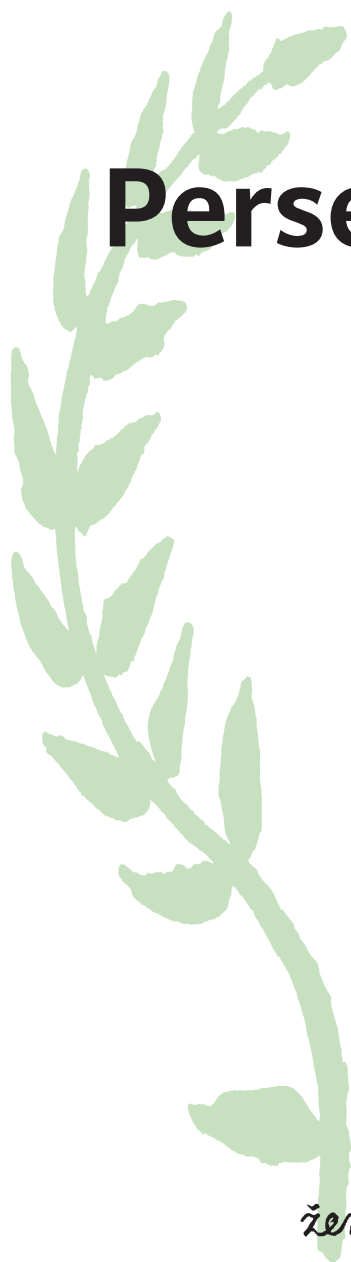


# PERSECUTIONS CURSES AND THE REST

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A DOSSIER ON  
ATTACKS  
AGAINST  
WOMEN IN BLACK



# **Persecutions, curses and the rest**

**Dossier on attacks  
on Women in Black**

*žene u crnom beograd*

Persecutions, curses and the rest  
Dossier on attacks against Women in Black

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# Introduction

*Violators of moral, political, cultural consensus, jumpers of ethnic barriers and walls, “deserters” from the national / patriotic and patriarchal honor have been exposed to various forms of repression for 30 years, relentlessly.*

Since the beginning of its activities, Women in Black (1991) has been exposed to various forms of repression, both administrative-state and socio-cultural. Both levels are intertwined and there is a cause-and-effect relationship between them. Attacks on Women in Black are not spontaneous actions, incidents or episodes, but organized, constant, systematic acts of violence aimed at discrediting, criminalizing, intimidating, isolating, and exhausting. It is about unpunished violence for which the state and its institutions, which have never reacted in an adequate way, are responsible. “Failure to prosecute previous attacks encourages and incites new attacks. The epilogue is that an atmosphere has been created in the society where attacks on defenders are legitimate, justified and desirable” (Mirko Medenica). This publication also testifies to all this.

The types of repression to which the WiB is exposed, both by state and non-state actors, can be summarized in the following way:

**Administrative repression - the source of repression is mainly the state and its institutions:** bans on street actions, bans on work in refugee camps, permanent misdemeanor proceedings, informative interviews - police interrogations, obstructions / prevention / obstruction of gatherings of the International Network of WiB, organized chases and call for lynching of WiB activists by ultranationalist parties and politicians, criminalization through financial controls, issuing police arrest warrants, illegal deprivation of liberty of one activist, confiscation of activists’ passports, searches of

apartments, telephone wiretapping and sound system, as well as private apartments of some activists and the premises of the WiB, police seizure of activist material and WiB documentation, expulsion of international volunteers, ban on panel discussions, ban on crossing borders when traveling to commemorate crimes committed in our name, etc.

**Physical attacks by non-state actors:** ultra-right organizations of pro-fascist / clero-fascist / clero-nationalist / neo-Nazi provenance, hooligans, fans, whose “services” the regime often uses as its extended arm, as an informal part of the apparatus of repression. There is a very wide range of attacks: on street actions, verbal and physical attacks on activists on the street, intrusion into the premises of WiB, death threats, organized chases, blacklists, calls for lynching, destruction of WiB property, banners and other artifacts in street actions, telephone harassment, etc.

**Media harassment, defamations, slanders of regime tabloids** - distortion / falsification of facts about WiB activities and accusations of “national betrayal” create a climate for the shooting and lynching of individual defenders, so as to justify violence against them.

**Vertical and horizontal repression together** - the source of repression is not only the state apparatus, but also society. The system of control became increasingly horizontal, to the extent that the regime established control over important segments of society.

**Stigmatization and demonization Women in Black** is a way of expelling, excluding, banishing from the community and society those who violate the alleged national consensus and therefore deserve punishment. This justifies and legitimizes violence against dissidents:

**“You deserve it.”**

Documenting experiences of violence against human rights defenders is an integral part of the alternative history of WiB. We consider it extremely important for building a culture of human rights - accountability to victims of human rights violations and for our collective contribution to the defense of human rights. This publication is a written trace of our experiences, and testimonies of human rights violations help to break the culture of silence that prevails,

especially among women victims of violence. Documentation is also important for the *culture of collective memory* – knowledge of what happened and is happening, social circumstances that led to violations of human rights and responsibility of perpetrators of violence.

The culture of collective memory is also an act of acknowledging and honoring brave defenders. This publication is also a testimony to the resistance: *“We must talk about the female heroism of Women in Black and related groups, their struggle for dignity, the fight against war and all forms of violence”* (Carlos M. Beristain).

Stasa Zajović



*žene u crnom beograd*

Staša Zajović and Tamara Spaić

# Women in Black - 30 years of organized persecution

Women in Black took to the streets of Belgrade for the first time on October 9, 1991, to publicly oppose the war and the militaristic-nationalist policies of the Slobodan Milošević regime. Chronologically, the protest was organized at a time when tanks sent from Serbia were completing the destruction of Vukovar, a multiethnic city in Croatia, a symbol of working class Yugoslavia on a small scale, and began bombing Dubrovnik, a Croatian World Heritage town on the Adriatic, under the protection of UNESCO.

Since then, Women in Black has held more than 2,500 street actions against war and war crimes, against denial and relativization of crimes, against forgetting, belittling and insulting victims, against persecution of war deserters, against killing women, against economic and social marginalization of women, Roma and other national minorities, against all militant regional and global policies, against human rights violations.

***“Why men are never accused of ‘treason’, but women, those women, those horrible women, witches, whores. Where do so many whores come from in this city and this country? It is important not to wear black, not to thread a needle with black, blackness can remind you of Women in Black” (Borka Pavićević, Belgrade) (1947-2019)***

Almost no street action Women in Black took place without physical and / or verbal attacks. From the records of attacks, which is presented to you chronologically, you can see the continuity of intent. It is clear that the attacks were not only inspired, but were predominantly orchestrated by the policies of the regime, i.e., certain state centers of power. The attacks were mostly not initiated by

random passers-by, so irritated by the aestheticized performance of women and men dressed in black to start swearing, shouting, hurling stones and showing fists, insulting and threatening. All attacks on Women in Black were carried out by militant and criminal groups, more or less publicly connected to the state and its secret services, especially in the period after 2012.

Attacks on Women in Black, which took place on the street, on the occasion, during or after the performance of stage actions / performances, protests, commemorative rallies, etc. were inspired and prepared by media campaigns conducted in pro-regime media. Media vilification enabled and “justified” all physical and verbal attacks on Women in Black.

As an activist group and a network of feminist-anti-militarist orientation, Women in Black is most attacked for insisting on all levels of responsibility for war and war crimes. The most severe attacks are on the occasion of the commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide. As a particularly perfidious form of defamation of Women in Black, regime propaganda has “nurtured” a public discourse in which Women in Black is accused of “glorifying Muslim victims” and underestimating “Serbian victims” in order to, as “proven enemies of the Serbian people”, accuse “all Serbs of being a genocidal people”. Although Women in Black, for example, commemorates every year the mass crime against Serbs in Rahovec / Orahovac (Kosovo), the killing of RTS workers in the NATO bombing, the murder of guards in Topčider, although they protested against the persecution of Serbs in the actions of Flash (1995) and Storm (August 1995) they were “accused” of duplicating victims and this is probably the most subversive and monstrous attack on WiB.

Women in Black has not kept accurate records of attacks in a systematic and analytical way from the very beginning of 1991. Due to the escalation of repression against activists in early 2014, Women in Black began compiling the Database and accurately recording all such events.

Based on various historical and social circumstances in which the attacks on WiB took place, this chronicle is divided into three phases:

**First phase:** The era of Slobodan Milošević's regime - persecutions, attacks and death threats

**Second phase:** Repression by "democratic authorities" - denial of crimes

**Third phase:** Return of the 1990s - glorification of war criminals

## **First phase:**

### **S. Milošević regime – persecutions, attacks and death threats 1991- 2000**

Prohibition of protests, initiation of misdemeanor proceedings, wiretapping and surveillance, torturous interrogation by police officers from the State Security Service, stopping peace activists at the borders to prevent international solidarity, visa ban, financial investigation of business based on fabricated accusations, verbal and physical threats during street protests ...

From 1991 to 1996, WiB organized protests against the war in Croatia and BH every Wednesday.

From the very beginning, and especially since 1993, misdemeanor charges for allegedly disorderly and untimely reports of public manifestations have followed WiB as a continuous form of intimidation and obstruction, although all public protests have been reported in accordance with regulations.

***"Activists who advocate a radical break with the criminal past and responsibility for war crimes are qualified as extremists and even criminals ..."*** (Biljana Kovačević Vučo (1992-2010))

Since its inception, and especially since 1993, dozens of activists have been subjected to police interrogation. It was a form of intimidation, blackmail and pressure in order to break the solidarity and cohesion of the group.

**October 19, 1993 – Physical violence due to anti-war banners:** the first serious physical attack occurred during a regular anti-war vigil in Republic Square on Wednesdays. Members of the paramilitary formation the "White Eagles" attacked the activists. Shouting in-

sults, those brutes pushed activists, snatched and tore their banners with messages of peace: **“Stop the war”, “Not in our name”, “Sarajevo dreams of peace”, “Sarajevo - the tomb of the living”** ... Outraged activists resorted to non-violent resistance. They did not respond to insults, they did not respond to physical violence. Instinctively, they chose the only possible defensive tactic - defiantly and fearlessly, they stared the bullies straight in the eye. The attackers were stopped. They withdrew and left with their eyes downcast. The police, as in other similar cases, did not react.

**March 8, 1995 - Attack due to the banner “Albanians are our sisters”:** a group of men, whom the activists failed to identify, physically attacked them while they were standing in Republic Square with a banner **“Albanians are our sisters”**. The banner was destroyed in the attack. During WiB ongoing protests against the policy of violence and apartheid, which the Serbian regime pursued in Kosovo from 1996 until 1999, there were frequent physical attacks, but they were not accurately recorded.

**“Every Wednesday at half past three in the afternoon, we met and held a vigil in the Square. Those moments in which we stood to fight together, enabled us to endure everything. Both the disapproving looks of passers-by and their disturbing words.”** (*Ljuba Minić, Belgrade*)

**May 1995 - Prohibition of contacts with refugees:** by order of the Commissariat for Refugees of Serbia and the manager of the Kovilovo refugee camp, which housed refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Women in Black was banned from humanitarian work in the camp. Although the organization is registered for humanitarian activities, as a basis for the ban on work, it was stated that WiB allegedly does not have a work permit. In several refugee camps where we worked, the refugees were interrogated by inspectors from the State Security Service. The intimidation of refugees was an indirect attempt to obstruct the work of WiB.

## **Preventing international cooperation and closing borders for WiB**

In the period from 1992 to 2000, WiB organized nine rallies of activists of the International Solidarity Network: eight in Vojvodina and one in Montenegro. The regime, abusing the newly established system of issuing visas for foreigners from 1993, the powers of the border police and members of the State Security, tried to thwart these gatherings and isolate Women in Black Serbia from the Network of international solidarity. Obstruction of this type intensified, especially after the Srebrenica genocide in 1995.

**July 1995 - Visa denials to Spanish women:** The FRY embassy in Madrid refused to issue visas to 30 Spanish peace activists. The Spaniards still managed to get a visa at the embassy in Rome, but all this caused great additional financial costs and exhaustion of the activists.

**August 3, 1995 - Prohibition of entry into the country for activists from Europe:** the border police of FR Yugoslavia stopped a bus full of activists from Italy, Spain, Great Britain and Croatia, who were heading to the Fourth Meeting of the Network of Women's Solidarity against War / International Network of Women in Black. Peace activists from Europe tried to cross the border in an organized manner at three different crossings from the direction of Hungary, but were prevented at each of them. In total, they were detained for 30 hours at the border crossings, the police were particularly harassing and unpleasant to the activists from Croatia. Most of the Peace Network participants from abroad managed to reach the rally only after they separated. In groups of two or three, they traveled by local transport (train and bus) from Szeged to Subotica or Senta.

**August 5, 1995 - Police harassment of activists at the border:** three Women in Black activists, who were going to meet foreign guests, were stopped at the Horgos border crossing. The Yugoslav border police interrogated them for four hours. They were subjected to unpleasant and derogatory interrogation, search and police harassment.

**August 5 and 6, 1995 - Interrogations of activists from abroad in the Secret Police:** members of the State Security Service brought activists to interrogations throughout the international gathering in Trešnjevac, near Senta (Vojvodina). The organizers of the rally were also detained, as well as locals who did not participate in the rally. In addition, the local police of the Municipality of Kanjiža summoned all foreigners, participants in the gathering, to informative talks. Local scout groups, who wanted to support the rally, had to give up their public support due to pressure from local police. A Roman Catholic priest, the parish priest in Trešnjevac, Jena Utaša, was subjected to police interrogation several times because he openly provided solidarity assistance for the maintenance of two gatherings of the Network in Trešnjevac (1993 and 1995).

**September 19, 1998 - Ban on the anti-war rally** “For Peace in Kosovo”: the police banned the anti-war protest in Belgrade, in front of the Presidency of Serbia. The international peace action was organized in coordination with Amnesty International. Protests against the war in Kosovo were held that day in Podgorica and throughout Europe.

**1996 - 2000 - Expulsion of international volunteers:** three activists from the USA were expelled from Serbia in that period because they provided solidarity help and support to the work of Women in Black.

*“WiB saved my life in the 1990s” (Ildiko Erdei, Pančevo)*

## **Death threats in the Assembly of Serbia**

**September 28, 1998:** At the session of the Assembly of Serbia, peace activists received death threats from the parliamentary rostrum with the general approval of the deputies. The threats were made by Vojislav Šešelj, then President of the Serbian Radical Party and MP: **“If the United States decides to attack Serbia, let them withdraw their quislings in time, such as members of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, the Belgrade Circle and Women in Black and not leave them as hostages. We may not be able to reach every**

**plane, but we will grab those who are at hand.”** Other deputies in the Assembly of Serbia accompanied this threat with a roar of laughter.

***“Once during the war, there were only three of us in the Square. Passers-by cursed us, and spat on us. But I felt proud, not at all scared. I was so devastated that I didn’t care. Our vigils in the Square every Wednesday were like a breath of fresh air that saved my life, over and over again” (Saša Kovačević, Belgrade)***

## **Campaign of regime aggression**

**June – September 2000 – Relentless persecution:** In the last months of the rule of Slobodan Milošević’s regime, before the elections that were going to bring about democratic changes, the regime’s most aggressive campaign against Women in Black was recorded.

