup> 2014). On same occasion, we asked a series of questions regarding the registration of the rally of “Democratic and peacefull strike” in which “our co-fighter chetnik duke and the president of Serbia Tomislav Nikolić” is saluted, among other things, etc. We asked OJT Valjevo the following questions: can such a formulation be classified as the criminal offense of violation of the Republic of Serbia and the President of the Republic, because the stated formulation has the implication that the President of the Republic has not renounced the title of chetnik duke, which would mean that on the head of the state we have a person who does not renounce the continuity with the quisling movement in World War II, which would then mean Serbia does not belong to the community of countries such as Russian Federation, the USA and the EU, who insist on antifascist tradition and decisively renounce every historical revisionism and rehabilitation of quisling organizations from World War II”, etc.<sup>16</sup>
- October 29<sup>th</sup> – request to the Higher Public Prosecutor Valjevo/VJT Valjevo: for information on what goes on regarding the undertaken measures in relation to the event on July 8<sup>th</sup> 2014. Namely, OJT informed Women in Black on October 16<sup>th</sup> 2014 that OJT, “on July 24<sup>th</sup> 2014 delivered entire script to the Higher Public Prosecutor in charge” and WIB asked of VJT to deliver information on the measures undertaken.<sup>17</sup>

10 Criminal charge submitted by Yucom, July 27th, 2014.

11 Request OJT Valjevo, September 29th 2014.

12 Request to the Prosecutor’s Office of the Higher Court in Belgrade, September 29th 2014

13 Rply by the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, October 6th 2014

14 Request by YUCOM, Police Administration Belgrade, September 29th 2014

15 Request by WIB to the Higher Court in Belgrade, October 10th 2014

16 Request by WIB to OJT Valjevo, October 29th 2014

17 WIB request to VJT Valjevo, October 29th 2014

- *October 30<sup>th</sup> – request to the Higher Public Prosecutor-s Office Valjevo/ VJT Valjevo*: Police Administration Valjevo/PU Valjevo sent a letter to OJT Valjevo (on August 4<sup>th</sup> 2014) in which it informs on content elements of the registration of rally “Democratic and Peaceful Strike” (July 11<sup>th</sup> 2014) and which was scheduled and held on July 16<sup>th</sup> 2014. The especially emphasized formulation is that the rally “**will not be attended by fagots, homosexuals, lesbians and Women in Black**”. We consider that the information sent needs Prosecutor’s assessment whether there are elements of criminal offense which calls for prosecution ex officio, so WIB ask for the information on what VJT has undertaken in the matter of this file.<sup>18</sup>
- *October 31<sup>st</sup> – Request to the Higher Court in Belgrade*: on October 6<sup>th</sup> 2014 we were informed that “the Prosecutor’s Office is unable” to provide us with the requested data in relation to questions we asked as the aggrieved party in the case procedure against R. Počuča, given that “the case is in the accusation phase and it is located in the Higher Court in Belgrade”, from whom WIB requests “information on actions undertaken in this case”.<sup>19</sup>

The legal YUCOM team, as well as other experts and Women in Black activists are unanimous regarding the legal remedies and procedures which are to be undertaken in the following period regarding the responsibility of the state, communication with international organizations and institutions, as well as further developing of resistance strategy, mutual support, etc.

### III Measures undertaken by the state regarding the assaults

In this chapter we will only enumerate the actions undertaken by the state, the information which we received exclusively upon our requests; our assessment of the undertaken measures as well as of the ir/responsibility of the state will follow further down in this report.

- *May 13<sup>th</sup> – Ministry of Internal Affairs (Police Directorate, Police Administration/PU for the City of Belgrade)*: statements were taken from WIB activists Ljiljana Radovanović, Staša Zajović and Viloeta Đikanović in relation to threats by Boris Knežević/Hasanović.<sup>20</sup>
- *May 14<sup>th</sup> - Ministry of Internal Affairs (Police Directorate, Police Administration/PU for the City of Belgrade)*: filed a criminal charge to the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, to the Department for High Technological Crimes/VTK “due to a reasonable suspicion that Boris Hasanović committed a criminal offense of Endangering safety from article 138 paragraph 2 of Penalty Code”.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, B. Hasanović continued on social networks with permanent threats, assaults and insults against Women in Black.
- *June 20<sup>th</sup>* – the trial scheduled in the Higher Court regarding the case of the assault against WIB was canceled: it was canceled because of the strike of Lawyers.
- *July 8<sup>th</sup>: Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Valjevo took statements from the injured activists*: Dejan Gašić, Ljiljana Radovanović, Miloš Urošević and Staša Zajović.
- *July 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>*: Police in Valjevo arrested 11 persons for the assault against activists of organization “Women in Black”. Four men were also suspected of having committed the criminal offense of assault on the public officer on duty and of the criminal offense of violent behavior. At first, the one month detention was ordered, but they were kept detained for only one day, and after that they were released. The Criminal-trial Chamber of the Basic Court in Valjevo issued a decision to suspend the detention, with explanation that in assessment of the gravity of the offense the persons were suspected of, the Law on criminal procedure was violated.

