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LYMEC Digital Assembly Outcomes Report

(Hybrid - Online and Belgrade, Serbia)

30 August 2025

Serbian Students leading the fight against authoritarianism

On Saturday 30 August, guests gathered at the Office of Movement of Free Citizens in Belgrade, alongside online participants from across the wider European liberal family to discuss the role of youth in fighting authoritarian forces. Alongside our moderator, **Sorcha Ní Chonghaile** (Policy Officer), we had five guests at our Digital Assembly from diverse backgrounds. This includes **Pavle Grbović**, Member of Parliament and PSG President, **Dušan Dinić**, Senior Project Manager at the FNF Western Balkans, **Konstantin Malaev**, Activist and PSG Youth Member, **Velimir Milošev**, President of the Board of the National Youth Council of Serbia, and **Emilija Milenković**, Activist and student. The event lasted 2h 30 minutes, with a detailed panel discussion on youth action and censorship.

The initial guest speakers set the tone for the wider debate at hand. LYMEC president, **Ines Holzegger**, shared her pride in LYMEC's Serbian members who are standing up and fighting for democracy while it is under attack. **Pavle Grbović** framed Serbia as a key battle ground for core liberal European values, emphasising the importance of free, independent institutions and media, and the support of the European liberal family. **Dušan Dinić** went on to praise the younger generation for their tenacity and bravery in standing up to a corrupt regime. He referenced the political prisoners, government manipulation and the generational difference between Serbian youth, who are not accepting a warped government any longer.

The content of these speeches largely framed the wider panel discussion, where we discussed censorship, student protest and organisation, and authoritarian pressures. **Sorcha Ní Chonghaile** directed questions towards our panelists, focusing on youth advocacy, digital transparency and international solidarity with Serbia.

The speakers all agreed that a united opposition is crucial to dismantling Vučić's oppressive regime. **Konstantin Malaev** pointed out how over 15 years, the regime has grown huge and extremely difficult to intercept due to the power imbalance. **Velimir Milošev** pointed out how activists are arrested just for informal discussions, which creates a dangerous criminalisation of dissent. There has been continued repression of youth activists since 2024, including criminal police investigations, surveillance and intimidation. **Emilija Milenković** reminded the group that daily life in Serbia is not like it is in democratic countries, that is why she and other activists are so determined to achieve democracy.



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Sorcha Ní Chonghaile then pressed the importance of spotting inaccuracies in the media and calling them out, an issue that is prevalent in Serbia. **Konstantin Malaev** expressed concerns about how the corruption that led to 15 deaths and a collapsed roof was not covered internationally, struggling to make the front page of even European news. The violence on the streets was underreported, and in general there is a lack of journalistic credibility - with PR articles dominating journalism spheres, a strategic tactic of the oppressive regime. **Vladimir Simić** added that the EU's failure to acknowledge events on the ground feeds a growing sense among young people that Serbia is being left behind, further deepening distrust between citizens and European institutions. **Emilija Milenković** referenced the problematic nature of propaganda and foreign funding, as well as the state using personal photos to blackmail individuals and force compliance.

The issue of surveillance and intimidation was especially prevalent at the Digital Assembly in Belgrade. **Velimir Milošev** expressed contempt at the extreme dictatorship marked by spying and censorship, especially in the cases where criminal charges are brought against people for simply speaking about a corrupt regime. The regime's intimidation of young activists and surveillance by state security agencies through the use of spyware makes it even harder to fight for freedom. This bravery is demonstrated by **Emilija Milenković**, who says that surveillance does not change the movement's plans, even if police know a protest is being organised. The government uses propaganda, such as making documentaries claiming activists are funded by foreign sources.

The guest speakers made a rallying call towards the European Union, who they say is not active enough in Serbia's defence. All speakers agreed that Serbia cannot face the repressive regime alone, external pressure and visible solidarity are pivotal. **Velimir Milošev** observed that despite the EU pressure points and legal treaties, it has largely ignored what is happening in Serbia. There is a growing sense of feeling left behind and deep distrust between Serbian citizens and the EU. He noted that EU support must be stronger, as well as pressure from the media. **Konstantin Malaev** agreed, saying that foreign support is vital given that PSG has the most political prisoners in Europe. For students, connections to European partners, such as LYMEC, are crucial for raising awareness and sharing information. **Emilija Milenković** emphasised the importance of peer-to-peer solidarity across Europe, especially when international media is failing Serbia. European students have a duty to show solidarity, spread awareness and take an interest in what is happening in Serbia.

The Digital Assembly highlighted both the severe repression faced by Serbian youth and their unwavering determination to fight for democracy. Speakers underscored that international solidarity, especially from European liberals and student movements, is essential. LYMEC reaffirms its commitment to stand with Serbian youth as they continue their courageous struggle for freedom and European values.



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