- Daily police interrogations of members of the State Security Service. The activists were interrogated in the Women in Black premises and in the MI station;
- Continuous incursions by the financial police;
- Illegal deprivation of liberty and torture by the State Security Service of WiB activist Bojan Aleksov, who came to support us as a postgraduate student at CEU;
- Issuance of a wanted circular for activist Staša Zajović for solidarity with deserters and conscientious objectors, as well as for activist Srđan Knežević for desertion from Kosovo during the military intervention. The arrest warrant remained in force even after Srđan was released under the Amnesty Law;
- Confiscation of the passport of activist Dunja Hadžiomerspahić;
- Searches of apartments, telephone tapping, illegal monitoring, wiretapping of activists’ apartments, such as the apartment of Staša Zajović;
- Seizure of activist material and documentation Women in Black. State security seized the material during a police interrogation in June and July 2000. Despite WiB continued requests to return the seized material, it has not been returned so far.

## **Second phase:**

### **Repression by “democratic authorities” – denial of crimes committed in the period 2000 – 2012**

The fall of Slobodan Milošević’s repressive and criminal regime on October 5, 2000 did not bring about the expected democratic changes, the reforms of the criminal security services failed to take place, the attitude towards the committed war crimes and victims did not change significantly. All this influenced the continuation of attacks on WiB, verbal attacks, defamation, bans on public protests ... After the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, and especially after the early elections in December 2003 and the coming to power of Vojislav Koštunica, representatives of the previous regime were openly rehabilitated. As expected, repressive methods from the previous period were also “rehabilitated”.

**July 11, 2002 Prohibition of crossing the border and going to Srebrenica:** at the border crossing near Ljubovija, the Republika Srpska border police, reinforced by special units, members of SFOR, stopped a bus with about 50 activists of the Women’s Network in Black Serbia and prevented participation in the commemoration of the seventh anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica and attending the funeral / burial rites for the remains of the victims of genocide.

**November 9, 2002 - Neo-Nazi counter-meeting I:** on the occasion of the International Day against Fascism, WiB organized and, as usual, in accordance with the law, announced to the police the holding of a public anti-fascist action in Republic Square. In order to thwart this action, a counter-meeting of Red Star and Partisan fans was organized. They came to the square dressed in black T-shirts with the image of convicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić and obstructed the performance of WiB. Fans, more precisely organized hooligan and criminal groups gathered around the management of sports clubs, were often used in “special” street actions against those whom the regime labeled as enemies.

**November 9, 2003 - Neo-Nazi counter-rally II:** shouting “Heil Hitler”, a group of hooligans belonging to Red Star and Partisan fans, “Delije” and “Grobari”, repeated the previous year’s scenario of obstruc-

tion of the anti-fascist peace protest in Republic Square. They were wearing T-shirts with the image of Radovan Karadžić and shouting insults at the activists who were marking the International Day Against Fascism. The police did not react.

**December 10, 2003 - Prohibition of the action “Extradite them”:** in Republic Square in Belgrade, and on the occasion of the International Human Rights Day, WiB reported the action “*Extradite them*”. However, the Ministry of the Interior banned this action at the order of the authorities. “*Deliver them!*” Campaign started with a clear request to the authorities in Serbia to cooperate fully and unconditionally with The Hague Tribunal and to urgently and unconditionally hand over to The Hague Tribunal all war crimes indictees. At the same time, the goal of the campaign was to sensitize citizens about this topic and draw their attention to its importance. The campaign had a “traveling” character and took place continuously throughout Serbia, from December 2003 to March 2005, and occasionally later. During this period, WiB activists were continuously exposed to repressive administrative measures: misdemeanor proceedings, police questionings and interrogations in the Department for Organized Crime and Prostitution and for Economic Crime of the Ministry of the Interior.

**April 6, 2004 - Physical attack due to opposition to state aid to The Hague indictees:** Activists Boban Stojanović and Radojica Bunčić were physically attacked at a protest against the Law on Assistance to Hague Accused and Their Families, organized by WiB and related organizations. Minor bodily injuries were registered at the Emergency Center, and the perpetrators were neither identified nor punished.

In the course of April that year, WiB organized a protest against violence against Serbs in Kosovo, but also against the demolition of mosques and attacks on non-Serbs in Serbia. During the protest, two of our activists were physically attacked. The police did not react.

**July 10, 2004 - Physical attack for delivering mail to victims in Srebrenica:** During the commemoration of the ninth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, a performance “Map of Forbidden Memory” was

performed in Republic Square. The performance was performed jointly by Dah Theater and ŽUC. A large, organized group of thugs who announced themselves as “Serbian patriots”, during the performance, threatened and insulted Women in Black, shouting insults **“Balis, Whores, Barren women, Drug addicts, Long Live Mladić, Long Live Karadžić, you are the shame of Serbia, We’ll skin you alive at the next rally.”** Three activists were then physically attacked. The performance continued according to the agreed scenario, despite the attack and regardless of it. The police did not remove or detain anyone. The criminal complaint, filed against the attacker, was rejected.

**November 9, 2004 - Attack by fans and skinheads:** for the third year in a row, at the protest marking the International Day against Fascism, neo-Nazis attacked Women in Black activists. The police did not react, which was yet another clear sign of the government’s tolerance of fascist incidents.

## **Defamation and attempts of brutal criminalization of WiB**

**January 2005 - Repression of the state against Women in Black:** since the beginning of 2005, WiB has been exposed to organized harassment, slander and attempted criminalization with a full range of repressive administrative methods. Cross-examinations, informative interviews, constant police intrusions into WiB premises, interrogations, misdemeanor trials, financial control, telephone harassment, threats of activists sent by phone, especially to Staša Zajović’s private phone, intimidation, threats of “Serbian patriots” ...

At the beginning of 2005, a pensioner from the interior of Serbia (Zaječar), known in the local community as a bully, who continuously harassed and threatened Staša Zajović with phone calls, criminal charges against Staša Zajović (in the police station Savski Venac) “for organizing prostitution”. This bizarre report was used as a pretext for months of police harassment and repression of activists.

**February 2, 2005 - Attack of “Serbian patriots” on Svetozar Miletić Square in Novi Sad:** during the action “Extradite them!”, an organized group of thugs attacked activists Women in Black from Belgrade and Novi Sad. They tore down banners carried by activists, shouted insults, glorifying war criminals ...

*“Each of us has a different inner feeling and expresses it in different ways. It seems to me that the presence of the police is to tell people to point at us “yes, look at them, remember them well, here they are”. Once we left WiB, I jumped out of the column, and the policeman pushed me “you can’t go there, you’re not safe there”. I told him: “Who are protected me from, I know how to protect myself” (Svetlana Šarić, Vlasotince).*

*“The year when the police dispersed us (2005), divided us into groups, I was angry because they could have removed them instead (the fascist groups, editor’s remark). Last year, I felt that I couldn’t do that anymore. When the fascists, during our action, stood prepared as a choir, I had the experience that it would be like that for the rest of my life and that I was not going to take it anymore. Fascists counter-rallies, chasing us and making everything meaningless.” (Slavica Stojanović, Belgrade).*

**April 2005 – Police “investigation” of Women in Black:** The Ministry of the Interior’s Department for Organized Crime and Prostitution launched an official investigation against Women in Black on charges of “organized prostitution.” The “investigation” took place continuously from April to October 2005. In order to protect WiB, Amnesty International launched a campaign, asking the competent institutions in Serbia to stop the repression of peace activists and human rights activists. After hundreds of letters from all over the world, which were sent to the authorities and the public by the most famous and largest peace organizations and networks, the

WiB protection campaign bore fruit. This type of slander and harassment, which was officially organized by the state, has stopped. The accusations of prostitution were aimed at attacking the moral integrity and discouraging women from activism, especially in smaller communities. During the same period, members of the State Security Service continuously came to WiB premises, interrogated and mistreated the activists.

**June 2005 – Financial control:** the abuse of the financial police against organizations and the media that the government labels as its political enemies is a well-known method of pressure and intimidation. In order to criminalize the work of Women in Black, the financial control came on several occasions in the course of June and reviewed all the documentation. It was determined that there were no irregularities of this type in our work.

**July 10, 2005 - Tear gas at the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide:** in Republic Square in Belgrade, a group of neo-Nazis threw tear gas at the participants in the protest on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica. Misdemeanor proceedings were initiated against the attacker. The criminal charges, filed by Women in Black, were not accepted.

***“On the tenth anniversary of Srebrenica, we had a very risky rally, where stones were being hurled at us. And we stuck together. I remember that moment of solidarity. It’s like family. As if they were my sisters. I always knew that there were ...” (Borka Pavićević, Belgrade (1947-2019)).***

***“I was impressed by the tenth anniversary of Srebrenica, when tear gas was thrown at us. This and many other events exposed Serbia during and after Milošević - Serbia, which has not changed” (Biljana Kovačević Vučo, Belgrade (1952-2010)).***

***“On the tenth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, very young people threw tear gas at us. We coughed, we were caught in smoke. But less than ten minutes later Women in Black were in the same place again” (Vesna Rakić Vodinelić, Belgrade).***

**January 22, 2007 - Skinheads attack on well-known activists:** without any reason and only because they were recognized as participants in the public protests of Women in Black, a small group of Skinheads attacked WiB activists Violeta Đikanović and Miloš Urošević. They pushed the WiB activists down the stairs, near the green market, and inflicted minor bodily injuries. Police refused to come and conduct an investigation, and the attackers were never identified.

**October 7, 2007 –** Stones hurled on the participants in the anti-fascist march in Novi Sad: in protest of the announcement of the neo-Nazi march, a group of non-governmental organizations from Novi Sad organized a protest and anti-fascist march. About fifty activists of the Women in Black Network from all over Serbia also took part in the action. Neo-Nazis from the National Alignment organization, gathered in the park, threw stones at the participants in the protest march, as the anti-fascist procession passed. Members of the Gendarmerie protected members of the National Alignment, an organization banned by the Constitution and operating “illegally”. After the incident, government officials spoke negatively about the anti-fascist march as “extreme.”

“They (the police) are following us, filming us, harassing us. They equate us with them (right-wing organizations) and that is a problem. Yes, we need protection, but the government must ban clerical-fascist organizations” **(Zorica Trifunović, Belgrade).**

**December 3, 2007 -** Prevention of the panel in Arandjelovac: Women in Black activists organized an action of solidarity and support for the authors of the opposition radio program “Peščanik”, who organized the panel and the promotion of the book “Peščanik” (Sandbox). The panel was physically prevented by members of the New Serbia party, whose political program has the characteristics of clero-fas-

cism, and which has significantly participated in the government at the republic and local level since the democratic changes in 2000.

**December 10, 2007 – Attack by clerical fascists:** on the Human Rights Day, the collective Škart and ŽUC performed the action “Stop clericalization - We will not go back” in the Republic Square. During the action, neo-Nazis from the constitutionally banned organization Obraz and the like, constantly obstructed and tried to stop the performance. They sang Chetnik songs and the anthem of the criminal Special Operations Unit, whose members were convicted of participating in the political assassinations of the 1990s and the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić. They shouted: *“Ratko Mladić, Kill, kill the fagot, there will be meat - we are slaughtering Croats, Kill and slaughter, so that Shiptar does not exist, Shiptar whores in black”*. The police did not stop the neo-Nazis, but allowed and even encouraged their savagery.

*“Once, after our protest, when I came out of WiB, the policeman told me: ‘Well, you can’t come out in black!’ I was very angry and told him: ‘Don’t you tell me what I’m going to wear’ (Nevena Nena Kostić, Leskovac).*

*“When Kosovo’s independence was declared (February 2008), we evacuated from WiB, we did not go out on the street, there was a lot of fear. They were clearing the streets of all of us and we withdrew, fled to some ghettos...” (Miloš Urošević, Belgrade).*

**March 8, 2008 - Ban on the march on the occasion of 8th March:** The Police Administration in Belgrade issued a decision banning the celebration of March 8 in Belgrade, on the centenary of this holiday, with the following explanation: *“There may be disruption of public traffic, endangering health, safety and property”*.

In March 2012, the Constitutional Court passed a verdict stating that the state of Serbia violated the human rights of Women in Black, including the right to freedom of assembly, the right to a fair trial, the right to a trial within a reasonable time and the right to

an effective legal remedy. This is the only verdict passed in favor of Women in Black and the protection of human right defenders.

**July 10, 2009 - Attack of the clerical fascists and aggressive denial of genocide:** even before Women in Black arrived at Republic Square, the space traditionally used to mark the anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica was "occupied". The activists were greeted with loud and aggressive insults. A large group of members of clerical-fascist organizations chanted in unison: "*Srebrenica is not genocide*", "*Ratko Mladić*", "*Radovan Karadžić*", "*Kosovo is Serbia*" ... During the action "Let's not forget the Srebrenica genocide", stage action "We remember - responsibility and solidarity" was performed. Republic Square in Belgrade was covered with a huge foil with 8,372 embossed roses, in memory of the victims. About 150 people took part in the action, activists from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bihać and Sarajevo), Italy, Spain, Israel, the USA, Great Britain, India, Sweden, etc.

*"Together with Women in Black, we stood on the Republic Square on July 10 (2008) holding banners Responsibility and Solidarity, and the people of Belgrade projected the film Women of Srebrenica Speak, by Milica Tomić. It was strange - the Square in the dark, the Srebrenica women addressing Serbia, Belgrade was silent, only a few passers-by would come up and spit on us" (Boban Stojanović, Zaječar / Belgrade).*

**November 9, 2009 - Prohibition of anti-fascist action in front of the Serbian Parliament:** on the International Day against Fascism, Women in Black activists, Labris and artists from the art group Škart performed in front of the Belgrade City Assembly, because the police banned performances on the plateau in front of the Serbian Parliament. During the action, flowers were laid on Terazije square next to the monument to the hanged anti-fascists from the Second World War. Despite the ban, a march was performed through the central city streets, from Terazije to the Academic Plateau, in front of the Faculty of Philosophy.

## Attacks because of solidarity with minorities

**October 9, 2010 - Intrusion of hooligans into WiB premises on the eve of the Pride Parade:** there were about a dozen activists from the WiB Network, from various cities in Serbia, who had come to the Pride. About an hour after midnight, two men broke into the WiB premises, and one of them was beating with a hammer, shouting: "Who is gay here?". First, they attacked an activist from Pančevo, beat him with fists and chased him around the apartment, until he escaped to the bathroom, and locked himself in. The attackers then grabbed a chair, hit the activist from Niš and broke her glasses. The attackers fled after one activist managed to call the police. The police patrol came to conduct the inspection of WiB premises only three hours later. A report was made, and one of the attacked activists went to the police station in 29 November Street, where he was questioned and recognized one of the attackers. The Ministry of the Interior never initiated a procedure, and the criminal report of WiB was not accepted. The Pride was held with huge police security and will be remembered for the savagery of right-wing hooligans, fascist and extreme football fan groups, who ravaged the city. Pride participants from WiB were evacuated by police vehicles from the Student Cultural Center to the bus station.

**June 17 and July 30, 2010 - Threats during a solidarity visit to Roma in the village of Jabuka:** the murder of a young man (17) of which his peer was suspected, on June 10 in the village of Jabuka, Vojvodina (40km from Belgrade), led to an escalation of violence against the Roma population. For days, a group of non-Roma locals pelted with stones members of the Roma minority, destroying their property, mistreating them and threatening them with death. WiB activists were attacked during a solidarity visit to the vulnerable Roma minority.

**October 5, 2011 - Arrest of a WiB activist during an action of solidarity with Roma:** Women in Black, together with six other NGOs from Belgrade (Regional Center for Minorities, Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights, PRAXIS, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Reconstruction Women's Fund and the Philosophical Defense), organized an action of solidarity with the Roma, whose huts, that were their

only homes, were destroyed. Those huts had been illegally occupied, and their residents (21 people) were not provided with alternative accommodation. Police did not allow human rights activists to approach the barracks. In addition to identification, the police also used force, and on that occasion, Marija Perković, a WiB activist, was detained. She was released the same day. Owing to activist pressure, working class families were not evicted.