18 Request by WIB to VJT Valjevo, October 30th 2014

19 Request by WIB to OJT Valjevo, October 31st 2014

20 Record of the hearing of WIB activists, May 13th 2014

21 Reply by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Police Directorate, Police Administration/PU for the City of Belgrade) from October 3rd 2014 upon the request by the authorized WIB attorney Kristina Todorović

- *July 23<sup>rd</sup>* – the trial of Radomir Počuča for endangering the safety of Women in Black was postponed. The trial was supposed to begin on July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014, but this time again the session was postponed, for the reason of absence of the defendant’s attorney. In the name of the defendant Radomir Počuča, the attorney’s law clerk informed the Court that the defendant’s attorney was on leave, and he asked the Court not to hold the main session on that day, because he has not passed the Bar and he is not familiar with the scripts of the given case file. The judge stated that this criminal offense does not necessitate a defense attorney, but that it is the defendant’s right to have a defense attorney. The authorized attorney of the injured party, lawyer Kristina Todorović (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights) stated that for this criminal offense does not even call for the presence of the defendant, but the Prosecutor’s Office agreed with the Court’s decision that the main trial session be postponed.
- *August 14<sup>th</sup>* – *reply by the Ministry of Internal Affairs* (Cabinet of the Minister and the Bureau for Information of Public Relevance): in the reply, among other things, it is stated that what occurred on April 27<sup>th</sup> 2014 was the “spontaneous gathering of the citizens with aim to give support to the newly formed Government of the Republic of Serbia. On that occasion, in front of the House of the National Parliament, approximately 10,000 citizens gathered, who had all come individually or in smaller groups, as well as on buses from the interior of Serbia. At 19:35 in front of the National Parliament of Republic of Serbia, the Premier of the Serbian Government Mr. A. Vučić, with his newly elected ministers of the Republic of Serbia, came out and addressed the gathered citizens. At 19:45 the speech by Mr. A. Vučić ended”, etc. Nevertheless, the state avoided this time also to answer the explicit question: has the rally in front of the House of the National Parliament (on April 27<sup>th</sup> 2014) been registered? Does this mean that the executive power is not obliged to register with itself the rallies it organizes?!<sup>22</sup>
- *September 17<sup>th</sup>* – the trial session at the Higher Court in the case file on assault against the WIB was canceled because of the Lawyers’ strike.
- *October 7<sup>th</sup>* – *reply by the Ministry of Internal Affairs* (Cabinet of the Minister and the Bureau for Information of Public Relevance): “Association of citizens ‘Srbski sabor zavetnici’ filed in Police Station Savski Venac a registration for the rally on April 5<sup>th</sup> 2014 in front of the premises of organization Women in Black”, and it is also stated in the continuation that “the mentioned public rally was attended by 40 citizens, while the physical, operational and traffic security was conducted together by officers of Police Administration/PU for the City of Belgrade – 31 members of Police Brigade, 12 members of the Department for public order and peace of Police Administration and 6 members of Traffic Police. During the rally there was no violation of public order and peace”.<sup>23</sup> But, the situation was notably different: “Police blocked the entire neighborhood, stopped the traffic and identified the people who wanted to enter the building. They caused such kind of repulsion towards us, that they pandered the ‘Zavetnici’. ‘Zavetnici’ want to help Počuča. If they want to protect him, they ought to go the Government, and instead of that, they come to the place where threatened victims are. Here, the Police and the State joined Počuča in endangering WIB, because they authorized the rally in front of the WIB premises. The fact that the rally was not denied to be held outside your premises, is actually threatening your safety. The state in this case enables violence”.<sup>24</sup>
- *October 16<sup>th</sup>* – *the reply by the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Valjevo to the request by WIB of September 29<sup>th</sup> 2014*: we have been informed that the case file was sent to the authority of Public Prosecutor’s Office in charge.<sup>25</sup>
- *October 22<sup>nd</sup>* – the trial session at the Higher Court on the file case of assault against WIB was canceled; it was canceled also for the reason of the lawyers’ strike. The next trial session is scheduled for November 27<sup>th</sup> 2014.

22 Statement by Staša Zajović on the meeting „Repression against defenders of human rights”, September 16th 2014

23 Notification by the Ministry of Internal Affairs – Police Administration for the City of Belgrade – Department for control of legality of work, October 17th 2014

24 Statements by the legal advisers on the working meeting of WIB „Repression against defenders of human rights”, October 10th and 11th 2014

25 Notification by the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Valjevo, October 16th 2014



## IV Support and solidarity – local, international networks and institutions

### 1. Organizations for human rights – local and regional

As in the previous period, civil society organizations of Serbia and of the whole region expressed their clear solidary support to Women in Black. With the legal team of Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM), who also represent us, Women in Black are in permanent communication, we agree protection and security strategies together. Numerous meetings were held with other organizations, which represents the contribution to the common struggle against the ultimately authoritarian state, the impunity of violence against defenders of human rights and against the different (in ideological, ethnical/racial, social-class and sexual choice).

