

BELGRADE DEMONSTRATIONS: Excessive Use of Force and Beatings in Detention

Contents

Background	2
June 1, 1993, Demonstrations.....	3
Excessive Use of Force by the Police.....	5
Attacks on Journalists.....	7
Arrests at the office of the SPO (Srpski Pokret Obnove).....	9
Mistreatment of Vuk and Danica Drašković.....	11
Denial of Medical Care for Vuk and Danica Drašković.....	15
The Serbian Government's Response	17
International Response to the Arrests.....	19
Relevant International Law	20
Conclusion	22

Bowing to intense pressure from the international community, President Slobodan Milošević released opposition leader Vuk Drašković and his wife Danica from prison on July 9, 1993. Serbian authorities had held the couple for over a month for allegedly leading demonstrators to commit violent acts in the demonstration against the Parliament on June 1.¹ They had been both charged with taking part in a demonstration which used violence and Vuk had been charged with assaulting a police officer.² In

¹ They were indicted under Article 230 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia which provides: (1) Whoever joins a group of people who jointly kill a person, cause someone serious injuries, burn things, cause great material damage, commit similar acts or attempts to do so, will be sentenced for participating alone to a term between three months to five years in prison.

(2) The leader of a group who acts as described in the aforementioned sentence, will be sentenced to one to ten years in prison.

² Vuk was indicted for allegedly assaulting a police officer under Article 24, Paragraph 3, of the law on Public Peace and Order.

granting Vuk and Danica Drašković "amnesty," Milošević dropped all charges against them, except for the assault charge against Vuk.

Serbian police officers had brutally beaten Vuk and Danica Drašković during and after their arrests. The couple's health deteriorated rapidly in prison; Vuk began a hunger strike which weakened his condition. Sources indicate that he was near death at the time of his release.

Helsinki Watch recognizes that this case marks the continuation of a disturbing policy which has long been enforced in Kosovo and which has now appeared in Serbia proper. Since the police crackdown in Belgrade on March 9, 1991,³ Milošević seems ready to respond with force against his opposition within Serbia and employ random police violence against the general public to create an atmosphere of fear that discourages dissent. Although the international community should be heartened that its pleas were heard in the case of Vuk and Danica Drašković, it must remain vigilant against further misuses of police power, and press for a full investigation of allegations of police misconduct.

The following report summarizes the events of June 1, 1993 giving rise to charges of police brutality, and the subsequent treatment of Vuk and Danica Drašković. Helsinki Watch hopes that this document will serve as a record of those events that the international community can use in pushing for investigations into allegations of police and governmental misconduct. All information is based upon research and testimonies gathered by Helsinki Watch representatives.

Background

Although Serbian President Slobodan Milošević led his Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) to re-election victories in December 1992, the party actually lost strength. While capturing the most seats in the republic assembly and Yugoslav Parliament, the party lost its majorities in both. Thus, the Milošević-backed socialists have been able to maintain power only through minority governments, with the support of the ultra-nationalist Serbian Radical Party (Srpska Radikalna Stranka — SRS), led by Vojislav Šešelj.

Meanwhile, "DEPOS" — a coalition of opposition parties — collapsed amid leadership rivalries. This turn of events left Vuk Drašković and his Serbian Renewal Movement (Srpski Pokret Obnove — SPO) the only

³For an account of the March 1991 demonstration, see Helsinki Watch, "Yugoslavia: The March 1991 Demonstrations in Belgrade," Vol. 3, No. 1, May 1, 1991.

serious opponents to the Milošević regime. With the economy of Serbia rapidly spiraling downward since the United Nations imposed sanctions against it, Milošević has retained power by blaming the west for all of Serbia's problems. Still, some citizens of Serbia have grown dissatisfied with Milošević, regardless of their opinion of his role in Bosnia. Aware of this, Milošević supporters have become increasingly distrustful of anyone who could present an alternative, but particularly of Vuk Drašković.

June 1, 1993, Demonstrations

According to several parliamentarians present at the scene, the events of June 1 were triggered by a brawl outside the Chamber of Citizens, one of two houses of the Yugoslav Parliament. At about 5:00 p.m., Mihajlo Marković, an SPO delegate known for his open criticism of the regime, was standing outside the Chamber of Citizens talking to colleagues. Serbian Radical Party delegate Branislav Vakić, a former boxer,⁴ suddenly approached the group and punched Marković in the face. Marković collapsed unconscious after one blow and was taken to the hospital.⁵

Meanwhile, in Parliament, members of the SPO attempted to protest the assault. The socialist chairman of the Chamber of Citizens, Radoman Božović, ignored their attempts and refused to halt the proceedings in Parliament.

After broadcasters carried news of the incident, citizens spontaneously began to gather in front of Parliament.

Vuk Drašković went to Parliament as soon as he learned of the attack to meet with SPO deputies. He held a press conference inside the building, announcing that SPO members were now "in a state of war." The SPO deputies walked out through the main entrance and joined the angry protestors, several of whom tore down a Yugoslav flag.

At about 8:00 p.m., Vuk Drašković joined the crowd which had by then swollen to several thousand people. They greeted him with cheers. Drašković attempted to divert the protestors from the scene by initiating a march around town. The crowd eventually began marching through the center of the city with Vuk at the helm. As they walked, the protestors chanted, "Belgrade, wake up!"

A small group of demonstrators grew violent. According to Miroslav Mikuljanac,⁶ a journalist on assignment for the Belgrade daily *Borba*, Mr. Drašković attempted to put an end to the violence:

At the Street of Srpskih Vladara, someone threw a rock at a bank. Vuk reacted immediately, demanding that his [body] guards prevent such incidents.

⁴ Before Vakić volunteered to fight with a Serbian paramilitary group, he was a well-known amateur boxer for thirteen years and a member of the federal amateur boxing team.