### **Third phase:**

## **The glorification of war crimes and criminals - the return of the 1990s 2012-2022**

**March 23, May 11 and June 22, 2012 - Insults and threats of Chetnik organizations:** during the political and judicial process of rehabilitation of Draža Mihailović, war criminal and commander of Chetnik formations, collaborator of Hitler's occupiers in World War II, Women in Black protested in front of the building of the Third Municipal Court in Belgrade, where the trial took place. WiB launched a campaign *"Stop the rehabilitation of war criminal Draža Mihailović."* The activists carried banners that read: *"Women in Black against fascism", "Stop rehabilitation", "Mihailović - genocide - Srebrenica", "Anti-fascism is my choice"* ... During all hearings, the activists were constantly exposed to insults and threats by members of Chetnik organizations from Belgrade and other cities.

Protests against the rehabilitation of Draža Mihailović, during which WiB was exposed to attacks by right-wingers, were also held in 2013 (February 22) and 2014 (February 27, March 3 and April 28).

***"I feel a bit exhausted and in some phases I get the feeling that we are spinning in the same circle, that we are not succeeding in stepping out. Today's Serbia is an anesthetized community whose regime has closed all roads and blocked all life juices" (Vladimir Jevtić, Bajina Bašta)***

**November 2012 - On the black list:** constant threats and pressures of clerical-fascist and right-wing organizations in Serbia were rapidly intensifying after the parties that formed the regime in the 1990s came to power again in the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections. The clero-fascist organization “Nashi”, closely connected with the new ruling nomenclature, published a so-called black list of “hostile” non-governmental organizations in November. Among the twenty or so NGOs on the list were Women in Black. “Nashi” was asking for a ban on blacklisted organizations and the introduction of laws against civil society, following the example of the law in the Russian Federation.

**March - April 2014 - A series of attacks due to commemorations of crimes against Albanians:** calls for lynching and organized chase against Women in Black, a series of attacks preceded the commemorative action of WiB, commemorating the 15th anniversary of war crimes committed by Serbian forces against Kosovo Albanians.

## **Media persecution and call for slaughter**

**March 25, 2014 - Special police official publicly calls for lynching of WiB activists:** Radomir Počuča, spokesman for the anti-terrorist police unit, posted on his Facebook account a call for hooligans to deal with the peace group Women in Black: *“I think this should not take place. Gentlemen hooligans, Delije, Grobari, Radovci, Firmaši, (supporters of rival football clubs Red Star, Partisan, Rad and Vojvodina, respectively, translator’s note) instead of using fists against one another, and you are great patriots, get together and beat the hell out of those pussies and to those who deserve to be given pussy”*.

**March 26, 2014 - We remember the crimes in Kosovo / I kujtojmë krimet në Kosovë!** despite threats Women in Black held a public commemorative rally on the 15th anniversary of the crimes committed against Albanian civilians in Kosovo. The stage action “Reconstruction of Crimes” - homage to Albanian civilian victims” was also performed, with the support of art groups Multimedia Center LED ART / Art Clinic from Novi Sad and Dah Theater from Belgrade. All banners were written in Albanian and Serbian as a sign of solidarity and sympathy with the families of those killed, but also to

raise public awareness in Serbia about the crimes of Serbian armed forces in Kosovo. About 35 activists took part in the action. It was carried out without incident, but the day after this peace action, brutal attacks and threats followed.

**March 29, 2014 - New call for lynching Women in Black:** the following call was published on the Facebook status under the name Boris Knežević: *"I call on all brothers to immediately lynch and burn those whores in black wherever they see them!!!"* *Justice for Počuča!*" Hundreds of threatening and insulting comments were published. The prosecution rejected the criminal report.

**April 1, 2014 - Fake interview to incite hatred towards WiB:** on the Facebook account **"Online Reporter"**, the text appeared followed by a fabricated interview, in which, among other things, bizarre, fictitious threats are made that Radomir Počuča *"found himself under threat from this infamous women's NGO, who announced that he will be publicly raped in Republic Square until Počuča apologizes publicly or dies from exhaustion"*.

**April 4, 2014 - The police approved a rally in support of hate speech:** The Serbian Assembly the Pledgers (Zavetnici), a right-wing organization of clero-fascist orientation, is seeking and receiving police approval to hold a rally in support of Radomir Počuča, spokesman for the Anti-Terrorist Unit of the Serbian Interior Ministry. Počuča was allegedly threatened with sanctions at work because he called for the lynching of members of WiB, while the rally of support is approved by the same institution that officially announced disciplinary measures for hate speech.

**April 5, 2014 - Police threats under the window of WiB:** a protest organized by the clerical-fascist organization Serbian Assembly the Pledgers (Zavetnici) was held in the immediate vicinity of the premises of Women in Black. A broader area around the building was blocked. The protesters demanded that a law be passed in Serbia that would make it possible to ban actions of NGOs from the "Black List". About thirty people took part in the protest, and it was secured by twice as many armed police officers. Police blocked the entrances to the green market, checked the tenants' IDs and further disturbed the public. The tenants were especially upset by the robust presence of the police, which acted menacingly, not protec-

tively, in front of and in the building during the protest. The police abused freedom of assembly, by giving permission for a protest whose motive was for the defense invites violence.

***“By being involved in the activities of WiB, I felt constant insecurity. As the years went by, the number of members of the police at our vigils increased, and so did my feelings of fear and insecurity.” (Milka Rosić, Leskovac).***

***“I am an activist who went through the 90’s in this group and Milošević was a poor amateur compared to this. I thought that had been the worst thing that could have happened.” (Violeta Djikanović, Belgrade)***

***“I have been an activist since 1996, I chose to be at risk, to be insecure, to be attacked, to be in danger. Talking about war crimes means you’re constantly at risk.***

***I am concerned about the safety of my daughter, who is also an activist, who is not allowed to sit in a cafe because she is going to Srebrenica.” (Svetlana Šarić, Vlasotince).***

**April 5, 2014 - Facebook call for slaughter with a blunt knife:** on the Facebook page of the magazine **“PressOnline”** there was a call for the liquidation of WiB on a user account named Aleksandar Balaban:

***“Urgently liquidate them. I offer 100,000 euros per whore to the person who liquidates them... the only condition is to slaughter them with a serrated and blunt knife... the offer lasts as long as they live...”***

**April 8, 2014 - Campaign for the expulsion of Women in Black** - the false news was published on the website of the Serbian Assembly the Pledgers (Zavetnici) that the representatives of the tenants of the building where WiB premises are located asked them for help. In their statement, the Pledgers undertake to *“support the fight of the residents in Jug Bogdanova 18 to get rid of the NGO Women in Black and we will provide them with legal and any other kind of*

*assistance in that fight.” The harangue against WiB was joined by high-circulation tabloids that published headlines such as: “Nobody likes women in black, get out of here”, “Women in Black mourn Albanian victims, and don’t care about Serbian victims”, “We will do anything it takes to make Women in Black leave the building”.*

In 2016, Radomir Počuča was tried for the crime of endangering the safety of Women in Black activists. He was acquitted by the ruling of the High Court, and the Court of Appeals and the Constitutional Court upheld the acquittal.

**July 8, 2014** - Chetnik attack in the center of Valjevo: on the occasion of the 19th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, Women in Black and participants in the initiative “Peace Activism - Activist Cycling - Srebrenica 2014” organized, in mourning and silence, a peace rally in the main town square in Valjevo *“We will never forget the Srebrenica genocide”*. From the very beginning, the participants in the mentioned peace action were exposed to nationalist-militaristic-misogynistic insults of a pro-fascist group of men. The group was “uniformed”, wearing T-shirts with the inscription “Chetniks of Valjevo” and pictures of Ratko Mladić. The violence escalated, and the police failed to prevent the perpetrators from breaking through the cordon. Staša Zajović, Ljiljana Radovanović, Miloš Urošević and Dejan Gašić were injured in the attack, which was committed in an atmosphere of lynching and calls for destruction. The police barely managed to evacuate the activists from the dangerous environment and for security reasons, all participants in the peace operation were returned to Belgrade under police escort. Two days later, activists on bicycles managed to continue their journey from Belgrade to Potočari / Srebrenica.

***“I feel both scared and angry after the attack in Valjevo (July 8, 2014). People drove us out of there and that infuriated me. I don’t care so much about my own safety, but I am worried about the safety of close people. I am aware of the risks” (Goran Lazin, Pančevo)***

***“This year, during the vigil for Srebrenica (July 10, 2014), I felt very upset. You turn around and see one circle of the police, then another circle of the gendarmerie, and a third circle of the special intervention police. I wondered: What did I do? Is it all because we show solidarity with the victims of crimes committed in our name?” (Milka Rosić, Leskovac)***

**July 22, 2014 - Threats to Staša Zajović:** at the bus stop in Zemun, an unfamiliar man threatened Staša Zajović, coordinator of WiB: “I know you, you are Staša Zajović from Women in Black. And you know, you have no place in Serbia because you hate Serbs and you work for Muslims ... We are invisible, we come out of the dark and work in the dark, we are everywhere ... You will not be defended by American commandos ...”

**November 18, 2014 - Violence of the Pledgers:** during the action ***“We will never forget the crimes in Vukovar”*** in Republic Square, members of the organization Pledgers (Zavetnici) tried to prevent and stop it. They developed the banner ***“Bykovan will never be Vukovar”*** and hurled insults and threats to “Women in Black” activists.

**April 28, 2015 - Vojislav Šešelj’s verbal attack on Staša Zajović:** at the trial for the rehabilitation of Draža Mihailović, before the main trial, the influential president of the Serbian Radical Party and political “father” of the current president of Serbia, publicly insulted the coordinator of Women in Black Staša Zajović: ***“You freak! I have never seen an uglier woman. You are a witch. Have you always been so ugly or has something happened to you? They should have drowned you in the cradle when they saw how ugly you were. Do you have a girlfriend?”*** The court guard did not react to these insults and did not remove Šešelj from the courtroom. After that, in front of the Palace of Justice, Šešelj, with the approval of his infuriated escorts, continued in the same, insulting manner. He told reporters that he was “surprised to see what ugly Staša Zajović looks like, a real witch. She is so ugly that primordial evil erupted from her. This should have been stifled as soon as it was born,” Šešelj said. When journalists asked him why he insulted women, he replied that ***“there is nothing feminine about her.”***

***“When we had a peace action in the Square on May 24 this year, when we left WiB, there were more police than us, in front of, next to, behind, everywhere” with radio stations, cars. I had an unpleasant feeling” (Danica Pupovac, Pančevo.)***

**June 22, 2015 - Insults at the New Cemetery:** activists Women in Black Staša Zajović and Ljiljana Radovanović entered a flower shop at the entrance to the New Cemetery in Belgrade, followed by a large man who rushed into the flower shop behind them. He approached Staša Zajović less than half a meter away, looked her angrily in the face and started insulting her: *“Who are you, traitor of the Serbian people to attack my hero Ratko Mladić? You bitch. Who is paying you? How much money do Americans give you for what you are doing? The people have nothing to eat, and you are organizing a gay parade. I saw you, you personally carried the gay flag. You are evil and shame for the Serbian people. “*

***“Being an activist in a small town means being pressured by everyone, rejected by family, by the environment. To be alone.” (Ivana Ristić, Leskovac)***

***“For me, being at risk is success, because I am doing something that will be good for future generations. It is good to tell children about Srebrenica. That is what we will do for them, to face what has been done in their name.” (Snežana Obrenović, Kraljevo)***

***“I feel insecure, apprehensive and threatened. It is the state that allows us to be insecure.” (Anelija Dimitrova, Dimitrograd)***

**June and July 2015 - Targets marking the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide: activists were the target of insults and threats almost every day, and were especially exposed during the actions**

*marking the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide (actions in Belgrade on July 7 and July 10, July 8 in Šabac and July 9 in Loznica). At the same time, a large number of threats and insults were sent to the Facebook profile of Women in Black. The insults were mostly on a misogynistic and chauvinistic basis: “whores in black”, “kill the Bali”, “whores, fuck your dead mother”, “fuck your Ustasha mother”...*

**July 7, 2015 - Destruction of the symbolic memorial for the victims of the Srebrenica genocide:** in Srebrenička Street in Belgrade, WiB organized a stage action “Srebrenica - a stumbling block for Serbia!” – the erection of a symbolic memorial. The practice of erecting memorials, primarily in Germany, called the “Stumbling block” is an act of remembrance for the victims of the Holocaust. Just as Auschwitz is a paradigm for Nazi crimes and the Holocaust, so Srebrenica has become a paradigm for Serbian crimes, the largest in Europe since World War II. With the stage action of erecting the symbolic memorial “Srebrenica - a stumbling block for Serbia!” the creation of a climate of civic responsibility is encouraged. Unfortunately, the symbolic memorial was destroyed after 24 hours, which testifies to the climate of denial of the Srebrenica genocide in Serbia. After that, WiB made a new “stumbling block” to be installed on the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. WiB designed and implemented the action together with the Multimedia Center / MMC Art Clinic / Led Art from Novi Sad. Over 80 activists of the WiB Network of Serbia (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Leskovac, Kraljevo, Kruševac, Zrenjanin...) and activists from European countries (Belgium, Italy, Spain, Great Britain, Hungary, Belarus) took part in this action, and also from the USA.

**July 10, 2015 - Prohibition of action # Seven Thousand #:** BBC journalist Dušan Mašić (1964-2022) initiated an action in which 7,000 people would lie on the boulevard in front of the Serbian Parliament, and each participant would be marked with a number symbolizing one of the Srebrenica victims, in order to pay tribute to them. A group of organizations for human rights and democracy from Serbia took over the idea and officially announced the action for July 11. Right-wing organizations threatened to prevent the rally, and the Ministry of the Interior banned all street manifestations on July 11 in Belgrade. Instead, on July 10 (from 23:00 to 24:00),

human rights organizations, including Women in Black, organized a commemorative gathering in the park in front of the Serbian Presidency. Dozens took part in the action, activists of the Women in Black Network of Serbia, as well as activists of Women in Black from Belgium, Italy and Spain.

**September 22, 2015 - Attack on WiB premises:** unidentified persons removed and destroyed all signs of the organization from the front door of the Women in Black office.

**November and December 2015 - Prohibition of visits to refugee centers Preševu and Adaševci:** WiB activists visited the centers where refugees are accommodated, in order to distribute to them the collected aid, get acquainted with the conditions in which refugees live and hear the attitude of state authorities towards them. During these visits, the police prevented activists from entering the reception centers, under the pretext that a permit was required to stay in the center. When asked about the procedure and who issues the permits, they gave confusing and contradictory answers. Attempts to obtain more information or “permission” from the Commissariat for Refugees and officials in the Government of Serbia did not bear fruit.

**March 8, 2016 - Attack on the participants of the march on the occasion of March 8th:** while arriving at Republic Square, the gathering place of the participants in the march, a man attacked a group of WiB activists near the underground passage at Zeleni venac. He followed them loudly, insulting them, and then he snatched the rainbow flag from them and ran away.

**May 24, 2016 – Attack with eggs in Leskovac:** on the occasion of the International Day of Women’s Action for Peace and Disarmament, organized by Women for Peace Leskovac and Women in Black, Belgrade, with the support of activists of the Women in Black Network from several cities in Serbia, a feminist-anti-militarist action “Everything for peace, knowledge and education, nothing for weapons” took place. About 50 persons took part in this gathering, which was approved by the Leskovac police. From the very beginning of the action, until the end of the public rally, a group of people constantly tried to prevent the rally by insulting, threatening, shouting,

disturbing the speakers. Participants were repeatedly pelted with eggs.