A large number of organizations of civil society expressed their solidarity with Women in Black, with the request for an investigation on the assault and for bringing the perpetrators to justice. Among others, those organizations are:

- *Gay Pride Organization Belgrade*: they most strongly condemn the assault against Women in Black activists, expressing “solidarity with our dedicated friends who together with us work on building a society safe for all of us. Gay Pride Belgrade again calls all state institutions to contribute to diversity with dedicated and honest work on the promotion of human rights”.<sup>26</sup>
- *Women’s Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina*: “The assault against Women in Black shows that the community is still not ready to confront the past and that the national leadership of Republic of Serbia still has not learned the values that Women in Black advocate. Organizations of civil society in B&H request urgent processing and rethinking of this offense against the organizations of civil society in Serbia. We advise the representatives of the international community to use all mechanisms and to protect the defenders of human rights”, etc.<sup>27</sup>
- *Association for Social Research and Communication (UDIK), Sarajevo*: “We lend solidary and antifascist support to Women in Black in our common effort for the just peace and Different Balkan”, etc.<sup>28</sup>
- *Association for Social Research and Communication (UDIK), Sarajevo*: they publicly condemn non-response by the Serbian state in the matter of protection of activists of organization Women in Black from Belgrade. “Here by, UDIK calls upon the state of Serbia to finally stand among responsible countries, where threats directed against the activists of Women in Black Belgrade would be condemned”.<sup>29</sup>
- *Stop Violence against Women in Black*: protest in support of WIB by Association for Social Research and Communication (UDIK), Sarajevo, on September 16<sup>th</sup> 2014: as a sign of support to WIB, the protest was held in front of the Embassy of Serbia in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the announcement “Women in Black are not Alone”, UDIK calls the national leadership in Serbia to react adequately and to protect WIB from “neo-fascist organizations which have been widely legalized in Serbia. The issue of the further activity of this organization is the question how much Serbia wants Women in Black in its environment, or in other words, the question if Serbia is still not ready to renounce to its dark past of Milošević’s regime. We consider that violence against Women in Black concerns us all, and not only the Republic of Serbia”, etc.<sup>30</sup> The Embassy of the Republic of Serbia/RS in B&H declined to accept the letter by this organization addressed to the president of Serbia Tomislav Nikolić.<sup>31</sup>
- *Stop Violence against Women in Black* – protest in support to WIB by the Association for Social Research and Communication (UDIK), Sarajevo, on October 21<sup>st</sup> 2014: as sign of support to WIB, the protest was held in front of the

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26 Gay Pride Belgrade, July 9th 2014, Announcement

27 Announcement „Women’s Network of B&H condemns all forms of violence“, July 9th 2014

28 Announcement by UDIK, July 9th 2014

29 Announcement by UDIK, July 9th 2014

30 Women in Black are not Alone, announcement by UDIK, September 14th 2014

31 Anadolija/Oslobođenje.ba, <http://www.avaz.ba/clanak/135901/podrska-zenama-u-crnom-aktivisti-udik-a-odrzali-protest-u-sarajevu>



Embassy of Serbia in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Embassy of the Republic of Serbia/RS in B&H accepted the letter by this organization addressed to the president of Serbia Tomislav Nikolić.<sup>32</sup>

## 2. Organizations for human rights – international level

A very large number of international organizations and networks for human rights, peace, feminism and antimilitarism expressed their support from the entire world: War Resisters International, Amnesty International, International Network of Women in Black, Women Living under Muslim Laws, Secularism is a Women's Issue/SIAW, Network of Organizations for Peace of Italy/Associazione per la Pace.

We state in chronological order some of the appeals, petitions, announcements, visits:

**Women in Black European Network:** participants of the Women in Black Conference (123 participants from 22 countries), held in Lueven, Belgium, from May 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> 2014 addressed an appeal "Stop Repression against Activists for Peace and Human Rights" to Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the EU for Security and Foreign Politics, as well as to the candidates for the EU Parliament, in which it is stated: "Because of its work on issues of peace, anti-fascism, antimilitarism, antiwar action and against impunity, the organization Women in Black experiences permanent harassment from both state and non-state actors in Serbia", with the request for the EU to "attentively observe the respect for and protection of human rights by the Government of Serbia, as the basic conditions for integration into the EU".<sup>33</sup>

### Front Line Defenders request from authorities in Serbia to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attack against members of Women in Black with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of members of Women in Black and any human rights defenders commemorating the Srebrenica massacre;
3. Take measures to ensure that government officials or other public figures refrain from making statements or declaration stigmatising the legitimate work of human rights defenders;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Serbia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.<sup>34</sup>

Women in Black Madrid/Mujeres de Negro Madrid addressed an open letter on July 11<sup>th</sup> to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain with the following requests: to guarantee security of Women in Black Belgrade; to have the EU exert pressure in order for perpetrators of violence to suspend their criminal offenses and in order to sanction the violence against Women in Black; to have the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain voice its support to the WIB activists visible in the eyes of the authorities and society in Serbia, etc. On July 21<sup>st</sup> 2014 activists of Women in Black held an operational meeting in Madrid concerning the issues of the assault against Women in Black, the position of defenders of human rights and the climate of impunity in Serbia.