⁵ According to medical records and interviews obtained by Helsinki Watch, he was later diagnosed with a brain contusion, numbed reflexes, a fractured jaw and problems with his equilibrium.

⁶ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993.

About 200 demonstrators and a handful of journalists split off from Vuk and the rest of the crowd. Mikuljanac continued:

After Vuk walked past the Belgrade television building, a group of about 200 demonstrators and journalists remained behind. The demonstrators threw rocks at the building and at the police, who did not respond.⁷ They broke several windows on the first floor. Two or three of Vuk's [security] guards were trying to calm the crowd.

Danica Drašković,⁸ a member of the SPO executive committee, arrived at Parliament around 9:00 p.m. and tried to set up loud speakers in order to organize the demonstrators. While she was setting up the equipment, she saw police officers inside Parliament fire their weapons.

I arrived [at Parliament] between 9:00 and 9:30 p.m. I tried to get a public address system set up. The police agreed, but then they commandeered our loud speakers. I don't know how it all started, I just saw the police shooting from inside the Parliament building. I stayed for about half an hour, during which time I gave a few statements to the press. I went to the Republic Square to meet Vuk.

Nenad Čanak,⁹ the leader of the opposition League of Social-Democrats, joined Mr. Drašković at the head of the crowd at about 10:20 p.m.:

I asked him what was going on, and he answered: "People gathered and asked for me. We didn't organize any of this." We walked together chatting. As we approached the television building, Vuk ordered his guards to prevent any violence.

Meanwhile, in front of the Parliament, the police removed the loudspeaker system that they had originally agreed to set up. After the police had dismantled the sound system, Danica Drašković gave an interview on the front steps of the building in which she expressed her disappointment that several thousand demonstrators had yielded to a few dozen policemen.

The police guarding the Parliament building were replaced by special riot police, fully equipped with flak jackets, shielded helmets, shields and gas masks, and armed with three-foot-long plastic truncheons, AK-47s and tear-gas guns. When Vuk returned from the march, he was prevented from getting any closer to the entrance of the Parliament by police standing in a wedge formation.

⁷ On March 9, 1991, Serbian opposition parties organized demonstrations protesting the tight control the Serbian government held on the media, especially Belgrade television. Belgrade television remains a target for critics of the current government. For an account of the violence at the March 9, 1991 demonstration, see Helsinki Watch, "Yugoslavia: The March 1991 Demonstrations in Belgrade," May 1, 1991.

⁸ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade on July 11, 1993.

⁹ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993.

At about 10:40 p.m., the demonstrators tried to force their way into Parliament. Some started throwing rocks at the police, in turn, threw them back. The police then withdrew into the building, and five minutes later, fired the first of dozens of tear-gas canisters. In the interim, the demonstrators hurled rocks at the Parliament windows, breaking twenty one of them.

Soon after, shots erupted. It is unclear whether the first shots came from the crowd or from the riot police. According to an audio tape obtained by Helsinki Watch from a journalist caught in crossfire at the scene, a total of twenty four shots were fired.¹⁰ Some were live rounds and some were rubber bullets. The police also fired tear gas canisters.

During the course of the demonstrations, a twenty-four-year-old police officer, Milorad Nikolić, was killed. The same night, Dr. Svetomir Ivanović told a journalist from *Borba* that six wounded police officers were brought in and that two of them — Ilija Djurić and Milorad Nikolić — suffered serious wounds. According to Dr. Ivanović, both officers had been hit on the head with blunt objects and had suffered brain contusions.

Helsinki Watch obtained a copy of hospital records of persons treated for wounds at the Urgentni Centar. The records indicate that doctors diagnosed two police officers (Petar Cvetkov and Dušan Stevanović) and five civilians as suffering from gunshot wounds. The same list includes only the names and dates of birth of the other patients, without specifying the nature of their wounds. Nowhere do the records state that the deceased police officer had been shot. Nevertheless, the Serbian Ministry issued a public statement claiming that Nikolić had indeed died from a gunshot wound. Helsinki Watch has not been able to obtain an autopsy report for Officer Nikolić to confirm this allegation.¹¹

Excessive Use of Force by the Police

A Helsinki Watch representative who observed the demonstrations from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. and from 10:15 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. witnessed the ensuing violence. During this time period, the police fired rounds of rubber and live bullets and tear gas canisters into the streets while demonstrators and bystanders attempted to run away. Afterwards, they charged the crowd with truncheons in hand, severely beating demonstrators and passersby.

A heavy cloud of tear gas¹² began covering the street, and over 2,000 armed riot police arrived as demonstrators fled from the shooting. The police were backed by at least two armored personnel carriers mounted with machine guns and water cannons. According to the Helsinki Watch representative and other

¹⁰ The Helsinki Watch representative confirmed hearing approximately two dozen shots.

¹¹ SPO lawyers have identified for Serbian civil authorities witnesses to Nikolić's murder and have identified the person they believe killed him. As of July 1993, civil authorities had not initiated an investigation into Nikolić's death.

¹² The Humanitarian Law Fund, a Belgrade-based human rights law group, has claimed that the police used a prohibited chemical substance — "a mixture of nerve gas, tear gas and asphyxiating gas." (The Humanitarian Law Fund, *Spotlight Report* No. 5, "Police Violence on Belgrade Streets," June 14, 1993, p. 5.)

witnesses, even after the demonstrators dispersed, groups of police beat anyone they caught with three-foot-long plastic truncheons, regardless of whether they were protestors or simply bystanders.

I.S.,¹³ a journalist, saw police officers beat up a young couple and then turn upon an elderly couple who tried to assist the first pair:

In Tašmajdan Park, three policemen ran up to a teenage couple and started hitting them with clubs. A man about 75 years old intervened: "Why are you beating them? If they are guilty, you should arrest them!" They then turned toward him and beat him with their clubs. His wife started screaming. One policeman slapped her in the face and then hit her in the stomach with a truncheon. After that, the [wife] fell down.