**June 17, 2016 - Attack during the action “We remember the women raped in the war”:** a group of members of extreme right-wing organizations harassed activists in Republic Square, photographed them up close, and put a wreath with the inscription “*Peace be upon your souls*” in front of the activists. Among those who harassed the activists was Nemanja Ristić, known for belonging to criminal circles, has been convicted several times for the most serious crimes, including murder.

**November 9, 2016 - Defamation of WiB in a pro-regime tabloid:** the highest-circulation tabloid *Informer* published on the front page the article “*WOMEN IN BLACK BIGGEST FOREIGN MERCENARIES: The West gave them 1,587,596 euros to accuse Serbia of war crimes.*” This text states that Women in Black received the stated amount of money in the last two years, with the aim of “*attacking and destabilizing the state of Serbia*”. The text is illustrated with a photo of the coordinator Women in Black, Staša Zajović, over which the figure of one million euros is written, and it is insinuated that Staša Zajović personally received that amount of money. The data published in the text are completely incorrect. None of the real donors of Women in Black was mentioned in the text, but rather donors who had never financed the projects of Women in Black, or not in the given period. WiB sued the *Informer*; the procedure lasted in several court instances from 2016 to 2020, when the Constitutional Court rejected the appeal of WiB and finally acquitted the editor of the *Informer*.

## The unpunished rampage of extremists

**December 6, 2016 - Destruction of the exhibition “Vukovar – the killing of a city”:** MMC Art Clinic from Novi Sad and Women in Black from Belgrade organized the installation of an exhibition dedicated to crimes in Vukovar, by author Srdjan Veljović. The exhibition opened on November 18 in Novi Sad, in “Shock Corridor 22”, in the passage in Zmaj Jovina Street 22. It was supposed to last a month,

but after less than three weeks it was destroyed by “unidentified perpetrators”.

**May 30, 2017** - Interruption of the panel discussion and threats at the Faculty of Political Sciences of Belgrade University: a panel discussion organized by Women in Black was being held, at which a book and a film about the Women’s Court were presented. Dozens of members of extremist organizations stormed the panel and interrupted it by singing and chanting nationalist slogans, as well as highlighting images of war criminal Ratko Mladić. After that, they left the hall, and the panel continued. After the panel, the hooligans shouted insults at the visitors and participants of the panel as they were leaving.

**May 31 - June 3, 2017 - Attacks in Belgrade during the Mirëdita / Hello festival:** numerous members of extreme right-wing groups insulted, poured water and threatened visitors to the Festival, which promotes cooperation between artists and activists from Kosovo and Serbia. Violent groups also disrupted some Festival programs. An atmosphere of lynching and hatred was created in the media and on social networks, and numerous calls were made to prevent the Festival from being held at all costs. The documentary “Albanian women are our sisters”, which talks about the resistance to the war in Kosovo and the solidarity of the citizens of Serbia and Kosovo, was shown on the last day of the Mirëdita / Hello festival. The film also talks in part about the actions of solidarity of Women in Black with Albanian activists in Kosovo during the 1999 bombing. The title of the film “*Albanian Women Are Our Sisters*” was taken from Women in Black, who were physically attacked precisely because of the banner with that inscription on March 8, 1995.

**July 10, 2017 - Police enable perpetrators to insult victims of genocide in Srebrenica:** on the occasion of the 22nd anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, the Women in Black Network, with the support of the Multimedia Center Led Art, Dah Theater, Youth Initiative for Human and Autonomous Women’s Center, organized a stage action in mourning and silence “**Srebrenica 8372 ...**” in Republic Square, in Belgrade. It was planned that the action would traditionally take place in front of the monument to Prince Mihailo. The rally had been duly reported to the police and approved. At the time and place

where the peace rally was to take place, a large group of members of far-right organizations had gathered before the activists arrived, including: *Simo Spasić* (from the Association of Serbs Kidnapped and Killed in Kosovo); Radomir Počuča, suspended for participation in the war in Ukraine, *Miša Vacić*, convicted for attacks on LGBT people, former adviser in the Government of Aleksandar Vučić, and *Milovan Drecun*, former RTS journalist, known for war-mongering reports and hate speech about Albanians during the war in Kosovo, a member of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party and chairman of the Assembly's Parliamentary Committee for Kosovo. A large number of members of the extremist organization *Pledgers (Zavetnici)*, as well as the neo-Nazi organization *Alternativa*, were noticed. They displayed Russian and Serbian state flags, as well as flags with the figures of The Hague convicts Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić. Police officers, designated as security for civic activists, practically acted against the peaceful action of commemoration of the genocide. Activists surrounded them, prevented them from moving freely and moved them to the other end of Republic Square. During that time, members of right-wing organizations were able to move freely, threatening and insulting citizens who had come to pay tribute to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide. Police said they received an announcement for a counter-rally during the day. The police officers from the service in charge of public gatherings received information that the notification about the counter-rally had come "from the office of the Minister of the Interior". Women in Black carried out their peace action across the street from the monument, at the other end of Republic Square. About a hundred activists took part in this peace action.

***"The most difficult thing for me is the division between us and other people who are there. They separate us from everyone else. They have been following us since leaving the building and everyone knows that Women in Black are there and every fool can come and drop a bomb when they are not protecting us. And the question is how safe we are, because most police officers have attitudes completely opposite to ours" (Jelena Marković, Belgrade).***

**February 22, 2018 - Threatening messages on the door of the Women in Black office:** on the night between February 22 and 23, members of the ultra-right organization “Pledgers (Zavetnici)” pasted the doors of several NGOs with posters that read *“Foreign Agents - closed since March 4 - Pledgers”* and *“Closed as of March 4 - Pledgers”*.

**April 6, 2018 - Megaphone of Simo Spasić:** during the celebration of the 26th anniversary of the beginning of the war in BH, Simo Spasić from the Association of Families Kidnapped and Killed in Kosovo and Metohija disturbed the gathering by shouting primitive insults and slander through a megaphone. He shouted “Women in Black, pre-war, war and post-war profiteers!”

“Women in Black get money from Soros and the West to talk about Muslim victims, and they don’t talk about Serbs at all!”, “Here, Staša is wearing black, and no one was killed. They wear it for money! Would to God they buy coffins for their loved ones for that money!”... The police did not react.

**June 20, 2018 - Simo Spasić, swearing and curses amplified by a megaphone:** during the action “Solidarity with refugees / migrants - International Refugee Day” in Belgrade, he shouted into his megaphone *“Let me nail you to a stake and watch you dying for 15 days!”* *If you were at Putin’s and Kim Jong Un’s, you would be launched by a rocket into the sky! I would launch you into space to demonstrate there and never come back! Fuck you! Let you who make Serbs criminals be wiped out”*... A Canadian of Serbian origin, who had previously obstructed the actions of WiB, shouted in English at the time: *“This organization has always worked against the interests of the Serbian people, and in the interest of the West.”* The police reacted only after half an hour and practically enabled the violence to take place unhindered. WiB filed a criminal complaint, but it was rejected.

**February 26, 2019 – Radicals’ threats to Staša Zajović:** dozens of members of the Serbian Radical Party threatened Staša Zajović before the Special Court for War Crimes in Belgrade. The Radicals said that she was a “whore” and that “she should be killed”. The Judicial Guard responded by escorting Staša to the courtroom, where hearings were held for crimes against Bosniak civilians in Kravica (July 13, 1995).

**March 8, 2019 - Attack during the march on the occasion of March 8th:** in addition to the usual threats and insults, someone threw a stone at the participants in the march of March 8th.

**March 29, 2019 - Interruption of the screening of the film “Kosovo Gezuar / Cheers:** at the Youth Center in Belgrade, as part of the “March Documentary Film Festival”, the film “Kosovo Gezuar / Cheers” about the friendship of Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo was shown. The screening of the film was also attended by several Women in Black activists. After the beginning of the screening, several members of the organization “Pledgers/ Zavetnici” entered the hall and unfolded their posters and banners in front of the cinema screen, and with shouts and threats they interfered and prevented watching the film.

**May 28, 2019 - Pledgers filed criminal charges against WiB:** Milica Đurđević Stamenkovski, leader of Pledgers (Zavetnici), filed a criminal complaint with the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office against Women in Black for the feminist-anticlerical performance *“My Body - My Autonomy”*, held in front of the Patriarchate, on the International Day for Women’s Health and Reproductive Rights. The prosecution illegally accepted report and, as a form of institutional pressure and threat, to date there has been no information on the conclusion of this procedure.

**June 19, 2019 - Prohibition of crossing the border:** eight activists of the WiB Network were stopped by the Serbian police on the border with BH (Mokra Gora, near Višegrad) and prevented from crossing the border. Women in Black set off to Foča to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in War. After several hours of detention due to alleged, undefined “legal omissions” - they alleged that the van they were traveling in needed a number of permits - they were forbidden to cross the border.

**June 16, 2019 - Šešelj’s threats and insults again in the Assembly:** convicted war criminal Vojislav Šešelj, who, contrary to the law, was a member of the Serbian Parliament, presented insults and threats against Danas journalist Snežana Čongradin and Women in Black at the Assembly session.

**July 19, 2019 - Persecution at the green market as well:** at the green market in Zemun, a woman approached Staša Zajović and insulted her several times. She shouted: *"Shiptar and whore."*, *"She is the main and most important in Women in Black"*, *"She should be expelled from Serbia". We will banish you"*, *"She is selling Kosovo, Our Kosovo is being sold"*, *"Why are you buying a Serbian melon, go and buy it from Shiptars"*...

**November 6, 2019 -** Insults due to solidarity with victims of sexual harassment: out of solidarity with the victim and as a sign of support, Women in Black regularly monitored the trial of the local strongman from Brus Milutin Jeličić Jutka for sexual harassment of Marija Lukić, winner of the "Conquering Freedom" award. Vojislav Šešelj, who came to the trial in support of the sexual predator, insulted Staša Zajović in court, in front of the courtroom: *"Where are you, Staša, beauty pie. You are so ugly that your mother had to feed you with a slingshot in the cradle."* During the break, in the hallway, in front of the courtroom, Vojislav Šešelj addressed Staša Zajović again: *"Staša, did anyone sexually harass you? Have you sexually harassed anyone? What will happen if Staša Zajović sexually harasses someone?"* Šešelj constantly addressed Staša Zajović... The court guard did not react in order to protect the dignity and integrity of the Woman in Black activist.

**January 29, 2020 - Repeated verbal attacks in court:** convicted war criminal Vojislav Šešelj insulted activist Woman in Black Staša Zajović in the court in Kruševac (sexual harassment procedure): *"You witch, freak, traitor, scum."* You are so ugly that your mother wanted to kill you in the cradle, she had to feed you with a slingshot. "The court guard did not react again, but laughed out loud and approved of the insults.

**March 15, 2020 - "Diagram of Serbian Enemies"** - during the state of emergency in Serbia, introduced due to the Covid-19 virus pandemic, a *"Diagram of Serbian Enemies"* appeared on social networks, another list of alleged "enemies" of Serbia and the Serbian people. Along with civic organizations and prominent critical individuals, there were also Women in Black.

***"I am responsible because my fellow deserters had to leave the country, because my Croatian neighbor had to leave the country, because the owner of the Albanian patisserie also had to leave the country ..." (Nevena Nena Kostić, Leskovac).***

***"I do not want to be a victim and I am most offended when some people from civil society want to reduce us to victims. We are not victims; we have consciously chosen a position of risk because we live in a state like this. Reducing women defenders to victims is a patriarchal strategy, but it never occurs to me to reduce the dangers. That is my political responsibility. In this dangerous risk, we support each other and thus nurture hope" (Staša Zajović, Belgrade).***

**April 26, 2020 – Threats to WiB activist Tomislav Petrušić and his family:** an article entitled *"A student from Serbia provoked anger on social networks."* The occasion was an interview for Euro news Albania, in which a student of Albanian language and literature and historical linguistics, in November 2019, spoke about the crimes of the state of Serbia against Albanian civilians during 1998 and 1999. Attacks on the student, in the form of manhunt, were taken over by other regime media (Alo, Objektiv, B92). He was labeled as a traitor and death threats followed, sent from various profiles to society on social networks. Threats, although reported to the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime, have not been sanctioned.

**July 9, 2020 - Insults at anti-regime protests in front of the Serbian Parliament:** during anti-regime and student protests, due to the announcement of anti-Covid measures, members of right-wing groups rudely insulted Staša Zajović and WiB activists trying to drive them away from the protest, where they had no place. "

***"I feel resigned. I see danger in the right, and I believe that bad government can be replaced in elections. Today we have Obratz, various fronts, a church that says terrible things, we have Putinization because 85% of society sees the future of***

**Serbia with Putin's Russia. That scares me** (*Snežana Tabacki, Belgrade*).

**"What is bad for us defenders are the fact that in the 90s there existed the "Other Serbia", and now all that is somehow confused. The conformism of civil society prevails and that makes us insecure. The conformism of the intellectual elite is a huge problem. Where are they by our side"** (*Stasa Zajović, Belgrade*)

**July 10, 2020 - Obstruction of the commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide:** about fifteen pro-fascist activists came in an organized manner to Republic Square in Belgrade and tried to stop the public commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica. They carried a banner condemning Staša Zajović for *"traitorous behavior"*. *"Ratko Mladić"*, *"Radovan Karadžić"* and *"Srebrenica is not genocide"* were chanted. The police did not react.

**October 5, 2020 - Insults due to solidarity with the parents of the killed guardsmen:** in front of the Karaš barracks in Topčider, during the commemoration of the anniversary of the murder of two guardsmen (2004), two men insulted Women in Black activists by calling them

*"Traitors and foreign mercenaries"*, shouting that they should be ashamed to do so, and sent similar messages to the young man's parents, their lawyers and journalists.

**October 15, 2020 - Media attacks by right-wingers - Nikola Džafo and Staša Zajović targeted** by Prismotra (Watchers) a right-wing internet portal that has no impressum and publishes incriminating texts in the rank of slander on a daily basis, published a series of lies about the artist Nikola Džafo and Staša Zajović related to the 2016 exhibition **"Vukovar – the Killing of a City"**.

**November 18, 2020 - Attack during the commemoration of the anniversary of the fall of Vukovar:** during the stage action, on the sidewalk of a central Belgrade street, it was written in salt: Vukovar (1991-2020). An unfamiliar man, with a child in his arms, approached and poured water on the boxes of salt, and then broke the

salt inscription written on the sidewalk with his feet. The activist, who was handing out leaflets about the crimes in Vukovar to passers-by, was insulted by a group of men with the words “Shame on you! Are you Serbian? The Croats destroyed Vukovar. “ The police did not react.

**May 24, 2021 - Obstruction of the protest “Let’s remember the brave resistance of the women of the Rasina district”:** the action marking the 22nd anniversary of the protest of the citizens of the Rasina district against the forced mobilization in 1999 was obstructed by members of the Serbian Radical Party. They shouted at the activists of “Pešćanik” and the WiB: “*You are ugly*”, “*Shame on you*”, “*There was no genocide in Srebrenica*”. SRS members trampled on the inscription “**We remember the resistance of women**”. The police officers got out of the vehicle, parked across the scene, only when the organizers asked them to make sure that the action, which was duly reported to the Kruševac Police Administration, be carried out without interference.