<sup>35</sup> The request by the Women in Black Madrid to be received by the Ambassador of Serbia in Spain was declined.

*The following two international petitions were initiated as well:*

**The international petition addressed to all Embassies of Serbia in the world:** "The individuals and organizations undersigned note with concern the increasing violence against the women's peace organization Women in Black – Belgrade, and in particular against its founder, Stasa Zajovic, which and who have been targeted repeatedly in the past few months by

32 Announcement by UDIK, October 21st 2014

33 WIB European Network Statement, Lueven, May 3rd 2014

34 Front Line Defenders, July 10th 2014

35 Mujeres de Negro Madrid, July 11th 2014



extreme-right political groups and individuals, as well as harassed by the police, justice system as state actors in Serbia. We will remain alert and closely monitor Serbian authorities' actions to ensure Stasa Zajovic's safety."<sup>36</sup>

This petition was undersigned by **45** persons from following countries: Austria, Australia, France, USA, Great Britain, India, Israel, Switzerland, Canada and Guatemala. The persons who signed are feminist-pacifist activists and members of academic community from following universities: UCLA (California), Goldsmiths University of London, Columbia (NY), Minnesota, Rutgers (USA), Manchester, Toronto, Connecticut, Arizona, Hyderabad, Clark(USA), Delaware, Canberra, Glasgow, Bristol, Monash (Austria), Washington DC (SAD), etc.

**International petition addressed to numerous Embassies of Serbia worldwide:** It is stated, among other things, in the petition: "Staša Zajović, the founder of Women in Black Belgrade, antinationalist and feminist activist, as well as other Women in Black activists, is exposed to a constant campaign of demonization and denigration by the regime nationalist media, non-state and state actors. Staša is exposed to psychological aggression and is genuinely in danger. The aim of this campaign is to thwart the activity of Women in Black", etc. The petition was signed by approximately thirty members of the academic community from numerous European and non-European countries and it has been sent to embassies of Serbia in countries of the signees.

Visit by **Carlos M. Beristain**, human rights activist, Bilbao, Basque/Spain: in June and September 2014 numerous working meetings were held, with discussions on political goals of the repression against WIB and generally against human rights defenders, on strategies of protection and nonviolent resistance.<sup>37</sup>

The visit by **Andrea Rocca**, Front Line Defenders, Dublin, Ireland: participation in the working meeting "Repression against defenders of human rights – assaults against Women in Black" on October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> 2014. On that occasion, A. Rocca spoke about international mechanisms of protection of human rights' defenders, the significance of documenting human rights' violations, etc. The working meeting was attended by 32 activists of the WIB Network from Serbia.<sup>38</sup>

### **3. International institutions – the UN and the EU Mission in Serbia**

In numerous communications held in this period, WIB activists exposed facts about the assault, as well as their stands on the political context in which violence against peace and human rights defenders is conducted. We are stating some of them:

**UN – working meetings – May 14<sup>th</sup>, June 11<sup>th</sup>, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, Belgrade:** operational meeting with Irena Voyackova Sollorano, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Serbia and with NGOs for human rights, on the position of human rights defenders in Serbia. The participants exposed facts about difficult position of defenders in Serbia, manipulation in the media, autocratic manner of executing power in Serbia, warning about the gap between declarative promises and the state of facts. Zorica Trifunović and Staša Zajović participated in the name of WIB, and they met again with the United Nations Resident Coordinator. They also held a meeting with Asya Varbanova, UN Women Representative in Serbia, on the status of human rights' defenders in Serbia and on the assaults against WIB, etc.

**The EU Mission – June 3<sup>rd</sup>, Belgrade:** operational meeting with Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia; WIB activists (Zorica Trifunović and Staša Zajović) discussed with Luca Bianconi, Counselor Head of Political Section at Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia, about the assaults against Women in Black and generally about human rights' defenders in Serbia. The EU representatives spoke about the seriousness of the assaults, about demonstrations against Women in Black, about the intervention they undertook to protect us, which they were not content with, about the general atmosphere which makes work more difficult for the NGOs with critical opinions, about stigmatization of those NGOs, about the conversations they had with official representatives of authorities, etc.

**The EU Commission:** In regard of the assaults against WIB in Valjevo, the Autonomous Women's Center and the Network of Women against Violence in Serbia addressed an appeal to the President of the European Commission, and in reply to this

36 Statement in defense of rights defenders Women in Black-Belgrade and founder Stasa Zajovic, 28 July 2014, by SIAWI

37 From WIB report, July and October 2014

38 From report on working meeting "Repression against defenders of human rights", October 2014



appeal, the following is stated: "The European Commission observes attentively the status of human rights in Serbia, including the position of human rights defenders, as part of the Agreement on Serbia's Accession to the EU (Chapter 23). The Commission condemns all forms of violence and finds the assaults against the defenders of human rights unacceptable. Through our Delegation in Belgrade, we immediately publicly reacted in response to the assault in Valjevo on July 8<sup>th</sup> 2014, and we advised the authorities in Serbia to investigate all the circumstances and bring the perpetrators to justice. The European Commission will observe the situation with alert, and we will report on the mentioned assaults in our next Progress Report in October 2014."<sup>39</sup>

**Working meeting in Embassy of Switzerland in Belgrade, September 25<sup>th</sup>:** on invitation by the Embassy and upon a request by the Women in Black from Geneva, who sent a petition to their Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the assaults against the WIB and against Stasa Zajovic, WIB activist (Stasa Zajovic and Zorica Trifunovic) were received by Jean-Luc Oesch, the Deputy head of Mission. During the operational meeting, the issues discussed were the assaults against WIB, and generally the attacks against defenders, about the media darkness, about suspension of space for critical public, etc.