From the terrace of the "Madera" restaurant, Nenad Čanak¹⁴ watched a group of police officers beat up a young man. He reported:

Thirty policemen ran up to us and took one young man away from the table where he was sitting with friends. Four of them were hitting him in the stomach with their truncheons for approximately two minutes. I don't know what happened to him later, but I saw the policemen run further into the [Tašmajdan] park. They beat up on anyone they found.

Police officers assaulted dozens of protestors over the next few hours. The police eventually closed off the city center by blocking off roads and indiscriminately beating and arresting people. After 1:00 a.m., when the streets were already empty, Borislav Mihajlović,¹⁵ a well-known Yugoslav author, witnessed the beating of a young woman from the balcony of his apartment on Pašić Square:

There was a police squad by the fountain. I heard noise coming from the Moše Pijade Street. When they came closer, I saw that there were three policemen leading one young woman. She was protesting and screaming: "Let me go! I didn't do anything to you!" Two police officers held her while the third one hit her repeatedly with a club over the head and shoulders. She continued to protest. I yelled at them from my balcony to let her go, and another voice from the dark joined me. A bystander tried to help, but they chased him away.

Attacks on Journalists

After the demonstrations, roaming police officers beat and harassed several journalists. Each journalist interviewed by Helsinki Watch reported that they were abused *only after* they identified themselves as journalists. In addition, every journalist reported that police officers shattered their cameras or tape recorders.¹⁶

¹³ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993.

¹⁴ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993.

¹⁵ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June, 1993.

¹⁶ For a similar report, see The Humanitarian Law Fund, *Spotlight Report* No. 5, "Violence on Belgrade Streets," June 14,

Police mistreated the following journalists during the night of the demonstrations:

- **Slobodan Potić,¹⁷ a photographer for the Belgrade weekly *NIU*, described how he was beaten by two different groups of officers:**

I was [taking photographs] at Terazije Square at about 12:15 a.m. Two or three policemen saw me and ran up to me. One hit me over the arms [with a club,] and cursed at me for taking photographs. He grabbed my camera and smashed it against the ground. He hit me repeatedly on my back and arms with a club; I ran away as soon as I could.

When I returned to collect the remains of my camera, another group of policemen saw me. "What are you doing there?" they exclaimed. "We'll kill you!" They [ran over] and started clubbing me. I screamed that I was a journalist, but that didn't stop them.

- **Aleksandra Vukičević¹⁸ of "Radio 202" told the Belgrade-based independent magazine *Vreme*.**

I was at Terazije Square in front of the SPO offices at 12:20 a.m. The police started battering a young man as he passed by. Shocked, I stood nearby with my colleagues with my tape recorder on. [The police] saw us and ran up to us, shouting: "What are you doing here? Stop recording!" Without waiting for me to respond, they beat me on the arms, buttocks and legs. They took my tape recorder from me, smashed it against the ground and one of them jumped on it. Then they put us in a police car. I tried to get out [of the car] to pick up the remains of my tape recorder, but they beat me with their clubs again.

Police took Vukičević into custody. At about 5:00 a.m., the police officers interrogated her, threatening to destroy her equipment if they caught her on the streets again. According to Vukičević, the officers asked her:

What business does an honest journalist have in the street at this hour and in such a situation? So what if we broke your tape recorder? We will do it again if we see you anywhere.

- **Lazar Lalić,¹⁹ a former Television Belgrade employee, recounted to Helsinki Watch how he spent the evening at home with family and friends. When Lalić left his house with a group of friends, police officers attacked them. Lalić told Helsinki Watch:**

1993, pp. 5-6.

¹⁷ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993. Doctors examined Potić and found bruises caused by a blunt object on his left shoulder and left arm.

¹⁸ Interviewed in *Vreme*, Number 138, June 19, 1993.

¹⁹ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993.

At about 12:50 a.m., I went out with my wife to see our friends off. All of a sudden, at Nikola Pešić Square, several policemen stormed after us. One twisted my arm behind my back and another slapped Milica Pešić across the face. When they let go of my arm, I approached a policeman who appeared to be in charge and identified ourselves as journalists, and myself as the president of the Independent Journalists' Union. He said, "Now you will see, Mr. President!" and they started clubbing and kicking me. Milica screamed and that saved me. They put us in a police car and took us to the police station where we spent several hours.²⁰

Helsinki Watch has confirmed that the following journalists were also abused by police officers during and after the demonstrations:

- Dušan Vranić, a photographer for the Associated Press.
- Branimir Grulović, a journalist with Reuter.
- Vladan Djordjević, Alexander Djurić and Ljuba Stefanović, journalists from Belgrade independent television "Studio B."
- Gradiša Katić and Miroslav Mikuljanac, a journalist from the Belgrade daily *Borba*.
- Momčilo Čebalović and Djordje Martić, a journalist from the Belgrade daily *Politika*.
- Vojkan Ristić and Djordje Vukoja, journalists for the SPO paper *Srpska Reč*.
- Ratko Radetić and Željko Džafer, photographers for the Belgrade daily *Večernje Novosti*.
- Vlada Dimitrijević, a photographer for the TANJUG Yugoslav news agency.
- Rade Ranković, a free-lance photographer.
- Milica Pešić, a journalist from Belgrade television.

Arrests at the Office of the SPO (Srpski Pokret Obnove)

After the clash with the police in front of Parliament, Vuk Drašković and the remaining group of demonstrators marched to Republic Square and sat at the foot of the Knez Mihajlo monument in quiet protest. Drašković heard a rumor that a policeman had been killed or wounded and sought an end to the demonstration. Drašković went to the SPO office, accompanied by journalists who expected him to hold a press conference.