*“I have been an activist since the 1990s and I know the brutality of the police on the streets and the attacks of the White Eagles. However, I have now encountered pressure on the parents of my son’s friends to forbid their children to hang out with him” (Marija Vidić, Belgrade).*

*“I have been with WiB from the beginning. I feel anger and responsibility to share my experiences and invest in new generations. I would not engage in self-victimization. It is difficult and we are where we are, but WiB has a great platform and they are an inspiration and I want to recognize a new strength there” (Dragan Protić - Prota Škart, Belgrade).*

*“In the city where I live, I am an epitome of black and women and it is perceived as a rather dangerous phenomenon. It is easiest for my surroundings to bypass me in a wide semicircle and to refuse to broach topics that I want to open” (Snežana Obrenović, Kraljevo).*

**July 10, 2021 - Obstruction of the rally “Srebrenica - the name of genocide”:** Several hours before the action of WiB, the Republic Square was occupied by a large number of members of pro-fascist organizations. Two weeks earlier, Women in Black had reported the action to the police. Over sixty ultra-rightists obstructed the action with loud insults and threats. They were carrying many pictures and flags with the image of The Hague convict Ratko Mladić, flags with skulls and other fascist symbols. Among them were Simo Spasić, president of the Association of Missing and Kidnapped Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija, and Damnjan Knežević (People’s Patrol). Throughout the performance dedicated to the victims of genocide, the fascists shouted loudly, issued death threats, chanted “Ratko Mladić, Serbian hero”, “Srebrenica - not genocide”, “Whores, fagots, you fucked up Serbia, Serbia, Russia, we do not need a union!” “Get ready, get ready Chetniks, there will be a tough fight! Throw bombs, Chetniks!”

“From Topola, from Topola, to Ravna Gora”, “Women in Black are pre-war and post-war profiteers. They never lost anyone. None of their folks were killed.” Also, the fascists played songs glorifying war criminals, denying the verdicts of The Hague Tribunal, and mocking the victims. While Staša Zajović was giving a statement to the media, most members of fascist groups swarmed around her, creating strong physical pressure and repeating open threats: “Staša, I will run you over with a car!”, “Staša, I will kill you!”, “Staša, who will bury you”? “Staša, whore, you poor thing, motherfucker Ustasha”, “Get lost from Serbia”, “Fuck you in the mouth”, “Staša Ustasha”, “Black whore”...

In very difficult conditions, endangered by bullies from all sides, without convincing police protection, the activists performed the stage action “Srebrenica - the name of genocide” in a shortened form, together with the art groups “Škart” and Dah Theater. A 12-meter-long banner with the inscription “Srebrenica - the name of genocide” was displayed to the attention of citizens; silver foils with the official number of victims 8372; the factual truth about genocide, the installation of a symbolic memorial, the Srebrenica Flower. About seventy activists from Belgrade, Novi Sad, Leskovac,

Vlasotince, Kraljevo, Zrenjanin, Novi Pazar, Niš and Pančevo took part in the action.

***“I fully perceive the political context as hostile, as well as the social community. If the police want to provide us with protection, how can none of them react in situations when we are endangered? Did they get an order for that?” (Snežana Obrenović, Kraljevo).***

***“I don’t feel fear, I feel anger and I want to turn that anger into some energy. We must not allow them to frighten us, but to initiate as many actions as possible, to endanger them, to make them work harder around us, with the cordons of the police and gendarmerie” (Nadežda Kostić, Kruševac).***

**September 6, 2021 - Media chase in regime tabloids:** regime media (Novosti, Alo, TV Pink), after the enthronement of the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral Ioannicius (SOC), published false news:

*“Women in Black defeated in Cetinje: Milo’s hooligans were supported by Nenad Čanak and Staša Zajović, but they are returning home in their own style - as losers.”*

“The news” was published with the aim of further defamation of WiB.

**October 22-23, 2021 - Right-wing scribbles on the door of WiB office:** on the night between Friday and Saturday, unidentified perpetrators spray-painted *“Whores in Black”*, *“Ratko Mladic”* on the front door of the Women in Black office, and “decorated” everything with nationalist symbols of four “S”.

**November 13, 2021 - Seizing and burning of the banner dedicated to Srebrenica:** after the protest “The mural must fall”, which was held in Cvetni trg, in Belgrade, two unidentified perpetrators approached Women in Black activists from behind and snatched the banner that read “We will never forget the Srebrenica genocide.” The banner was burned in a nearby park.

*"I see the state as an enemy. The state took everything from me, made me a being who has nothing. And who can go to the revolution, because she has nothing to lose, but can only gain something. I do not understand the EU. I feel I am lonely and helpless and I am afraid that time will swallow us up" (Mima Alajbegović, Priboj).*

**November 29, 2021 - Scribbles on the door of WiB office again:** during the night, as before, on the front door of the apartment where the Women in Black rooms are located, messages were written in red spray: *"Staša Ustasha", "Ratko Mladić", "Ratko Mladić hero", "Whores in black", "Fuck antifa"*, four characters with four "S".

**December 6, 2021 - Threats during the feminist action "Stop killing women!":** On the occasion of the International Day against Femicide, the Autonomous Women's Center and Women in Black organized an action in Republic Square in Belgrade. On that occasion, a man, a notorious member of the neo-Nazi organization Leviathan, leading on a leash a Staffordshire, broke into the central space where the artifacts of the action were placed. He kicked them with a curse: "Fuck your violence." Shortly afterwards, plainclothes police stopped and identified him. We have no information on whether the police filed a misdemeanor or criminal complaint against this person.

**February 11, 2022 - Defamation in the Informer:** the tabloid published a manipulative and inaccurate text entitled *"ĐILAS AND HIS VLADETA AND WOMEN IN BLACK TOGETHER IN PROTEST!* In the greedy fight for power, he does not stop cooperating with the chauvinists who recognize the GENOCIDE in Srebrenica!" This text used footage from the environmental protest in front of the Presidency building, which shows Staša Zajović shaking hands with the opposition candidate for mayor, Vladeta Janković. The text contains false accusations that Women in Black claims that Serbs are a genocidal people and that Staša Zajović tells the worst about the Serbian people for foreign television.

***"I am especially disturbed by the repression through the media. We no longer have free media, we had that even in Milošević's time. WiB is not written about, they want to push us into a ghetto. It's as if we were Ebola that will infect the rest of the world!" (Nadežda Kostić, Kruševac)***

**February 21, 2022 - Interrogation and harassment of Vukovar citizens at the Bačka Palanka border crossing:** at a peace meeting organized by Women in Black, Belgrade, CK 13, Novi Sad and the Humanitarian-Cultural-Tournament Center Association from Vukovar, the documentary film "KPJ and Vukovar - from creation to disappearance" was shown, produced by the Humanitarian-Cultural Center Association (2021). On their return to Vukovar, at the Bačka Palanka border crossing, four members of the State Security Service detained and interrogated Nikola Tarle from the Humanitarian-Cultural Center Association for two and a half hours. They asked him: what he said in CK13, why he was coming to Srem, where he meet Staša Zajović, who he saw, who was investigating the missing Serbs. They then took his mobile phone, illegally and without a court order.

**February 26, 2022 - Police isolation of WiB at the rally "Stop the War in Ukraine":** at the very beginning of the protest, the police surrounded some of the participants who stood next to the canvas with the inscription "Women in Black Against War" and thus separated them from the others. They did not allow anyone to approach this group. The organizers protested against this kind of police action and assessed that obstruction of the protest was in progress. Police responded that it was a high-risk rally and continued to disrupt the rally until the end.

***"The regime is also afraid of small groups of people who can "infect" others. I can't wait for the attacks, for the dormant people to join us and for a revolution to begin. I am not afraid of anything" (Ružica Karalić, Belgrade).***

**February 28, 2022 - Defamation in the Informer:** a high-circulation tabloid published an article entitled "GOD FORBID! WHAT WOULD

*HAPPEN IF THEY WERE LEADING THE STATE?! Čuta and Women in Black want Serbia to go to war with Russia!" in which they make a false claim that Women in Black, at a rally against the war in Ukraine, demanded that "Serbia enter the war with Russia."*

**March 1, 2022 - Defamation on TV PINK:** in the central news program, in the National Daily, false news was published:

*"Women in Black organized a protest in front of the Russian Embassy. Staša Zajović states that they gathered because of the tyrant Putin, and she calls the decision of the Serbs not to impose sanctions on Russia shameful. Vladeta Janković, Djilas' candidate for mayor of Belgrade, was also at the protest."* It has been repeated several times. Vladeta Janković was not at the protest in front of the embassy, and the photo that illustrates the news and in which Staša Zajović and Vladeta Janković were filmed together was taken at the environmental protest on February 10, 2022.

**March 16, 2022 - Provocations at the protest "Stop the War in Ukraine" I:** during the protest in Knez Mihailova Street, organized by Women in Black, an unfamiliar man, screening with his body the WiB banners, stripped to his waist and showed tattoos of Chetnik criminals Draža Mihajlović, Momčilo Đujić, as well as convicted war criminal Ratko Mladić.

**March 30, 2022 - Provocations at the protest "Stop the War in Ukraine" II:** during the protest in Knez Mihailova Street, a priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church shouted: *"You are a sect", "Antichrists", "Yes, shame on you!" "Where is your Jasenovac", "Where is your Bratunac and Kravica", "And the crimes in Metohija".*

Tamara Spaić and Staša Zajović

## **Srebrenica – a paradigm of Serbian crimes**

The commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide is one of the most important political, moral and emotional acts of Women in Black. Street actions, vigils held in silence and mourning in public places and aestheticized performances are acts by which activists confirm that the murdered have left a deepest and indelible mark in their lives, but at the same time symbolize compassion and responsibility, although they bear no responsibility, not agreeing to remain silent about the crime, but accepting the truth and facing it. Every action requires all citizens and the state to do the same, show worthy respect for the victims of genocide, acknowledge the truth and face it.

For the state, which refuses to recognize genocide, the activities of Women in Black are the worst “finger in the eye”. The regime, which was created by those responsible for the criminal war policy of the 1990s, rightly sees these actions of WiB as tearing down the foundations of its power. That is why the fiercest attacks on Women in Black are mostly related to Srebrenica, whether the regime is using all its means to force open attacks or indirectly, through the right-wing, clero-fascist, criminal and hooligan groups it controls. Attacks related to Srebrenica are the fiercest, because Srebrenica is the biggest stumbling block for Serbia.

WiB held its first vigil for Srebrenica during the genocide on July 17, 1995 and since that year it has been regularly paying tribute to the victims of Srebrenica in Belgrade, Zrenjanin, Novi Sad, Leskovac, Loznica, Šabac, Valjevo ... One of the central events for WiB is

the commemoration of the genocide in Republic Square in Belgrade every July 10.

***“Srebrenica is a vicious word for Serbia, worse than the word feminism, and Women in Black connects both of them” (Jasmina Tešanović, Belgrade).***

The attacks on WiB related to Srebrenica are thematically and chronologically presented here: *Attacks on WiB during street rallies, bans on panels discussing the scale of crimes and international verdicts, rejection of requests for erecting a permanent monument to genocide victims, ignoring campaigns that genocide be recognized, media persecutions in which activists are slandered and vilified, denial of police and institutional protection of the right to freedom of expression and assembly, obstruction of international cooperation and illegal closing of borders in front of activists ...*

**I Attacks during street actions:** protests, commemorations, performances, both in the period during the wars and in the period after. We bring only a concise “list” of attacks, because more space is dedicated to this in this publication:

**Belgrade - July 10, 2004, 2005 and 2009;**

**Valjevo - July 8, 2014 and July 7, 2015;**

**Loznica - July 9, 2015;**

**Belgrade - July 10, 2015, 2017, 2020 and July 10 and 11, 2021.**

None of the attacks has been prosecuted, none of the perpetrators have been punished!

## **II Administrative measures of state bodies: bans, obstructions of panels, exhibitions ...**

**Belgrade - *The exhibition / labyrinth “Memory and Responsibility” was supposed to last a month during July 2013, but for “security” reasons, the exhibition was opened only on July 10.*** It was held at the Human Rights House in Belgrade, organized by Women in Black, the Center for Cultural Decontamination, the Committee of Lawyers for

Human Rights, the Humanitarian Law Center and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia. Photographs were exhibited as part of the *"July 11 - Day of Remembrance of the Srebrenica Genocide - Proclaim!"* campaign. The threats of clero-fascists and hooligans were used as an alibi for obstruction.

**Panels banned, June and July 2015, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the genocide:**

**Zrenjanin - June 25** - The Cultural Center of Zrenjanin rejected the request to rent a hall for holding a panel on genocide. The panel was held thanks to the solidarity of the alternative cultural center *Zeleno zvono* from Zrenjanin.

**Belgrade - June 18** - Belgrade Youth Center and the *American Corner* refused to rent a hall for the panel with the explanation: *"Belgrade Youth Center was left without a responsible person - the director, who is the only one to approve extraordinary program activities not covered by the Annual Plan and Program of Activities"*.

**Kragujevac, American Corner - June 11:** they canceled the panel on genocide and international court verdicts related to Srebrenica because

*"It is our assessment that we don't have an audience for your program."*

**Kragujevac, Students' Cultural Center - June 16:** they canceled the panel with the following explanation: *"This decision came after a threat that a group of students repeatedly sent to SCC employees in the last two days. The most controversial word for students is "genocide" and they are threatening to come to that panel in "huge numbers" with the intention of thwarting it.* " Thanks to the activist solidarity, the tribune was held on June 29 in the Youth Center in Kragujevac.

***All later attempts to organize panels on genocide in public space, in cultural institutions, were in vain.***

### III Rejected requests for the construction of a permanent monument to the victims of genocide in Belgrade

**“A pair of shoes - one life”** - on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the genocide, in July 2010, a campaign was launched to erect a permanent monument in Belgrade, in memory of the victims of the Srebrenica genocide. Hundreds of shoes were collected from all over Serbia, and it was planned to continue the action by collecting 8,732 pairs of shoes, which corresponds to the official number of those killed in Srebrenica. Several requests were sent to the competent institutions - the Assembly of the City of Belgrade, the City Secretariat for Culture and the Commission for Monuments and Names of Streets and Squares.

On February 4, 2011, the Commission sent to WiB the following answer: *“At the session held January 31, 2011, The Commission **did not accept the initiative** for the reason that it is an event that certainly deserves to be marked with a monument, but at the site of the event, as is the practice in similar cases, and not in a completely different city!”*

On the occasion of the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, WiB continued with the *symbolic erection of a monument to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide.*

*We no longer addressed the competent institutions because they have neither the political will nor the moral capacity for such an act. The fact that none of the demands were granted only confirms the link between the ideology of the crime and the current Serbian authorities, the continuity of moral and cultural patterns with the regime under which genocide was committed, a state-organized crime.*

## IV Obstructions during the trials – insults and slander

**Trial for the war crime in Kravica** - Before the War Crimes Chamber of the Special Court in Belgrade

Eight members of the Republika Srpska Army's Special Brigade were charged with war crimes and the killing of 1,313 Bosniaks in the Srebrenica genocide on July 13, 1995. The indictment for the crime in Kravica was filed in early 2016. This was the beginning of the most important trial before the Special Court of the High Court in Belgrade. Unfortunately, the indictment does not qualify it as genocide.

**On July 14, 2017**, the Court of Appeals made a decision to annul the indictment for this crime, because it was filed at a time when the War Crimes Prosecutor's Office / OWCP did not have a Chief Prosecutor. The trial continued in November 2017. Hearings are often postponed due to non-appearance of witnesses, inactivity of the Prosecution and withdrawal of protected witnesses due to threats they receive.