## V Reactions of the public (media, social networks, citizens...)

### 1. Media – local and regional

We state some of the reactions:

*The trial scheduled on July 23<sup>rd</sup> was covered by the following media: B 92, Free Europe, Beta, Naše novine, Kurir etc. and activists of following organizations expressed their solidarity with Women in Black by attending this court session: Labris, Reconstruction Women's Fund, Autonomous Women's Center, Gay-Straight Alliance, Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights.*

In her statements for the press, Stasa Zajovic said, among other things: "This trial is very important and we expect the state to behave responsibly and in accordance with international obligations. It is important for us that the adequate sentence be pronounced, in order to send a message to the public that violence against human rights defenders is punishable". She also stated that Women in Black are undergoing constant violence since that call for lynch: "We are exposed to permanent violence and the last act of violence occurred two days ago, when I was exposed to not only verbal violence in the street, but also to death threats".<sup>40</sup>

The indicted R. Počuča stated to the press that he has not changed his stance since March 27<sup>th</sup>, when on his Facebook account he called for lynch of Women in Black, as stated, that the court case is "a blown up and hypocritical farce, because the Law is interpreted without justice, and this shows that justice and Law in this state have less and less common points", Počuča assessed and added: "I regret the words I used in a vulgar form, but my stance remains unchanged. A normal state is supposed to take care of its citizens, and most of the citizens disapprove of the activities of auto-chauvinist organizations like Women in Black, Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Center, who act against the interests of the state", said Počuča.<sup>41</sup>



Many tabloids (Informer, Alo...), as well as many social networks, reported in a sensationalist manner, twisting the facts exclusively in favor of the indicted R. Počuča, and in the spirit of demonizing Women in Black and related NGOs: "These NGOs act with no restraint against the interests of the state... Why is their conduct allowed and not sanctioned?"<sup>42</sup>

39 European Commission, Directorate-General Enlargement, Brussels, August 12th 2014

40 Statement by Stasa Zajovic to the above mentioned media

41 Statement by R. Počuča to the mentioned press

42 Comments, on-line Telegraf, July 23rd 2014

## Reactions in the media – concerning the assault in Valjevo

Radio Free Europe, as well as agency “Anadolia” reported most in the period from July 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, covering the event in Valjevo from the very beginning, and later covering the statements by the participants of the action. Reports were fair and objective and very encouraging. Information of Free Europe was immediately passed on by other media.

“Media coverage of the beginning of the action was on last year’s level, Serbian media mainly ignored the announcement and the beginning of the action (with the exception of Free Europe, DW, Kontrapress and several similar profile media), even though they were all regularly informed about the action. Bosnian electronic media, as well as web portals, showed considerably more interest for the action, which was also noticeable upon our arrival to Potočari, where people were quite well informed of the event of our action, and especially of the extremists’ outbursts in Valjevo.

Only the violence in Valjevo got some attention in Serbian printed and electronic media, which once again proved the tabloid and sensationalist nature of domestic media, who are interested in sensation, scandal, blood, count of the dead and injured, while they don’t deal at all with any essential social issue or analyses of social trends.”<sup>43</sup>

Here are some of the headlines:

- WOMEN IN BLACK: They are calling us whores, they are threatening to slaughter us! (telegraf.rs)
- Football supporters and Chetniks assaulted Women in Black in Valjevo! (telegraf.rs)
- What the assault on Women in Black looked like in Valjevo! (telegraf.rs)
- In Valjevo 30 days of detention for conflict with Women in Black (agency Beta)
- Attackers of Women in Black at large (agency Tanjug), etc.

## 2. Social networks, public letters by citizens...

A large number of comments by the citizens was noticed, and they were very encouraging and positive, coming above all from one entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina – the Federation.

We bring you one part of the public letter “To Citizens of Valjevo” by author Ševko Bajić, activist from Sarajevo:

“Women in Black are not traitors of your nation, they are the bravest citizens of your very people whom I personally admire. Because it takes courage to remind somebody of the most painful truth. They are the bravest part of the Serbian people, because they have never made any compromise in relation to the truth and sufferings. You have decided, dear citizens of Valjevo, to believe only in your own truth, but where do you see the right to “force your own truth upon others” by violence, beatings, stones? Upon those who are hundred, and a million times braver than you are. Shame on you! Shame on you who kept quiet and still keep quiet, giving legitimacy to the worst of your people, condoning the use of violence as a routine, shame on you!