Before Vuk could address the press, police in full riot gear stormed the headquarters of the SPO. Marko²¹ was one of about forty people in the office at the time the police arrived. He remembered:

At about 1:00 a.m., about ten policemen came to the door, trying to get in. They looked like blue Ninja Turtles; they wore shielded helmets, flak jackets, blue camouflage uniforms and

²⁰ Lalić was examined by a doctor at on June 2, 1993, at 3:35 a.m. The doctor found two broken ribs and bruises on his torso and head.

²¹ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993. The name used here is a pseudonym used to protect the witness from reprisal.

carried long clubs, machine guns, tear gas, etc. As soon as they got in, they lowered their helmet shields and cocked their guns. About thirty additional policemen, some of them in plain clothes, arrived over the next several minutes.

Danica Drašković told a similar story to Helsinki Watch. She said that she and about 40 other SPO members returned to the SPO office to follow events on television. While there, the police stormed the SPO headquarters:

[While we were in the demonstrations,] my companions and I could not get to my car because of the tear gas, so we decided to go to Terazije Square [SPO headquarters] for a cup of coffee. While we were watching television, they barged in carrying machine guns, shields, helmets and flak jackets.

Once inside the SPO headquarters, the police officers proceeded to arrest all the SPO personnel present. Danica began to protest that the police did not have arrest warrants:

They ordered: "Everyone freeze. Hands up!" I started protesting and asked them for [search or arrest] warrants. They said they had to wait for their commander. I wouldn't let the police take anyone without a warrant.

The commander arrived ten to fifteen minutes later and said, "Madam, all of you have to come to our office." He said that he had verbal orders to arrest us. I continued protesting, saying that he could have just thought of all this up himself.

Our negotiations lasted about thirty minutes. During this time, we heard Radmilo Bogdanović²² giving orders over the radio. [I think that] he is behind everything that happened.

While Vuk, the lawyers, and I were negotiating with about ten policemen, other officers were taking people downstairs. I said, "You can only make me leave by force." They put me in handcuffs and I only barely succeeded in getting them to cuff my hands in front of me, instead of behind my back.

Several deputies insisted that the police respect their parliamentary immunity. The police allowed a few of the deputies to remain in the SPO's offices. Four armed officers guarded them for four hours before they were allowed to go home.

The police took the rest of the deputies into their custody, including Vuk and Danica Drašković, Liljana Lasić and Dragan Miličić.²³ The police walked them out the front door of the building and made Marko

²² Radmilo Bogdanović is a senior member of Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia and served as the Serbian interior minister during the March 1991 protests. Amid demands for his resignation, he was replaced and is now the vice-president of the Yugoslav Parliament's upper house, the Chamber of Republics. However, he is widely regarded as Milošević's chief enforcer and the real power behind the present Serbian interior minister, Zoran Sokolović.

²³ Amnesty International *Urgent Action*, June 2, 1993, UA 178/93.

and the Draškovići run through a gauntlet²⁴ of additional officers waiting outside. Marko described how he ran through a crowd of police officers:

I found myself in a gauntlet (in front of the building). It was about twenty meters long. I received many blows to my back. Suddenly, there was a loud roar. Danica [Drašković] was coming out and was also forced through the line of policemen.

The police took everyone to the police station, questioned them about their role in the demonstrations, and subsequently released everyone except the Draškovići.

SPO Deputy Bogoljub Pejičić²⁵ was not in the office at the time of the arrest. When he heard of what had happened to his colleagues, he drove to the SPO office. Pejičić told Helsinki Watch:

I entered the office at about 2:30 a.m. Once inside, I saw that the security guard was covered with blood.²⁶ When he opened the door for me, several police officers jumped out at me. Two held my arms and the third held me by my tie. They dragged me out onto the street where I was surrounded by twenty more policemen. I identified myself as an SPO deputy and they searched me for my deputy's ID. Once they found my ID, they cursed and insulted me before they let me go.

Pejičić said that about thirty meters further on, three other policemen stopped him and ordered him to stand against the wall.

These policemen also searched me. They took all my money, a ring for my daughter out of my pocket and the watch off my wrist. They found a pack of foreign cigarettes on me and started provoking me and asking how much money I receive in order to afford the cigarettes. One threw my deputy's ID in my face. When I asked for a certificate saying that they'd taken all my possessions, one cocked his pistol, pointed it at my head and said, "If you don't get lost in three seconds, you'll get your certificate!"

Mistreatment of Vuk and Danica Drašković

During the Arrests

According to several witnesses, police targeted Vuk and Danica Drašković for particularly harsh beatings during the "round up" at SPO headquarters. After the police raided the SPO's office, several police

²⁴ "Running the gauntlet" is an inhumane method of punishment chiefly used by military forces. The offender is made to run between two rows of soldiers who beat the offender with truncheons or some other weapon. According to witnesses, police waiting outside the SPO office used a similar tactic against the deputies as they exited the building.

²⁵ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993.

²⁶ The guard told Pejičić that, when the police arrived, they asked the guard whether Vuk Drašković was upstairs. He told the police officers that he didn't know. When the police found Vuk, they came back downstairs and beat him.

officers forced the Draškovićs out of the SPO's office and repeatedly hit, cursed at, and insulted them. Several people who live near the SPO's office building reported to Helsinki Watch that they saw police officers force Vuk and Danica to run through a line of officers who beat them repeatedly.

Mr. Milutinović, an SPO deputy, was also present at the arrests in the SPO office. He told a press conference in Belgrade:

Danica was held by the policemen while others kicked and hit her with their rifle butts and revolvers on the head, back and legs.²⁷

Danica explained the manner in which arresting officers mistreated her as they escorted her out of the building:

The police officers started to spit at me, saying, " We will drink your blood, you whore." They took Vuk down in the elevator, but I had to walk down from the tenth floor. Throughout this time, the police officers were spitting at me, pulling my hair and slapping me.²⁸

Nada Bošković²⁹ was arrested with Danica. At a press conference on June 4, 1993, Bošković gave her account of Danica's beating:

Danica was beaten as we were walking down the stairs [of the SPO building], on the street, and on the way into the police car. All the policemen jumped at her and beat her. When they put us into a car, they left the door open and continued to hit, insult and curse at her.