Women in Black have been following this trial from the beginning. WiB activists have been repeatedly insulted, slandered and threatened by Vojislav Šešelj at the Special Court for War Crimes:

**March 30, 2018** - A hearing was held at the Special Court in Belgrade, attended by about twenty supporters, and Vojislav Šešelj, leader of the pro-fascist Serbian Radical Party and a convicted war criminal. In the courtroom number 2, in the part intended for the audience, Šešelj entered first and took a seat in the first row. All the radicals settled in the front rows. There were no front seats for the families of the victims and for the media. The beginning of the trial was delayed, which Šešelj used as an opportunity to insult Women in Black and their representative Staša Zajović: *"That should have been drowned as soon as it was born."* Šešelj then shouted: *"Is there anyone here from Women in Black? To change them into livid!"* As it was announced that this hearing was closed to the public, there were no WiB representatives in the courtroom, and Jelena Diković, a Danas journalist, shouted in solidarity that she was from Wom-

en in Black, and all radicals turned to her. Šešelj asked her name and when she answered, the SRS leader told his party comrades-in-arms: "Write it down there, Jelena Diković, so we can turn her to livid."

The court security did not react to such scandalous behavior, which took place in the presence of the victims' families.

**May 23, 2018** – Before the main trial, the families of the victims and survivors were sitting in the audience, together with activists of civil society organizations, but also members of the Serbian Radical Party, together with Hague convict Vojislav Šešelj. Šešelj blamed the women of Srebrenica all the time, and he said the following about the present Staša Zajović: "Nothing uglier has been seen in the Balkans than Staša Zajović. She is so ugly that her mother could not touch her with her hand, but had to feed her with a slingshot."

The activist Woman in Black, Mirko Medenica, reacted to that, addressing the head of the court guard and asking for the dignity of those present to be protected. Even after the warning, Šešelj continued throwing in remarks.

**February 26, 2019** – **Radicals' threats to Staša Zajović:** dozens of members of the Serbian Radical Party threatened Staša Zajović before the Special Court for War Crimes in Belgrade. The radicals shout at her that she was a "*whore*" and that she should be "*killed*". The court guard reacted by escorting Staša to the courtroom, where hearings were held for crimes against Bosniak civilians in Kravica.

## **V Ignoring campaigns concerning the Srebrenica genocide**

**The Declaration on Srebrenica** was initiated in June 2005 by eight non-governmental organizations from Serbia, united in the G8 Coalition, and supported by about 50 non-governmental organizations from all over Serbia. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, the Declaration was sent to the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia with the obligation to take all measures to protect the rights of victims of war crimes, especially victims of genocide in Srebrenica. It also calls for the denial of the

Srebrenica genocide to be treated as a crime. The G8 coalition repeated the request in 2006, 2007 and 2008. **The Declaration was not even included in the agenda of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.**

**July 11 - Srebrenica Genocide Remembrance Day - "Proclaim"** - The campaign began in February 2009, after the European Parliament adopted a resolution on July 11 - Srebrenica Genocide Remembrance Day. The campaign was launched by Women in Black, the Humanitarian Law Fund, the Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights, the Center for the Advancement of Legal Studies, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, and was aimed at Serbian institutions with a request to proclaim the Day of Remembrance of the Srebrenica Genocide. The request was supported by 100 NGOs from all over Serbia. **Unfortunately, the competent institutions did not comply with these requests.**

Every 11th of the month, a protest was organized demanding that July 11 be declared the Day of Remembrance of the Srebrenica Genocide. It was held in the period from February 2009. until July 2010 in front of the Presidency of Serbia.

Every year on the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, Women in Black and related organizations reiterate their demand that July 11 be declared the Day of Remembrance of the Srebrenica genocide and that denying genocide be qualified as a crime. **The competent institutions have never complied with the stated requests!**

Tamara Spaić and Staša Zajović

## Their attacks – our defense

*“Courage, we might say, is a commitment to perseverance and determination despite risk, uncertainty and fear”  
(Holloway Sparks)*

*“Courage emerges as a historically situated performative ethos of collective perseverance, resistance and political engagement” (Athena Athanasiu)*

Women in Black refuse to be victims and to be imposed the role or position of a victim. This is what the attackers and thugs would like most, to turn them into victims of repression, persecution, swearing, slander...

“Understandable” frameworks of weak and unprotected victims, frightened by the repressive apparatus of the state or screaming and aggressive attackers. The intentions and wishes of the attackers never came true, because the response of Women in Black is always in the persistent implementation of the policy of non-acceptance of the crime.

Defense against attacks is focused on the goal. The most important thing is to carry out the planned action to the end and to send a clear message in public space, to disturb the dormant with lies and media manipulations, to break nationalist prejudices, to speak on behalf of victims of war and violence, discrimination and disenfranchisement. The biggest support is internal solidarity and the network of international solidarity.

**Support of international organizations** - In the beginning of 2005, a pensioner from Zaječar, a person known in the local community as a

bully, continuously harassed Staša Zajović by phone, threatened her, and then filed criminal charges against her “for organizing prostitution.” Instead of rejecting the report as unfounded, the Department for Organized Crime and Prostitution of the Ministry of the Interior initiated investigative actions against Women in Black for “dealing in organized prostitution”. Interrogations, provocations, and police harassment continued from April to October 2005. In order to protect WiB, Amnesty International launched a campaign, asking the competent institutions in Serbia to stop repressing activists. After hundreds of protest letters from all over the world, sent by the most respectable and important peace organizations and solidarity networks, the campaign bore fruit, and organized slander and police harassment had to be stopped.

**Tear gas will disperse, but not WiB** – On the occasion of commemorating of the tenth anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, organized by Women in Black, a group of neo-Nazis threw tear gas at the activists who were paying tribute to the victims in Republic Square in Belgrade and demanding recognition of the genocide. “Tear gas bit us hard on the eyes, we only took a little shelter, towards Vasina Street, and returned to the Square to stand, disturb, and warn” ...

**Retaliation** - In the passage of Sremska Street towards Zeleni venac, half an hour after midnight, three skinheads attacked WiB activists Violeta Đikanović and Miloš Urošević. One of them said to Miloš: “*Look at him, you fagot. You are in Women in Black*”. He grabbed Miloš by the hair and pulled him towards the ground. Violeta sprayed the attacker in the eyes, and when another neo-Nazi grabbed her hand, she directed the spray in his eyes as well. At that moment he pushed her, and Violeta fell down the stairs and got bruised. She was taken to the Emergency Center.

**Non-acceptance** - December 10, 2007 - During the action “*Stop clericalization - we will not go back*” on the Republic Square, neo-Nazis from Obraz and similar organizations constantly obstructed the performance. They sang Chetnik songs, the anthem of the infamous criminal police unit for special operations, shouted: “Ratko Mladić”, “Kill, kill the fagot”, “There will be meat- we are going to slaughter Croats”, “Kill and slaughter, so that Shiptars be wiped out”, “Shiptar whores in black “... All the time, the police acted as if protecting the

fascists from Obraz and did not act against them or provide protection to activists. Then members of the Gendarmerie came to remove WiB activists from the Square and escort them to WiB premises. The gendarmes forced activists to get off the street quickly and follow them shouting “faster, faster”. However, instead of going to their premises, a large group of WiB activists stopped several taxis and drove to the Center for Cultural Decontamination, to the *“I’m not afraid”* forum. CFCD was packed full.

**Non-withdrawal** - The Police Administration in Belgrade on March 8, 2008 passed a decision banning the celebration of March 8 in Belgrade, with the explanation that *“it can interfere with public traffic, endanger the health, safety of people and property.”* And March 8 of that year was also banned only in Kabul, Afghanistan. The following week, dozens of organizations reported the March 8 march, which was held on March 15 under the slogan *“Enough bans, fears and violence! Free citizens, never subjects!”*

**Opposing the bans** - On the International Day of Action against Fascism, November 9, 2009, on the plateau in front of the Belgrade City Assembly, activists Women in Black, Labris and artists of Škart performed an antifa performance *Antifascism is my choice*. On the eve of the announced action, the police banned the action in front of the Building of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, as well as the march through the streets. Despite the ban, both the action and the march were held. The action was transferred to the other side of the street, on the plateau in front of the City Hall, and after that the activists walked through the central city streets to the Academic Plateau, in front of the Faculty of Philosophy, where a concert of the Roma group Muha was held. About 500 people took part in the action.

**Police questions – our questions** – On the eve of each announced street action of WiB, inspectors from the Public Security of the Ministry of the Interior call activists by phone, with numerous questions aimed at putting pressure, although they take place under the pretext of better planning of police “protection”. In May 2010 an inspector of the Ministry of the Interior from “November 29” calls and asks: *“Are you carrying those flags?”* The activist retorts: *“Which flags?”* And he said: *“Those whom the people call gay!”* She answers,

*"You mean peace and gay flags?" He answers: "The number of flags is important to us because of the number of police officers. The more of these flags, the more police. We engage one policeman for one flag."*

**Their tools in our hands - on May 28, 2019**, at an anti-clerical, feminist action in front of the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church, WiB displayed the slogans "We all had an abortion! I will have an abortion - I will not ask anyone "," The witches will return - they will not go on foot! The brooms will rise - you will not approach us!", "Women can think: goodbye to the church! Neither the state, nor God, get near my ovary!", "Without God - without master!", "The church glorifies war criminals - enough!", "We will not give birth for the state, the church, the nation and the army". Goran dressed as the bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and then a purple apron was hung in front of the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as a symbol of condemnation of the views of the church, which together with the state attacks women. All "patriots" were alarmed, and the pro-fascist organization "Srpski sabor Zavetnici" filed a criminal complaint, on June 1, 2019, against Women in Black for ridiculing and belittling the role and significance of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Serbian society. No court proceedings were initiated, but the Prosecutor's Office illegally accepted the criminal report.

**Peaceful Opposition** - At the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade, on May 30, 2019, a public presentation of the Women's Court was organized in which the member of the International Judicial Council of the Women's Court Latinka Perović, associate of the Women's Court Snježana Milivojević, as well as witnesses from BH, Montenegro, Serbia and the organizers of the Women's Court participated. In the hall of the faculty, about thirty FPS students were waiting for the participants of the panel, shouting: *"Kosovo is Serbia! Long live Ratko Mladić! Long live R. Karadžić!"* ... When they finished their act, we asked *"Are you done?"* They left, and the panel was held afterwards.

**Resourceful Tactics** – On the eve of the International Women's Day, WiB and activists of other feminist groups, early in the morning on March 6, 2019, placed purple aprons on the monuments of historically significant men, as an act of rebellion due to the absence of

monuments to important women in public space. One of the monuments on which the apron was placed is the monument to the late Patriarch Pavle, in Tašmajdan Park. The action was carried out unhindered thanks to the deserted squares and streets, and when they woke up, the citizens were greeted by purple aprons all over the city. The reaction was fierce, and a hate campaign followed, launched on social networks. The lynching of activists who took part in the action was openly called for. On March 28, the association *"Who Poisons Our Children"* filed misdemeanor charges against three people and several others unidentified individuals.

## Borders

Crossing imposed borders, mental, social, physical and state, is an important political act and a way of functioning for Women in Black. The repressive state system continuously tried to close its borders in front of Women in Black, preventing the entry of international activists into Serbia, as well as the exit of WiB activists from Serbia, especially when they were related to the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. Activists were stopped, subjected to hours of interrogation by the police at the borders, technical reasons were invented for preventing them from crossing the border, harassment, etc.

**August 3, 1995 - Prohibition of entry into the country for activists from Europe:** the border police of FR Yugoslavia banned the entry of a bus full of activists from Italy, Spain, Great Britain and Croatia, who were heading to the Fourth Meeting of the Women's Solidarity Network Against War / International Network of Women in Black. The bus was detained for thirty hours at three different crossings from Hungary, and the police especially mistreated the participants from Croatia. The largest number of participants from abroad, in spite of obstruction, managed to join the gathering by splitting into groups of 2-3 and traveling by local transport (buses and trains), from Szeged to Subotica or Senta. All international activists managed to reach the gathering.

**August 5, 1995 - Interrogation of activists at the border:** Yugoslav border police stopped three "Woman in Black" activists at the Hor-

gos crossing, who were going to meet foreign guests. They were detained and interrogated for four hours. After the harassment, the activists were released.

**July 11, 2002 - Prohibition of participation in the commemoration in Srebrenica:** the border police of the Republic of Serbia at the crossing with BH warned the activists: “There is a report that you will come, but also a ban on your arrival. We will let you go, but you will not go further than 200 meters.” Indeed, the bus had barely moved 200 meters when it was stopped by a police force consisting of special forces, regular police officers, traffic police officers, one SFOR member and one translator. The explanation for the ban on entering BH was that the organized border crossing was “not duly reported.” *“You can take a regular line Belgrade-Srebrenica. It cannot be a chartered bus with the inscription “free ride”.* Sarajevo activists from the “Women to Women” organization came to Ljubovija to see women from Serbia for at least a short time, but even that was not possible.

**July 23, 2008 - Preventing the commemoration in Kozarac:** ten activists of the Network of Women in Black from Serbia left for Kozarac to mark the 16th anniversary of the crimes committed by Serbian armed groups in the Prijedor area. Radovan Karadžić was arrested that day and police control was stepped up. At the first border crossing, the activists were stopped. During the search of the van they were traveling in, they found flowers and wreaths for the funeral procession / burial of 70 victims in Kozarac. Police said “You do not have a permit from the phyto-sanitary inspection” and they did not allow crossing the border. The activists tried at the second border crossing and were luckier this time. The drowsy cop didn’t even look in the trunk. Due to the delay and the long journey, Women in Black arrived in Kozarac at four in the morning, where about a hundred women were waiting for them.

**June 19, 2019 - Prohibition of crossing the border on the road to Foča:** the police of the Ministry of the Interior of Serbia stopped eight activists of the WiB Network at the border crossing between Serbia and BH (Mokra Gora, near Višegrad). The activists set off for Foča, where the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in War was being marked. After several hours of detention due to

“legal omissions” related to the vehicle they were traveling in, they were forbidden to cross the border.

**February 21, 2022 - Interrogation and harassment of Vukovar citizens at the Bačka Palanka border crossing:** at the peace meeting, organized by Women in Black, Belgrade, Central Committee 13, Novi Sad and the Association Humanitarian and Cultural Center from Vukovar, the documentary *“CPY and Vukovar - from creation to disappearance”* was shown, produced by the Association Humanitarian-Cultural Center (2021). On their return to Vukovar, at the Bačka Palanka border crossing, at around 11 pm, four members of the State Security Service detained and interrogated Nikola Tarle (from the Humanitarian and Cultural Center Association) for about two and a half hours. They asked him what he had said at the panel, why he was coming to Srem, where he had met Staša Zajović, who he was seeing, who was investigating the missing Serbs and the like. They then confiscated his mobile phone and allowed him to continue his journey.