Is it possible that you have decided to go down in history as radical nationalists who remain indifferent as human beings, at least only as human beings, by the tears and the pain of over 20,000 survivors from Srebrenica”, etc. <sup>44</sup>

One citizen from Valjevo who, presumably for security reasons, did not leave his name, sent after the assault on WIB in Valjevo a public letter to several hundred addresses; in the letter “The arrogant god of war” where he reveals the background of the assault: “There is one association who have been harassing their fellow citizens for years. They emphasize in their name that they are WARRIORS... **To them, money is more important than anything...** They have their president and their premises that they do not own. The city provided them... They use a shield a board with names of the killed in the past civil war, which was waged gratuitously. **Now, their president is capitalizing on all of that... To him, situations of war are the natural habitat...**” <sup>45</sup>

43 One review of “Peace Activism – Activist bicycling” 2014, by author Vladimir Jevtic, July 2014

44 „To citizens of Valjevo” by author Ševko Bajić, activist from Sarajevo

45 The conceited god of war, letter by anonymous citizen, July 2014

## Reactions on social networks – citizens of Valjevo (July 9th to 13th)

With the exception of one case, more precisely of one female citizen who initiated the rethinking of the assault on WIB condemning the assault, reactions to Women in Black action are dominantly negative: they vary from support to pro-fascists, justifying their act, denial of the genocide and any accountability of the state of Serbia for war crimes, complete insensitivity to sufferings and the agony of others, through conspiracy theories against Serbian people, to self-victimization and recognition of only their own people as sole victims. And certainly as well, to the calls that everyone (above all WIB) who does not fit the national consensus be banished! Reactions confirm the well spread political and cultural attitude that fascism is 'the right to think differently', that it is included in 'freedom of speech and expression', thus justifying pro-fascist violence and accusing the victims and even criminalizing the victims of such violence.

Here are several writings:

*"Surely, I was pronounced the people's enemy number one. Large numbers of people in my city considers what happened to be completely normal, because, for the God's sake, our feelings of being "Serbs" have been hurt. I am ashamed that this happened in my city... And I am sad that my co-citizens showed me how uncivilized my city is... I am sorry that I was not able to prevent this from happening in any way..."*

*"...Women in Black look like frustrated women to me... By the account of the black women, it is all the fault of Milošević and his... So, again Serbs are being blamed... I do not deny part of guilt by this, but why would that guilt be on us only, exclusively on us..."*

*"WOMEN IN BLACK! When will it enough? For how long will they be spreading their banners... This in Valjevo was really, but really unnecessary!"*

*"They came to the city which is still recovering from the floods. What did they expect? That they would be tolerated? Understood?!"*

*"What do citizens of Valjevo have to do with Srebrenica?! Why are they doing all that and who pays them to provoke the long suffering people who have lost so much in the last to decades?! Who are they?! The moral sword of Serbia paid by the Soros money? Do they have any shame? A feeling of belonging to a nation? Is Ratko Mladić not in the Hague? What are those banners for then?"*

*Women in Black are a national disgrace! You won't see anything like that either in Croatia... or in Bosnia... no in Kosovo!*

*Provoking people in these more than hard times for Serbia is the shame of this government and not of the detainees...*

*Prohibit those creatures once and for all!*

*This is no longer the issue of human rights or freedom of speech, but of spreading non-patriotism and high treason for all the money they've been paid!*

*How much money are they getting for this? There must be an account somewhere... people need to know their price for what they are doing... we will pay them more. Just to shut them up for good, so we don't have to blush for them..."*

*"Yeah, yeah, I am 'very sorry' too, because Women in Black have been assaulted, they are exactly what this state needs!"*

*"Women in Black don't deserve a place in Serbia... we've got enough of our own women shrouded in black, only they are not given any media attention..."<sup>46</sup>*

Following the information that R. Počuča, ex-spokesman of the Counter-terrorist Unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs posted in mid-September 2014 on his Facebook profile, about him being 'on the side of pro-Russian forces' in the thrater of war in Ukraine, there has been a lot of information in the media, whose tone was dominantly sensationalist, glorifying, containing statements by R. Počuča.<sup>47</sup>

Also Women in Black are mentioned in this context, mainly referring to the trial against R. Počuča.

46 Serbia: Women in Black and cyclists assaulted in Valjevo for memorializing the genocide [www.klix.ba](http://www.klix.ba)

47 Radomir Počuča armed to his teeth, Kurir, September 24th 2014 etc.

## VI Political context

### ***Serbia: From authoritarian to autocratic state***

*"Fear this immense did not exist even in time of Milošević..."* (Ljiljana, WIB activist)

*"What worries me most is the current Prime Minister and his absolutist power. He seizes every opportunity to abuse everything he can, and he even abused the Gay Pride"* (Snežana, WIB activist)

In the parliamentary elections (March 16<sup>th</sup> 2014), the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) became the absolute winner of the elections (80% parliamentary seats).

Three key political figures of the current leadership in Serbia: Tomislav Nikolić, the president of the Republic, Aleksandar Vučić, the Prime Minister, who holds all levers of power in his hands and Ivica Dačić, the chief of diplomacy, are the key political figures from the S. Milošević era.