Danica similarly remembered:

Downstairs they all jumped at me and I heard people yelling "Hit her." "Slut." "Lynch her!" "She won't do this anymore!" and other things. I ran through them with my handcuffed arms around my head to protect myself. I yelled back at them, "Hit me, heroes, you only know how to beat women, children and old people."

The police officers continued to beat her after she was put in the police van:

They put me in the police car and a fat police officer jumped in with me and continued to hit me. Somebody said, "That's enough" and pulled him out and slammed the door shut. The fat officer replied, "It's not enough, let's kill her." During this exchange, the police continued to batter her in the police car.

Several people who witnessed the beatings from their windows said that police pushed Vuk

²⁷ Statement by Milutinović to a press conference in Belgrade in June 1993.

²⁸ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993.

²⁹ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993.

through a gauntlet of over fifty policemen who beat, kicked, and clubbed him.³⁰ When Vuk fell to the ground, police officers dragged him around, trampling and clubbing him for several minutes.

Mr. Milutinović,³¹ an SPO deputy who was also present at the arrests in the SPO office, told a Helsinki Watch representative that he saw police beat Vuk and Danica:

I saw the police mercilessly beat Vuk and Danica when they were arrested. After the police handcuffed Vuk, they hit him with a rifle butt on the head as they took him downstairs in the elevator.

Marko³² also witnessed the police beating Vuk as they escorted him out of the building:

Then Vuk came out. The crowd of policemen closed around him and they beat him mercilessly for several minutes. My estimate is that there were about eighty policemen there. They put Vuk into a separate patrol car and drove away.

In the Police Station

Once at the police station, the abusive treatment of Vuk and Danica Drašković continued. Witnesses at the police station, who requested anonymity, told a Helsinki Watch representative that groups of police officers repeatedly beat, clubbed and kicked Vuk in the head, genitals, heart and kidney areas during his first night in the station.

A witness,³³ who requested anonymity, told Helsinki Watch that police harassed Danica during the night, at times threatening her that she would be beaten, killed and gang raped. Danica told a Helsinki Watch representative of her experience in the police station:

At the police station, there were many policemen who continued this treatment — they spat, hissed, cursed, and yelled at me. I noticed [Belgrade Police Chief] Rade Marković. I asked him whether he saw them beating me and he replied, "I don't see anything," then he got out of his car and slapped me twice.

They put me and some other people in a waiting room and we could hear someone screaming and crying in the next room. The policemen exiting the room were wiping the sweat from their foreheads. About thirty different officers approached me and said things

³⁰ Information based on Helsinki Watch interviews in Belgrade, Serbia, in June 1993, with several witnesses, including people who watched the scene from their windows.

³¹ Statement by Mr. Milutinović to a press conference in Belgrade in June 1993.

³² Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993. The name used here is a pseudonym used to protect the witness from reprisals.

³³ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993.

like, "You are guilty of everything," "This is all your fault," and "We will all rape you." They continued to spit and curse at me and they slapped and pulled my hair repeatedly. At one point, they carried Vuk through the waiting room. He was wet and bloody. I screamed his name and he replied, "I am good for nothing." I did not see him again for thirty days. During the night, they let people use the phone. I took the opportunity to call my sister. I told her to spread the word that they were going to kill Vuk. At that moment, they took the phone away from me.

Police interrogated Danica during this period:

They tried to interrogate me several times, but I was furious and cursed and spit at them. I refused to talk. I was enraged. I said I would only talk about my head, my kidneys and my back, since I was in pain. Until 4:00 p.m. the next day, I was given only a chair to sit on and when I asked for a doctor, the said, "Oh, he'll come, he'll come."

Twenty-four hours after Vuk and Danica had been arrested, authorities presented them with a court order that authorized the police to hold them in pre-arraignment detention for another three days. Danica says that at this point she was taken into "a solitary confinement cell at the central prison."

Authorities denied Danica medical attention for three days after her arrest. She told Helsinki Watch:

In the morning, I asked to see a doctor, but they wouldn't take me to the prison hospital. My whole body was covered with bruises. I was in pain and I complained constantly.

Exactly three days later, at 1:30 p.m., the doctor and Judge Branislav Todić came. Todić issued a court order saying that I could go to a hospital if needed. Finally, they put me in the prison hospital. My room had five beds, but I was alone. A woman guard stood in front of the door. Five days after the arrest, an analysis showed that my kidneys were damaged.

I constantly complained, so they wrote in their medical report that I was a psychopath.³⁴ I retired [from my job] ten years ago because I have problems with my spine. Both Vuk and I were examined separately by the Medico-Legal Council, who acted correctly and said we should be admitted to the Neuro-Surgical unit at Belgrade Hospital.

Then a huge fight began. They insisted on placing me in a military, not a civilian, hospital.³⁵ I was kept in the prison hospital and given strong pain killers for three days while we were arguing over whether I would go the military or civilian hospital. I said, "As a civilian, I could never even enter the VMA, and now you want to give me an apartment?"

³⁴ A report obtained by a Helsinki Watch representative reads: "In certain dimensions, the patient expresses psychopathic characteristics."

³⁵ Danica testified that "Vuk later told me that they put him in a car and drove him to the VMA [Military Medical Academy]. He refused to stay there and the doctors finally said that he should not be held against his will."

Danica was eventually admitted to the Neuro-Surgical unit of the civilian hospital.