# Whores and traitors

## On misogynistic attacks on Women in Black

*“Why men are never accused of “treason”, but women instead, those women, those horrible women, witches, whores. Where do so many whores come from in this city and in this country? It is important that you do not wear black, nor even to thread a needle with black, blackness can remind you of Women in Black.” – Borka Pavićević*

**Misogyny** - institutional hostility towards women. - *Adrienne Rich, Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*

**Sexism** – “A belief in the innate superiority of one sex from which its right to dominate derives.” - *Audrey Lord, Scratching the Surface: Notes on Obstacles to Women and Love*

**Sexism** - Sexism “A belief system based on the assumption that physical differences between men and women are so significant that they should be decisive for virtually all social and economic roles of men and women. Imposing a gender-specific identity, a gender-specific set of human attributes, and gender-prescribed social roles.” - *Betty Reardon, Sexism and the War System*

**“Human rights defenders** - “To be a human rights defender, a person may work to exercise any human right (or rights) on behalf of individuals or groups. Human rights defenders seek the promotion and protection of civil and political rights, as well as the

promotion, protection and realization of economic, social and cultural rights.” - *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*

**“Diary of Insults”:** Since the fall of 1993, Women in Black has been creating what we can call a “Diary of Insults”. That’s how *“Notes on the Sidewalk”* came about. The “Diary of Insults” records the reactions of passers-by to our protests. Reactions have had and still have a diverse character - mostly negative reactions, but there are also rare, positive ones. In the reactions we can read: sexism and misogyny, it is always the fault of those others who are not us (there is a conspiracy against the Serbian people), we hate above all those others who are not us (cultural racism and chauvinism), militarization of spirit, ethnic fundamentalism, fatalism and resignation, etc.

**Most common reactions:** Go to the cunt motherfucker; I wouldn’t fuck any of you here; Traitors, mercenaries, sold souls; Lesbians; Blowers; These are the feminists, these are not women; Blow me; Infanticide; Barren; See these nymphomaniacs; These must be gays; You are ordinary pussies; Fuck you who pays you; These are those anti-Serbian women; You are not mothers and wives; Sows; Fuck you who sent you; Let the Shiptars fuck you when you don’t feel sorry for the policemen that the Shiptars are killing in Kosovo; Whores: (Ustashas, Balis, Shiptars - in relation to what crimes we pointed out).

**Predominant reactions:** Motherfuckers; I wouldn’t screw a single one here; Traitors, mercenaries, sold souls, lesbians; Pisspallets; They are those feminists, these are not women; Blow me; Killer moms; Barren women; See these nymphomaniacs; These must be gays; You are ordinary pussies; Fuck you who pays you; These are those anti-Serbian women; You are not mothers and wives; Sows; Fuck you who sent you; Let the Shiptars fuck you when you don’t feel sorry for the policemen that the Shiptars are killing in Kosovo; Whores: (Ustasha, Bali, Shiptar - in relation to what crimes we pointed out).

## Women of the Street

Ever since its inception, in 1991, Women in Black has been exposed to all kinds of both verbal and physical attacks. The perpetrators of attacks are sometimes state, and sometimes the so-called non-state actors. The latter are always under someone's control, sometimes parts of the secret services that have not been disbanded, dating back from the criminal regime of Slobodan Milošević, and now under the control of the ruling regime of Aleksandar Vučić. They used to be engaged for the physical elimination of ethnic others, now they are used for physical attacks on politically different people. Women in Black are attacked firstly because they are women, because women are seen as internal enemies, and then because they are defenders of human rights, especially those of others, because every kind of disloyalty and disobedience to "their own" is punished.

Women in Black is a group of feminist-anti-militaristic orientation that emerged as a reaction to the war and the aggressor policy of the Serbian regime. In mourning and silence, in the street, in the main city square, they brought their bodies to the public space with written messages. Women in Black disclosed what official politics denied - Serbia is at war. Using the traditional symbol of mourning - black, they mourned all victims of war (including "enemies") - hence the accusation of treason; they mourned in public space (despite a tradition that dictated that women's mourning be reserved for private spaces) - hence the accusation of prostitution.

Knowing that official history would silence them - not only as messengers of resistance, but also as women who dared to break the denial with their silence (bodies without voices), they began to write down what was written on their women's bodies.

In her book *Standing for Peace: A History of Women in Black*, Israeli activist Gila Svirski writes: *"I wondered what made them think of us as whores. Our strong looks? Our standing independent of men? Our black clothes? Or was being a "whore" just a way for men to push women into roles that were better known and more controlled? The reactions of passers-by / drivers most often had sexual connotations: "Whores; Arab whores; Arafat's whores; you need to be raped to feel*

*better; what is wrong with Jewish men; are the Arabs and the fucking Arafat better; Fuck you."*

In her text *Semantic Future of Machistic Ethics*, Julia Penelope Stanley listed 250 words that exist only in English, and which men use to insult and attack women. In the Serbian language, some of the derogatory names for women are, among others: cunt, pussy, bitch, whore, hussy, slop jar, slut, hag, sweat-dog, pispallet and so on.

**All these insults have a sexual connotation.** The insults that they are whores, which men send to women, are aimed not only at discrediting women, but also at dehumanizing them as such. It is an insult that is most often directed at women who dare to engage in politics. And dealing with politics when what is private is presented in public space and when one intervenes in private space, when it becomes a political issue.

Society in Serbia shows hatred towards women, especially those who violate patriarchal roles, national consensuses, overcome barriers. Society hates activists (especially those who advocate a radical break with past crimes), civil society leaders, etc.

State authorities in Serbia have accused Women in Black of "dealing in organized prostitution". Attacks of this kind continued continuously from April to October 2005. The accusations of prostitution were aimed at attacking the moral integrity of women activists and discouraging activists from activism, which was especially evident in smaller communities.

**Misogynistic attacks on Women in Black activists have several goals:** to separate activists from other, so-called ordinary women, to emphasize their otherness and diversity, to present them as foreign and in some way contagious to the otherwise healthy tissue of the same nation, they dehumanize them and thus make them legitimate targets of attacks. Women in Black activists are targeted by misogynistic attacks because they challenge the traditional gender-imposed role of women and because they are women in politics - they are feminist activists who fight for the human rights of others. And just as women's fears are primarily related to their bodies, so attacks on women are primarily related to their gender.

During a physical attack on women activists in Valjevo in July 2014, on the occasion of the commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide, men hurled insults, all of which were linked to sexual violence. During the commemoration of the anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, on July 10, 2021, in Republic Square in Belgrade, a group of men shouted, among other things: “Whores in black, Ustasha pussies, Staša, whore, fuck you in the mouth, black whore, Whore, where are the Serbian victims? You poor thing, motherfucker Ustasas, Whores, fagots, you fucked up Serbia. “

At the trial for the rehabilitation of Draža Mihailović, on April 28, 2015, the president of the Serbian Radical Party and then indictee before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Vojislav Šešelj, hurled sexist insults at Staša Zajović, as documented in the chapter “Dossiers of attacks on WiB”.

On July 19, 2019, a woman, a saleswoman at the market in Zemun, shouted “Shiptar pisspallet and whore” to Staša Zajović, among other things.

At the trial for sexual harassment (Marija Lukić vs Milutin Jeličić Jutka), V. Šešelj constantly insulted Staša Zajović (e.g. “witch, freak, traitor, scum”).

***Throughout history, one of the most commonly used insults to attack women has been the accusation that they are whores.*** Whores throughout history, and even today, are those women who, in the absence of other choices, sell access to the sexual exploitation of their bodies. In return, they receive money. Women in Black are seen as whores in the eyes of people and attacked as such, because they have been convinced that they are foreign mercenaries and domestic traitors.

For the first time, we publicly “admitted” the accusations of treason, on October 9, 1998, in Republic Square, in the performance “I confess”, after the threat made by Vojislav Šešelj, then MP, and now convicted war criminal, to the Parliament Speaker (September 28, 1998). Women in Black got organized to accuse and name actors of violence, and this is a highly resented act. They have always had the state backing them, which constantly resorted to strategies of criminalization: they called us traitors and spies; when we raised

our voices against state violence they accused us of terrorism. This often made us a legitimate target of persecution.

Violence against us as human rights defenders is part of deliberate, calculated strategies for silencing and preventing us from working every day to change society, save lives and seek justice.

# Militarization of street actions – repression in the name of “protection”

*“Activists who advocate a radical break with the criminal past and responsibility for war crimes are qualified as extremists, even criminals ...” (Biljana Kovačević-Vučo)*

**Militarism** cannot be reduced to visible manifestations, to phenomena such as: war, armed forces, military budget, production and trade in weapons. At the institutional level, Serbia is a distinctly militaristic state, which is confirmed by several important facts: Serbia has not freed itself from the burden of its recent war past - it denies and celebrates war crimes and criminals; Serbia is the only country in the region that has not adopted the UN Convention on the Prohibition of Cluster Munitions, depriving a large number of citizens of international aid to victims of these munitions during the NATO bombing (1999); the number of paramilitary / para-police formations is growing in Serbia, as extended arms of the state apparatus of force and violence; Serbia is continuously exporting weapons to war-torn areas, which mostly affects the civilian population, who is forced to seek refuge in the countries of the Western Balkans.

**Militarization** is the process of transmitting militaristic values, such as obedience, blind execution of orders, hierarchy, machismo, misogyny, xenophobia, racism, authoritarianism, uniformity, homophobia ... Militarization imposes certain cultural models that create a climate of patriarchal control and fear, and they are manifested through different types of structural violence: *enemy production*,

*machismo, uniformity / unanimity, homogenization (ideological, ethnic-racial, religious, sexual); demonization, stigmatization even the elimination of diversity and opposition; criminalization of social movements, etc.*

The experience of WiB confirms that state institutions also repress through excessive police protection, i.e., militarization of our street and other actions, **presenting militarized security as “protection”**.

After the brutal physical attacks during WiB actions (especially since the attacks marking the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide in 2004 and 2005), the “protection” of the state against WiB is reflected in the increased police presence at all our events. This type of “protection” is mostly inappropriate and leads to a certain degree of ghettoization and separation of our manifestations from the participation of citizens.

## **Attitudes of activists about this type of “protection”**

We have repeatedly discussed this type of “security”, the political goal of this type of “protection”, whether such militarization has reduced or increased the impact of our actions - discouraged or encouraged women to participate less / more.

A combination of state and para-state actors - strictly controlled para-state actors: *in order to commit violence against the unfit, those who think differently, the state uses the services of the so-called patriotic forces - football fans, ultra-right organizations...*

**“Fans are being instructed and managed”** (*Ljilja, Belgrade*); “Hooligans are being conducted. The police control both fans and fascist groups. That “spectacle” that the police make with us in the streets plays down what we do” (*Ivana, Leskovac*); “The policemen are kind to the fascists, they chat with them, as if they were old acquaintances, they laugh at the Obrazashi (members of the clerical-fascist organization Obraz, editor’s remark). When we pass, it’s as if they turn on the spotlight and change happens ... they make us look like “problematic”, we become isolated, enemies” (*Natasha, Belgrade*); “Right-wing groups are a kind of civil servants, they shout slogans,

insult us, threaten us" (*Svetlana, Vlasotince*); "The police are cooperating with violent groups. They approved a right-wing rally in front of WiB premises. The fact that the rally was not banned in front of WiB is a threat to your safety. The state supports violence here" (*Nikola, Belgrade*), etc.

***Militarization of protection* - a strategy of control, separation and isolation from the rest of the population, a ceremony of public humiliation of all who step out of the political and social consensus, which causes extreme insecurity, vulnerability and exhaustion of activists.**

It is a kind of deception and a trap - for us to "buy it" that it is a kind of our "protection". It is, in fact, turning public space into a place of conflict, a perfidious way of creating a great internal enemy. It is, in fact, turning us, who have taken to the streets to speak on behalf of the victims, into a kind of antipode: on the one hand we are victims, and on the other hand enemies, from victims they turn us into enemies, or rather, into enemies of both the state and society" (*Snežana, Kraljevo*); "When there are a large number of police officers, it is like a message to the citizens that we are dangerous, to get away from us" (*Nevena, Leskovac*);

"It is very dangerous to assume the image they build of us, to reduce ourselves to the role they give us. It is terribly exhausting, it leaves us breathless" (*Staša, Belgrade*).

***Militarization of street actions* - meeting formal European standards without substantial change:** a narrow legalistic interpretation of European standards serves as a justification for violence against human rights defenders, rather than punishing those who threaten civil liberties and human rights...

"In the 1990s, there were no police officers when needed, and now you come across a bunch of police officers, it seems to be a process by which this country is washing its face through us, in order to enter the European Union" (*Saša, Belgrade*);

"It is part of the package of fulfilling some formal standards of the European Union." Thus, the authorities carry out almost all orders in order to stay in power, and on the other hand, in order to maintain a patriotic image among the voters, they tolerate non-state or para-state actors who vent their anger towards human rights de-

fenders. Namely, the repression continued, it only took on a different character, depending on the political needs - internal and external" (*Nada, Novi Sad*); "Pride (2014) showed a very important thing: when the government wants to control the fascists, then they do it. Now, when they have been pressured by the EU, they have shown that they can control violence and perpetrators who produce it themselves..." (Staša, Belgrade); "In terms of integration processes, they use mechanisms to repel us. Their legalism and formal standards is a policy of not confronting the criminal past" (*Marija, Vrbas*).

**Militarization of "security and protection":** *an excuse to increase military and police budgets...*

"Why is so much money being spent on our 'security'?" Today, it is really possible that one of us could be killed, and then the state would suffer dreadful repercussions. Because of that terrible fear, they "protect" us (Snežana, Belgrade); "The fact that they are mobilizing so many police forces to "secure" you, which entails costs, is a message that they want to convey about how much you cost the citizens" (Nikola, Belgrade).

**Repression of intimacy:** *rejection in the family, rejection by friends / surroundings; activism also affects the position of family members, leading to marginalization and exclusion due to activism; it is a strategy to frustrate and prevent veterans from continuing their activism...*

"For days on after Srebrenica, they provoke me... These are very unpleasant things, when your surroundings look at you with contempt. Lately, I've been confused, I don't know if I'm also isolating myself or not" (Ljiljana, Belgrade); "My husband sees us, women from WiB, as the greatest sinners, because I, encouraged through activism, found my place under the sun" (Uma, Belgrade); "As an activist and as a Roma woman, I can say that I am not safe in my community. You are different and then you are also a lesbian, you stand out from the Roma culture and tradition" (Danica, Novi Bečej); "I distanced myself from my relatives, because everyone avoids talking to me about what I do, they avoid topics to which I would react, so as not to get into a discussion" (Jelena, Belgrade), etc.

*Repression over intimacy* is also manifested as revenge and harassment: in the experience of the defenders, there is an abundance of such and similar acts of violence: "... one woman was moved into the entrance next to mine. Then she waited for me, beat me twice and in the end I had to report her, but half of the police station was on her side '(Sonja, Belgrade); "It's very uncomfortable when they start spitting at you in public ..." (Staša), etc.

**Militarization of solidarity:** *solidarity with others is considered to be undesirable, even a "conspiracy"; activists, who work with all parties, are declared traitors and spies and that makes them a legitimate target of persecution by the state and parastatal factors ...*

Solidarity for the victims of crimes committed in our name - *an act of national "betrayal"* - for that, the most common epithets for WiB are "you are the shame of Serbia"; "You invented Vukovar and Srebrenica", etc.

WiB solidarity with the Serbian victims *has been cursed and condemned because, in accordance with nationalist ideology, "patriots" have a monopoly over "national bodies", only they claim the right to care for victims of the Serbian name ...*

"At the commemoration in Bela Reka (10 years since the murder of the guards in Topčider, on October 5, 2014), there were about 15 patrol cars, each with five police officers. In front of the house of the parents who were commemorating their murdered son, the police were accompanying us. I felt strong humiliation, pressure, the state is doing it on purpose. They put the police everywhere, to scare others, because they can't scare us. On the way back from the village, we managed to escape from the police" (Marija, Novi Bečej); "For example, during our recent action for Dražen and Dragan (guards killed in 2004), a passer-by was talking to a police officer who told him: 'These are the ones who hate Serbs!' As if Dragan and Dražen were not Serbs, but Martians!" (Violeta, Belgrade); "The Jakovljević family in Bela Reka was very shaken by police vehicles in front of their house. It was terrible and made us really angry" (Nadežda, Kruševac); "The Jakovljević family is exposed to shame and defamation because of us. However, that deterrence of people from contact with us does not deter the Jakovljević family from us. It is not a ray

of hope, but a huge light in this tunnel. I am uncomfortable with the awkward situation we are putting them in" (*Stasa, Belgrade*), etc.