A. Vučić has plebiscitary support of the citizens of Serbia, he has given citizens the illusion of justice by his demagogic struggle against corruption. On the interior plane, he rules in an absolutistic way, undermining and even devastating the already fragile institutions.

Since taking over power, SNS and A. Vučić introduced open censorship: the critically oriented media have been totally weakened – there is ongoing oppression of media liberties, the freedom of speech is seriously threatened, there is ongoing criminalization of the opposition, stronger self-censorship, mainly coming from fear for existence. Besides that, the judicial system represents a huge problem, the so called "reforms" of the judicial system are devastating, it is becoming clear that they lead exclusively to one party judicial system.

This has been mentioned, along with the media issue, as the main problem in this year's Progress Report for Serbia. In brief, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) imposes party control over all public spheres, including culture, education, and it tends to impose control over the sphere of civil society: *"Non-governmental organizations which are under the control of authorities are being formed, and they have support for winning project funds. These are new methods of repression which are not so visible."*<sup>48</sup>

At the present moment in Serbia, there is vulnerability of all social groups: the number of extremely poor is growing (Law on Employment, adopted in July 2014, is ultimately detrimental for vulnerable social groups), the vulnerability of children is growing, as well as of persons with special needs, members of national minorities, the mentally challenged, patients with serious diseases, asylum seekers, LGBT, defenders of human rights.

### ***International community and current authorities in Serbia***

*"It is important that not only the face of the EU which supports the authorities is seen, and you have every right to express your bitterness and your resentment"* (A. Rocca, Front Line Defenders)

*"The international community, and above all the EU, do not pay enough attention to the right wing extremism, which is in Serbia increasingly spreading in the tissue of society itself"* (Sonja B., defender of human rights)

By signing the Brussels Agreement (April 2013), A. Vučić and his government only declaratively adopted European values. Vučić pursues politics which enjoys the support of the West, in order to gain support of the leading EU countries and of the USA, who have a vested interest in the Kosovo issue.

For the European Union/the EU, it is the most important thing to have a partner who is ready to sign an agreement on normalization of relations with Kosovo. Therefore, the Brussels administration "turns a blind eye" on Serbia when it comes to the

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48 Sonja Biserko, on working meeting in WIB „Repression against defenders of human rights“, October 10th and 11th 2014.

absence of reforms on the interior plane. The EU is not interested in the dark economic perspective and in the deep economic crises, in the desperate state of media, in the collapse of the system and of institutions ruled by Premier A. Vučić and his associates. They are not interested in social demagoguery nor in cheap pluralism as the only constant of such politics. In short, Brussels and Washington support the current authorities and above all they support A. Vučić because of their own goals in foreign politics.

For these reasons, the EU does not exert adequate pressure on the current leadership in Serbia in case of media censorship and attacks against defenders of human rights.

For the same reasons, the international community, and above all the EU, do not pay enough attention to the right wing extremism, which is more and more present in Serbia and is increasingly spreading across the society.

For the same reasons, the EU is not interested in using the negotiations on EU membership to encourage Serbia to take concrete measures in order to terminate the atmosphere of impunity of war crimes by the International Law, which is supposedly one of the main criteria for progress in the process of negotiations on accession of Serbia in the EU.

And this is why civil society organizations such as Women in Black and related organizations, which advocate discontinuity with the criminal past and for crimes the sanctioning committed by Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces during the wars in the 90's, are an easy target of attacks by state and non-state actors in Serbia.

An important element of foreign political orientation of Serbia includes relations with the Russian Federation. Vučić imitates V. Putin in many aspects, and there are elements of the so-called "putinization" of Serbia in his politics. It was plain clear how much the current leadership in Serbia cares for Russia and especially for Putin, when the military parade in the occasion of 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of liberation of Belgrade was moved for four days before the actual date of liberation of Belgrade, so that the parade could be attended by the "dearest guest" V. V. Putin. But, in spite of everything, the Russian Federation declined to write off Serbia's bad debts for the imported Russian gas.

### ***The state is responsible for violence of state and non-state actors...***

*"Security of human rights defenders is threatened by the state and its structures in the physical, moral and material sense..." (Vlada, WIB activist)*

*"Police cooperates with violent groups. Police and the state joined R. Počuča in endangering WIB, because they approved of the meeting in front of the WIB premises." (Nikola Barović, lawyer, WIB legal advisor)*

*"Pride showed a very important thing: when national leadership wants to control fascists, then they do it. Now, when they are pressured by the EU, they showed that they can control violence and offenders whom they produce..." (Staša, WIB activist)*

Common denominator of attacks against WIB: attacks are organized, constant and systematic, they are not incidents nor episodes.

*Attacks and repression are carried out by state actors, like in the case of R. Počuča, ex-spokesman of the counter-terrorist unit of Ministry of Police of Serbia.*

Violence and repression are carried out by state institutions also through excessive police protection, which is militarization of our streets and other actions.