Denial of Medical Care for Vuk and Danica Drašković³⁶

In the early morning of June 2, police brought Vuk Drašković to the Urgentni Medical Center. There, Dr. Svetomir Ivanović wrote in the clinic's dossier that Drašković was brought in at 6:05 a.m., after being beaten by the police. According to the doctor's report, Vuk had no broken bones and was conscious, but was totally disoriented. He was bruised, complained about a headache, and some of his upper teeth were broken.

The same day, health care workers took Vuk to the maxillofacial ward where they diagnosed him as having "contusions of both lips, bruises and loose teeth in the upper jaw."³⁷ He was unable to stand up at this point; the police officers had to carry him.

The next day, on June 3, 1993, at 12:04 a.m., police took Vuk to the hospital again in the Belgrade central prison. After the doctors examined him, they listed several injuries:³⁸

- **A bruise with a diameter of one centimeter on the top of his head;**
- **Upper lip slightly swollen; both lips bruised, one by one centimeters in diameter;**
- **Six loose teeth in the upper jaw (second degree);**
- **Bruises on the left shoulder; five by three centimeters on the side, four by three in the front, fifteen by seven centimeter on the back;**
- **Above the left breast, a bruise of a size of a woman's hand;**
- **Numerous scratches on both hands and around wrists;**
- **On the upper left leg, a bruise ten by four centimeters; and**
- **On the inside of the lower left leg, a bruise four by two centimeters.**

The doctors noted that Vuk had pains throughout his body, especially in the heart and kidney regions, and that he had fainted several times. The doctors also wrote that he had a headache, double vision, and difficulties walking and remembering.³⁹

A medical team also examined Danica Drašković in the prison hospital on June 3, 1993, and

³⁶ **The information in this section is based on Helsinki Watch interviews with attending health care workers and hospital records.**

³⁷ **A Helsinki Watch representative obtained copies of Vuk's medical records.**

³⁸ **Based on a Helsinki Watch representative's inspection of Vuk's medical records.**

³⁹ **When doctors examined Vuk Drašković again at the Zvezdara Clinic in Belgrade (KBC Zvezdara) on June 11, a brain scan showed no skull fractures.**

reported several injuries:⁴⁰

- One bruise, eight by seven centimeters in diameter, on the right shoulder blade;
- One bruise, eight by two centimeters in diameter, on the left shoulder blade;
- One bruise, eight by six centimeters in diameter, covering the back and inside of the upper part of the right arm;
- One bruise, five by two centimeters in diameter, covering the upper part of the left arm; • One bruise, five by three centimeters in diameter, covering the inside upper portion of the left leg;
- One bruise, 13 by nine centimeters in diameter, covering the outside upper portion of the right leg; and
- One bruise, five by six centimeters in diameter, covering the left knee and lower portion of the left leg.

The Medico-Legal Council of the University of Belgrade Medical School examined Vuk and Danica Drašković on June 14 and 15, 1993, in the absence of their guards. The Council reported that, along with numerous bruises, Vuk suffered partial amnesia and that he could not remember the first several days after his arrest and specific periods thereafter. He experienced difficulty concentrating. Areas of his head were still visibly swollen and bruised and Vuk also continued to complain of severe headaches, hearing problems, double vision and blurred vision. Vuk told doctors that he saw "rainbows and waterfalls." His doctors believed that these perceptions were caused by one or more brain contusions.

The Medico-Legal Council also examined Danica on June 14, 1993. The doctors concluded that her previously existing spinal condition had worsened due to the police beatings, and that she was still suffering from terrible pain. The doctors listed her wounds as "serious" and concluded that she needed intensive rehabilitation.⁴¹

Vuk's health suffered because of a hunger strike which he began on July 1, shortly after learning that the district court had extended his pre-trial detention. On July 6, Vuk began to reject water as well. He was determined to die, according to a letter distributed by his attorneys to the press, unless he and his wife were released.⁴² Vuk's health deteriorated rapidly and he verged on metabolic coma before his release, according to sources close to him.

⁴⁰ Based on a Helsinki Watch representative's inspection of Danica's medical records.

⁴¹ On the Council's advice, both Vuk and Danica were admitted by the Neuro-Surgical Clinic of the Belgrade University Clinical Center, where they were kept under guard until they were given governmental clemency on July 8, 1993.

⁴² A Helsinki Watch representative obtained a copy of Vuk Drašković's letter which read:

... The intention is obvious — and we know whose it is — they intend for the two of us to bear great pain and suffering for a very, very long time and to grant someone personal satisfaction in their personal revenge.

I will not allow this. This is why today, on July 1, I have decided to start a hunger strike. I have decided to die and deprive my torturers of their long enjoyment. ... there is no force that will alter my decision to die and make them responsible for my death before Serbia and the rest of the world...

On July 7, 1993, a source close to the team of experts who had treated the Draškovićs told Helsinki Watch that they had been beaten "professionally."⁴³ The source implied that they were not hit in the abdomen, since a strong blow in that area could cause internal bleeding or death and could be diagnosed through an autopsy. Instead, Vuk had been severely beaten on the head, although with too little force to fracture the skull. The medical experts reported that Vuk was suffering from microscopic bleeding that could cause serious brain damage.⁴⁴

The source also confirmed that Vuk was also beaten on the chest, resulting in hemorrhaging inside the heart membrane, and that he had also received several strong blows to the kidney area where he has large hematomas. During his time in detention, Vuk developed an ulcer, which bled and caused him great pain.⁴⁵ According to the same physician, Danica was beaten mostly over the buttocks and lower back.

The Serbian Government's Response

The Serbian government's response to the beatings and arrests was limited. On July 1, 1993, the district court in Belgrade accepted the recommendation of the public prosecutor to extend the pre-trial detention of Vuk and Danica for three months. Their defense attorneys appealed to the Supreme Court of Serbia. The appeal was rejected "in order to avoid disturbing the citizens and the family of the deceased policeman."

The Serbian Ministry of the Interior then issued a statement on July 2, 1993, stating that "121 persons who violated public peace and order were brought to, and detained at the city police station by 2:00 a.m." and that "the main initiator, Vuk Drašković," was among those detained.

All but two of the detainees (in addition to the Draškovićs) were subsequently released. Police inspectors visited many of them on several occasions after their release, warning them that they would be arrested again if they talked about their experiences.⁴⁶ According to official statements of the Serbian government, a total of thirty two people — 26 civilians and six policemen — required urgent medical treatment. Most suffered bruises and broken bones, while several had bullet wounds.

Police officers also beat one of Vuk's body guards, Dragan Vušurević, in front of the SPO building on

⁴³ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993. Source not identified, in order to protect his/her safety.

⁴⁴ The doctors could not determine if such damage might occur because blood clots of this type do not show up on x-rays. Vuk's doctors believe that the blood clots are responsible for his double or blurred vision and headaches.

⁴⁵ Based on interview with an anonymous source in Belgrade in July, 1993.

⁴⁶ Helsinki Watch is not able to indicate which detainees were approached by police inspectors as this would endanger the witnesses.

June 2, 1993.⁴⁷ Several days later, Vušurević and Zvonko Osmajlić, another of Vuk's bodyguards, were re-arrested by a 200-man police sweep, with complete riot gear, armored personnel carriers and water cannons. Authorities held the men for a day before releasing them. Helsinki Watch has received no further reports of their mistreatment.

At the demand of the public prosecutor, on June 4, 1993, the investigative judge of the Belgrade District Court, Branislav Todić, opened an investigation of Vuk Drašković under Article 114 of the Yugoslav Criminal Code which reads in pertinent part:

Whoever attempts to use force, or threatens to use force, to change the constitutional order of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, or to overthrow the highest state organs or their executive organs, will be sentenced to at least five years in prison.⁴⁸

Vuk and Danica were the only demonstrators to be investigated under this provision. In an attempt to explain this disparate treatment, Justice Todić said that Vuk had, as

the president of the SPO, in his public appearances in the media and at organized public gatherings, called repeatedly for the overthrow of the highest state organs of the Republic of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia since December 1990. In an attempt to realize this goal, Vuk Drašković used force to overthrow the highest government organ — the Federal Parliament in Belgrade — on June 1, 1993. As a consequence of this, one person died, and lives of others were jeopardized.

While authorities investigated Vuk and Danica under Article 114, they did not seek an indictment under that provision. Instead, Vuk and Danica were indicted on June 30, 1993, under Article 230 of the Criminal Code of Serbia which provides:

(1) Whoever joins a group of people who jointly kill a person, cause someone serious injuries, burn things, cause great material damage, commit similar acts or attempts to do so, will be sentenced for participating alone, to a term between three months to five years in prison.

(2) The leader of a group who acts as described above, will be sentenced to one to ten years in prison.

Thus, under Article 230, authorities held Vuk and Danica indirectly responsible for the death of a police officer who was killed during the course of the demonstrations, and for the injuries of fourteen other police officers and sixteen citizens. Vuk was also indicted for assaulting a police officer under Article 24, paragraph 3 of the Law on Public Peace and Disorder.

⁴⁷ Interviewed by a Helsinki Watch representative in Belgrade in June 1993. Helsinki Watch has obtained pictures of Vušurević's injuries and has them in secure files outside its office.

⁴⁸ The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is no longer a recognized state by name, but the Criminal Code has not been adjusted to reflect the change.

International Response to the Arrests

Almost immediately after the June 1, 1993 arrests, many individuals, groups, foreign governments and international organizations, including Helsinki Watch, sent letters of protest to President Slobodan Milošević. French President Francois Mitterand, Greek Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis, and Russian President Boris Yeltsin appealed to Milošević to release Vuk and Danica.⁴⁹

Ignoring these pleas, the Yugoslav Minister for Human Rights, Margit Savović, openly endorsed the treatment of Vuk and Danica, declaring that "whoever beats others must expect to be beaten." According to *Borba*, members of the Police Intervention Brigade were financially awarded for a "successful operation."

After Vuk and Danica had spent over one month in pre-trial detention, Danielle Mitterand, the French President's wife, traveled to Belgrade on July 5 in an attempt to obtain the couple's release and to take them to France for treatment. She met with President Milošević, who wished her a "pleasant stay in Belgrade," sent his greetings to Mr. Mitterand, and explained that this case was in the hands of the courts. She returned home the next day. On her second visit on July 6, Mrs. Mitterand persuaded Vuk to accept intravenous nourishment.

On July 9, a Belgrade radio station broadcast the text of a letter which U.S. President Bill Clinton sent in support of the Draškovićs, which read:

I am touched by the courage that you and your wife Danica have demonstrated in defending the principles of democracy and human rights, and your great personal sacrifice. I strongly condemn the decision of the government to keep you detained and not allow you unbiased medical judgement and adequate medical treatment. My prayers are with you and your wife.⁵⁰

Hours later, Serbian President Slobodan Milošević granted Vuk and Danica an official presidential pardon. Although the pardon dismissed the charges of incitement to riot brought against Vuk and Danica, it did not alter the charges against Vuk for assaulting a police officer.⁵¹

In his statement to the press, President Milošević explained that he was releasing the Draškovićs because foreign enemies were using their detention to generate greater condemnation at Serbia. The text of his letter read:

⁴⁹ Milan Andrejevich, "Drašković Supporters Rally," RFE/RL *Research Report* No. 125, July 5, 1993. In conjunction with the international outcry, on July 2, 1993, about two dozen SPO parliament deputies and the main committee members started a hunger strike. They sat at the foot of a monument at Republic Square and stated that they would remain there "until our president and his wife are released." By July 5, fifteen members of the SPO, an additional thirty supporters, and members of local SPO branches all over Serbia had also joined the hunger strike.