*Attacks and repression are also carried out by non-state actors (ultra-right-wing organizations of pro-fascist/nazi provenance, the so called hooligans...) and the state often uses "services" by the mentioned organizations, as an informal part of its repression apparatus, so the so-called struggle against hooligans and similar groups is a propaganda farce. "Police reaction during the attacks against WIB in Valjevo, as well as the fact that they were carried out by multiple rowdies tolerated by Prosecutors' Offices and Courts, confirms to a great extent the thesis that this is the matter of consequences of state structures teaming up with right-wing violators disguised as football supporters"<sup>49</sup>*

49 Vladimir Jevtić, WIB activist

During the year 2014, the activity of ultra-right-wing organizations is increasing, to which the attacks against WIB are a testimony, while the state officers find that: "... activity of right-wing organizations has been insignificant this year. Activity of right-wing organizations at this moment is small and not so significant. On the path of EU integrations we need to conduct that (Pride) as well, and there is not much to say about it. That is one of the conditions that the EU will not oversee. And Serbia knows it has to pursue that."<sup>50</sup>

On the day of the Pride, A. Vučić said that he thanks "the citizens who stayed at home and made it possible for Pride to be carried out..."

"The state and those obedient citizens showed a very high level of synergy. They not only showed "respect" for Pride, when the national leadership called for tolerance, but some of them (for example Movement 1389) held a press conference, where they called their own membership to comply with the Constitution and the Law, because that is "important for the path of Serbia towards the EU". Only a couple of days later, "obedient citizens" showed up at the football game Serbia – Albania, they stormed into the field, and created chaos. After that, a wave of violence against property of Albanians began in Serbia, mainly in Vojvodina. This all proves that when the order comes from above to target and attack... they (hooligans) do it, if the command says to hit the targets selectively, then the entire operation is carried out with surgical precision..."<sup>51</sup>

### **Aim of repression against Women in Black**

*"The aim of political repression and terror is to destroy solidarity, commonness, collective common work, and to stultify political believes opposed to established order... is necessary to maintain the spaces for common reflections on problems and challenges, to nurture solidarity, collective work, to advocate your believes and values – of nonviolence, just peace, mutual support..."* (Carlos M. Beristain)

In numerous debates on aims of repression, activists of the local Women in Black Network and their international friends outlined, among other things, the following:

- **Silencing critical voices in Serbia, attrition strategy, discouragement, dissuade from activities:** "One of the aims of attacks is targeting the defenders and thwarting, preventing you from acting" (A. Rocca, Front Line Defenders); "The regime fears even the small group of people who can infect others as well..." (Nadežda)
- **Isolation of human rights defenders:** "The problem of isolation and marginalization comes from the position of the Women in Black as whistle blowers, who remind the entire society of unpleasant truths, which the society tries to run away from and oppress" (Vlada); "Being an activist in a little town means being pressured by everybody, rejected by the family, by environment..." (Svetlana)
- **Exile from social community:** "The message to society is that we are 'ineligible elements' which should be banished..." (Ljilja); "As activist, I have been discredited, discriminated, banished from all communities apart from the family" (Milka)
- "I have recently confronted the fact that there is pressure on parents of my son's friends to forbid their children to socialize with my son" (Marija)
- **Demonization, public dishonoring, denouncing the defenders:** "What threatens most the security of defenders is degradation, public dishonoring in media, everyone can attack us and do whatever to us" (Violeta); "I am threatened by the way human rights activists are being tainted" (Goran); "The fact that they mobilize such huge police forces to 'secure' you, which includes expenses, actually is a message they are sending, that you cost citizens a lot of money" (Nikola, lawyer); "Instead of blaming the victims of violent attacks (WIB), the responsibility should be allocated to the state which produces, tolerates and protects violators, but also to the society which enables violence by its conformist conduct" (Staša)
- **Preservation of the system of values which has existed in this society since the 90ies:** "Women in Black personify

50 Momir Stanojević, president of the Board for services of security control in the Parliament of Serbia (September 29th 2014)

51 Saša Ilić, Novosti (newspaper), October 24th 2014

*a different system of values and the authorities know that if the dominant system of values collapses, then the entire leadership would collapse. That is why they attack you” (Aleksandar, Lawyer); “Women in Black are attacked when they remind of the crimes committed by Serbs in the wars during 90ies, which are the topics systematically and deeply silenced in Serbian society, where there is a broadest possible social consensus not to touch those issues” (Vladimir); “Not confronting the burden of the past enables savagery of the right-wing groups” (Snežana).*

- **Leadership acquires legitimacy for itself, by faking the existence of everything Europe asks for:** *“That’s why they tolerate you. The way the ‘secure’ you shows that you are supposed to be toys. They count on those who persecute you. Besides, the national leadership wouldn’t be able to survive without the economic help from Europe. The leadership has the problem of not being able to show that they offer future and safety to people. No one feels safe. Here, no leadership has legitimacy, and that is their problem...” (Nikola, lawyer); “How come a small group upsets such a large number of people, scares and worries them? Why is that the case? Because this group has something very important in it – and that is the legitimacy, while the national leadership knows they don’t have the legitimacy, and they want to rob it off, so that nobody could have it” (Carlos M. Beristain).*

Prepared by: **Staša Zajović**  
Belgrade, November 12th 2014