⁵⁰ Translated from a radio broadcast in Belgrade, Serbia on July 9, 1993.

⁵¹ Amnesty International, *Urgent Action*, AI Index EUR 70/16/93, July 13, 1993.

The developments that follow the legal procedure against Vuk Drašković are creating an ugly picture, and those who are taking part in these developments are a shame to our country. I believe that these developments are beneath the dignity of our people and that they should be stopped immediately.

In the countries that were the initiators of the embargo on our whole state and all the Serbian people — because of their fight for freedom and equality — and who are carrying out a punishment of genocidal measures against our people, which is the reason why newborn babies are dying, there is a politically motivated media hunt against Serbia organized in the name of humanism.

Although I hold Vuk Drašković personally responsible and I believe that the citizens of Serbia who followed the events in front of the National Parliament think so, too — [his role in these events] should not be used in an anti-Serbian campaign now conducted by our enemies. . . . This is why I believe that clemency should be granted to Vuk Drašković, except for his attack on the police officer Ilija Djurić.

Aside from this, I believe that no one, not even Vuk Drašković, should be humiliated in this country. And he certainly would be if he was to be released without his wife. From the letters that he sent from prison to my wife and from what she told me about this situation, it is certain that those two people are deeply attached to each other, and those feelings should be respected. This is why I have decided to grant clemency to Danica Drašković as well.⁵²

Relevant International Law

The Serbian government is responsible for the actions committed by its agents, including the Serbian police, and is therefore responsible for the violations of international law committed by its police force.⁵³ The actions of the Serbian police force and other Serbian authorities may run afoul of numerous aspects of international law, including:

- **Principle VII of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, which calls on states to "respect human rights and fundamental freedoms;"**
- **Articles 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Yugoslavia ratified without reservations in 1971,⁵⁴ and which protect the rights to "assembly" and "association;"**

⁵² Translated by a Helsinki Watch representative as broadcast by Belgrade Television on July 9, 1993.

⁵³ The Serbian government may also be accountable under domestic law.

⁵⁴ As the successor government to the former Yugoslavia that had signed the ICCPR, the current state of Yugoslavia, made up of Serbia and Montenegro, is bound by the ICCPR as well.

- **Article 19 of the ICCPR, which grants the media freedom to "import information," declaring that "everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression;"**
- **Article 9 of the ICCPR, which holds that "[n]o one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention" and that "[n]o one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedures as are established by international law;"**
- **Article 7 of the ICCPR, which provides that "[n]o one shall be subject to torture or to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment;"**
- **Article II, Section 9.2, of the Concluding Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), in which Yugoslavia, as one of the signatory states, affirmed in June 1990 that "everyone shall have the right of peaceful assembly and demonstration;" and,**
- **The Charter of Paris for a New Europe, which Yugoslavia signed in November 1990, also affirming that "every individual shall have the right to ... freedom of association and peaceful assembly."**

The current Yugoslavia's, and therefore Serbia's, ongoing responsibilities as a signatory to the aforementioned international documents are weighty. In line with Serbia's responsibility under Article 2(1) of the ICCPR to take steps "to respect and ensure" the rights recognized in the Covenant, Serbia is obligated to halt the use of excessive force against demonstrators and to cease harassment and intimidation of journalists.

With regard to the specific events of June 1, in order to demonstrate its commitment to international standards, Serbia should immediately:

- **investigate thoroughly the events of June 1, and issue a summary of the results of the investigation, including the names of police officers and demonstrators specifically investigated, and any disciplinary steps taken against particular police officers;**
- **prosecute those members of the Serbian police force who are found to have used excessive force, including but not limited to: charging protestors who were trying to run away; attacking protestors after they had already been subdued; hitting handcuffed protestors; beating protestors in police custody; and using excessive force at any time;**
- **investigate and charge police officers who are found to have specifically targeted journalists for beatings; and**
- **provide compensation for any citizen who has been unlawfully arrested or detained, as required by Article 9(5) of the ICCPR.**

Conclusion

Whether the events of June 1 represent a continued pattern of human rights abuses in Serbia will be determined largely by the Milošević regime's response to charges of police brutality and its willingness to abide by internationally recognized guarantees. The international community should press Milošević to investigate the events of June 1, prosecute liable police officers and undertake training and disciplining of police officers to prevent a re-occurrence. In addition, the international community must demand that the Serbian government no longer interfere with demonstrations and other public gatherings, and that it immediately take steps to protect journalists from future attacks.

* * *

This report was written by Vlatka Mihelić, Julie Mertus, and Pamela Cox.

Helsinki Watch was established in 1978 to monitor domestic and international compliance with the human rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. The chair of Helsinki Watch is Jonathan Fanton and the vice chair is Alice Henkin. Jeri Laber is executive director; Lois Whitman is deputy director; Holly Cartner and Julie Mertus are counsel; Erika Dailey, Rachel Denber, Ivana Nizich and Christopher Panico are research associates; and Pamela Cox, Christina Derry, Ivan Lupis, Alexander Petrov and Isabelle Tin-Aung are associates.

Helsinki Watch is a division of Human Rights Watch, which includes Africa Watch, Americas Watch, Asia Watch, and Middle East Watch. The chair of Human Rights Watch is Robert L. Bernstein and the vice chair is Adrian W. DeWind. Kenneth Roth is acting executive director; Holly J. Burkhalter is Washington director; Gara LaMarche is associate director; Ellen Lutz is California director; Susan Osnos is press director; Jemera Rone is counsel; Michal Longfelder is development director; Dorothy Q. Thomas is Women's Rights Project director; Joanna Weschler is Prison Project director; and Kenneth Anderson is Arms Project director.

Helsinki Watch is affiliated with the International Helsinki Federation in Vienna, Austria.