## **Gender dimension of militarization - joint action of state and non-state actors**

***Accusations of prostitution*** - a new "invention" of the state - a strategy of control over the morals of activists and a militaristic strategy of deterrence from activism ...

A special form of collective patriarchal pathology, when the state and its subjects take on the role of moral guardians over "disobedient" women, are accusations of prostitution. It is an attack on the moral integrity of activists, in order to break the Network of Women in Black, especially in small communities; this type of repression has a distinct misogynistic connotation. Accusations of prostitution are aimed at undermining moral integrity and discouraging women activists, especially in smaller communities, from activism. This took place continuously from April to October 2005. In order to protect WiB, Amnesty International launched a campaign, asking the competent institutions in Serbia to stop the repression. After hundreds of letters arrived from all over the world by the most important peace organizations and networks, the campaign bore fruit – the state-organized slander stopped.

***Use of women as instruments of repression:*** men have always been more active in committing violence, but women have also been active in attacks until 2000. A certain change was noticed after 2000.

In the period after 2004, women were used more often than in the period of the Milošević regime to attack Women in Black. This method represents the **rehabilitation of the so-called model of state pimping**, used by the JUL (Yugoslav Left) party (leader Mirjana Marković, wife of S. Milošević): political pimps take women to the streets to beat political opponents - this has been confirmed by numerous examples of attacks, the most brutal of which were during the commemoration of ninth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, when a group of women brutally attacked and injured three WiB activists. The attacks of women on WiB activists and other de-

fenders also take place in the form of a defamation ceremony, not only during street actions, but also in public transport, markets: "One day, after the Informer had been running a campaign for days about WiB being "foreign mercenaries", I was warned on the bus that I was "riding in their vehicle". On one occasion, at the green market, a woman attacked me: "*Why are you buying a Serbian melon, go and buy a Siptar melon ...*"; or at the cemetery, while I was buying flowers: "*You bitch, who pays you?*" (Staša, Belgrade).

**Organized persecution, call for lynching:** Vojislav Šešelj, President of the Serbian Radical Party, stated in the Serbian Parliament on September 28, 1998, as follows: "If the United States decides to attack Serbia, let them withdraw their quislings in time, such as members of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, the Belgrade Circle and Women in Black, and let them not be held hostage. We may not be able to reach every plane, but we will grab those (from the mentioned groups) who are close to our hands ". Other deputies in the Assembly of Serbia accompanied this threat with a roar of laughter.

***Ceremonies of public defamation of activists and fascist abuse of them in the presence of the state, with the approval of the state*** - is especially manifested through the actions of convicted war criminal V. Šešelj. His attendance at trials is a form of obstruction of the judiciary, as he commits unpunished violence during trials. This is illustrated by two examples:

At the trial for the rehabilitation of war criminal Draža Mihailović in Belgrade (2014-2015), as well as at the trials in Kruševac for sexual harassment of Marija Lukić (2019-2021), to the continuous insults of V. Šešelj addressed to Staša Zajović, the court guard never reacted. This behavior represents the meaninglessness of the judicial system in the context of the total collapse of institutions in Serbia, which is complemented by the regime clown V. Šešelj. Such a fascist exhibition is a regime-orchestrated misogynistic public outcry against disobedient women. The laws of this country do not apply to Šešelj, because, with the full protection of the regime, he mocks the victims and everyone who is on the side of the victims, he sneers at the courts, the Prosecutor's office, the rule of law. Even

now, this convicted war criminal gathers around him other violent thugs, who, like him, believe that the laws do not apply to them.

***Strategies for demilitarized protection and security: solidarity, being in the public eye, occupation of public spaces, mutual support, dissemination of information about our activities, strengthening trust...***

It is necessary to question the very notion of state patriarchal protection - it is the exchange of obedience for false security and the justification of control and supervision. Because in patriarchy, the rule is "whoever protects you, oppresses you". Feminist security theorist Erica Blanchard believes that security, as offered by the state, deprives women of the ability and possibility to organize their own protection system. It is necessary to create our own protection systems and continue to turn vulnerability into a common force, to build peace and security through friendship, trust, solidarity ... As Selma Sevenhuijsen says: *"What we can do is to not want their protection, because they do not protect us. We can take care of each other by taking responsibility for each other."* We will mention the recent act of solidarity of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights from Belgrade with Women in Black (after the attack on the night of October 22/23, 2021) when they invited everyone participate in the joint "cleansing of hate graffiti", on Wednesday, October 27, 2021. Dozens of activists took part in the cleansing of hate graffiti.

# Court chronicle

## 36 attacks - 0 convicted (2014 – 2021)

Numerous pieces of material evidence, police videos of physical assaults on activists, witnesses, police reports, police testimonies, photographs, media reports... All this exists, and none of it was enough for any of the attackers on Women in Black activists to be punished on misdemeanor or criminal charges. From 2014 to 2021, WiB recorded and documented 36 attacks. No one was punished. The courts issued acquittals with arguments contrary to the logic of the law. Prosecutor's offices most often rejected criminal charges, kept silent or gave up, missing the legal deadlines for appealing a court decision. The police most often ignored and reacted inadequately.

**03/25/2014** – Spokesman for the special police units, Radomir Počuča, issued threats and called for the lynching of Women in Black.

*He was acquitted by the ruling of the High Court. An appeal has been lodged. The Court of Appeals and the Constitutional Court upheld the acquittal.*

**05/14/2014** – Death threats on the Facebook profile; the police filed a criminal complaint against Boris Knežević.

*The prosecution rejected the criminal report.*

**07/08/2014** – Physical attack at a rally in Valjevo during the commemoration of the 19th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide.

*The court dismissed the indictment. An appeal was lodged with the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court rejected the appeal.*

*The petition filed with the European Court of Human Rights was rejected on October 19, 2019.*

**11/18/2014** – Obstruction of the gathering “We will never forget the crimes in Vukovar” in Belgrade; the police filed misdemeanor charges against two members of the organization Zavetnici (Pledgers).

*Proceedings were suspended due to obsolescence.*

**03/08/2016** – Physical attack on activists who participated in the march on the occasion of March 8th in Belgrade; a report was submitted to the police.

*Police are conducting an investigation, still without announced results.*

**05/24/2016** – Obstruction and prevention of the gathering “Everything for peace, health and education, nothing for weapons” in Leskovac; criminal charges were filed against Marko Cakić and more non-identified persons.

*The Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office rejected the criminal report. The Appellate Public Prosecutor’s Office confirmed the decision of the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office.*

**06/17/2016** – Threats voiced during the gathering “We remember the women raped in the war” in Belgrade, criminal charges were filed against Nemanja Ristić for endangering security.

*The case is still in the Prosecutor’s Office (they refuse to answer what steps they have undertaken so far).*

**11/09/2016** – Attacks in the daily newspaper *Informer*, text: “Women in Black are the biggest foreign mercenaries”; a lawsuit was filed.

## **The Informer case**

On **November 9, 2016**, the *Informer* published an article based on untruths and announced it on the front page with the headline “WOMEN IN BLACK FOREIGN MERCENARIES: The West gave them **1,587,596 euros** to accuse Serbia of war crimes.” The data published in the text is completely incorrect. None of the real donors of Women in Black is mentioned in the text, but rather donors who have never, or not in the given period, funded Women in Black projects.

The procedure lasted from 2016 to 2020. In the procedure that was conducted against the owner, editor-in-chief of Informer Dragan Vučićević, according to the lawsuit of Women in Black, the *High Court in Belgrade* passed a judgment on March 8, 2018 rejecting the claim as unfounded. On 04/04/2018 an appeal was filed, the *Court of Appeals* ruled on October 18, 2018. and rejected the appeal of Women in Black and upheld the decision of the High Court. Women in Black filed a constitutional complaint in this case on 10/29/2018. The *Constitutional Court* rejected the appeal of Women in Black at the session held on February 13, 2020. WiB found out about this decision of the Constitutional Court on July 9, 2020, when it was delivered by mail. WiB had to pay court costs in the amount of 55,000 dinars!

**07/10/2017** – Disruption and prevention of the gathering “We remember! 22nd anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide” in Belgrade.  
*The police did not react.*

**02/22/2018** – Threatening messages on the door of the Women in Black office.

*Police are conducting an investigation, still without results ...*

**03/30/2018** – Interruption of the screening of the film “Kosovo - Gezuar / Cheers” in Belgrade and threats to Women in Black activist T.P. on the same occasion, a misdemeanor report was filed.

*The police have filed misdemeanor charges, and proceedings are being conducted before the court.*

**04/06/2018** – Disruption and prevention of the gathering “We remember! 26th anniversary of the beginning of the war in BH” in Belgrade.

*The police did not react. The procedure regarding the complaint about the work of the police is in progress. Police officers stated that there were no omissions in their work. The competent Commission of the Ministry of the Interior has not yet made a decision on the complaint. The legal deadline for making a decision expired on June 20, 2018.*

**06/20/2018** – Obstruction and prevention of the rally “Solidarity with Refugees / Migrants - International Refugee Day” in Belgrade.

The police did not react until the very end of the rally, when they ordered the persons who were obstructing the rally to leave.

*The police informed us that they would file charges against the perpetrators, so far there has been no confirmation that the applications have been submitted.*

**03/08/2019** – More attacks on Women in Black during the march on the occasion of March 8th. In addition to the usual threats and insults, it was noted that someone hurled a stone.

*The perpetrators remain unidentified.*

**02/26/2019** – Members of the Serbian Radical Party threatened Staša Zajović before the Special Court for War Crimes in Belgrade. They repeatedly shouted at her that she was a “whore” and that she should be killed.

*The court guard did not react.*

**05/28/2019** – Milica Đurđević Stamenkovski, member of the Presidency of the organization Zavetnici (Pledgers), filed a criminal complaint with the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office against Women in Black for the feminist-anticlerical performance “My Body - My Autonomy”, held in front of the SOC Patriarchate on the International Day for Women’s Health and Reproductive Rights.

*The Prosecutor’s Office illegally initiated a pre-investigation procedure based on the criminal report. There has been no epilogue.*

**06/19/2019** – The police of the Republic of Serbia stopped eight activists of the WiB Network at the border crossing between Serbia and BH (Mokra Gora, near Višegrad). They were travelling to Foča, where the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in War was marked. After several hours of detention due to “legal omissions” related to the vehicle they were traveling in, they were forbidden to cross the border.

*The police abused their authority and violated the right to liberty of movement.*

**07/16/2019** – Convicted war criminal Vojislav Šešelj voiced insults and threats against journalist Snežana Chongradin and Women in Black at the National Assembly session.

*There were no sanctions. Šešelj's parliamentary mandate was not illegally revoked after the final verdict for war crimes.*

**03/28/2019** – The association “Who is poisoning our children”, filed misdemeanor charges against three people and several other non-identified persons, related to the action of hanging purple aprons on monuments to famous men, March 6, 2021, organized by Women in Black.

*The misdemeanor court initiated the procedure.*

**07/19/2019** – Around 12.30 pm at the green market in Zemun, a woman approached Staša Zajović and insulted her several times. She shouted: “Šiptar pisspallet and whore”, “She is the main and most important in Women in Black”, “She should be expelled from Serbia”. We will banish her! “;”She is selling Kosovo, she is selling our Kosovo “;” Why are you buying a Serbian melon, go and buy a Šiptar melon!”

*The police did not react.*

**11/06/2019** – Convicted war criminal, Vojislav Šešelj standing right in front of the courtroom in Kruševac, where Women in Black was in support of Marija Lukić, in the proceedings against Milutin Jeličić Jutka, said to Staša Zajović, coordinator Women in Black coordinator: “Where are you Staša, beauty pie? You are so ugly that your mother had to feed you with a slingshot in the cradle.” During the break, in the hallway, in front of the courtroom, Vojislav Šešelj addressed Staša Zajović again: “Staša, did anyone sexually harass you? Have you sexually harassed anyone? What will happen if Staša Zajović sexually harasses someone?” Šešelj constantly addressed Staša Zajović, saying: “Staša, let me ask you something.”

*The court guard did not react and did not protect the dignity and integrity of the activist Woman in Black.*

**01/29/2020** – Convicted war criminal Vojislav Šešelj insulted Women in Black activist Staša Zajović in the court in Kruševac: “You witch, freak, traitor, scum.” You are so ugly that your mother wanted to kill you in the cradle, she had to feed you with a slingshot. “

*The court guard did not react.*

**03/15/2020** – During the state of emergency, introduced due to the Kovid-19 virus pandemic, “Diagram of Serbian Enemies” appeared on social networks, a paper written with the names of organizations and persons whom the author considers to be enemies of the state of Serbia and the Serbian people. Women in Black was also on the list.

*The Prosecutor’s Office for High-Tech Crime was supposed to react, yet failed to do so.*

**4/26/2020** – Death threats against WiB activist Tomislav Perušić and his family were sent on social networks after the media campaign launched against him on the novosti.rs portal, and then also in other regime media (Alo, Objektiv, B92). Perušić was called a “traitor” because of the views expressed in the interview.

*The family reported the threats to the police. To date, it is not known whether the the High-Tech Crime Agency acted upon the report.*

**07/09/2020** – At the protests in front of the Assembly of Serbia, a group of dissatisfied members of right-wing groups tried to let Staša Zajović and her associates know, by rudely insulting them, that they had no place in those protests.

**07/10/2020** – Fifteen pro-fascist activists tried to violently end the public commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. They carried a banner with the name of Staša Zajović, in the context of “treasonous behavior”. They chanted: “Ratko Mladic”, “Radovan Karadzic” and “Srebrenica is not genocide”.

*The police did not react.*

**07/13/2020** – The regime media, reporting from the protest in front of the Central Prison in Belgrade, which was organized in support of the release of detained protesters in the previous days, published a photomontage of the alleged meeting and conversation between Boško Obradović and Staša Zajović.

**10/05/2020** – In front of the Karaš barracks in Topčider, during the commemoration of the 16th anniversary of the murder of two guardsmen, two men attacked Women in Black activists from a car, calling them “*Traitors and foreign mercenaries*”, shouting that they should be ashamed of what they are doing, and they addressed similar words to the young men’s parents, their lawyers and journalists.

**11/18/2020** – Attack during the celebration of the anniversary of the fall of Vukovar under the slogan “We will never forget the crimes in Vukovar”. One man, with a child in his arms, poured a bottle of water onto the boxes of salt (during a stage action when it was written on the sidewalk with salt: Vukovar (1991-2020), and then he tore the inscription written with salt on the sidewalk with his feet), a group of men insulted the activist who was handing out leaflets about crimes in Vukovar with the words “What are you doing? Shame on you! Are you a Serb? Croats destroyed Vukovar.”

*The police did not react.*

**05/24/2021** – At the protest **“We remember the brave resistance of women of Rasina district”** in Kruševac, organized by the Association of Women “Peščanik” from Kruševac and Women in Black from Belgrade, in remembrance of the 22nd anniversary of the protest against forced mobilization in 1999, members of the Serbian Radical Party insulted activists. They trampled over the sign “We remember the resistance of women”, which was written in salt on concrete as the message of action.

*The police, which was supposed to safeguard the action, did not react adequately.*

**07/10/2021** – A large number of members of pro-fascist organizations obstructed the performance of Women in Black “We will never forget the Srebrenica genocide”, in Republic Square. More than sixty fascists constantly obstructed the action, insulting and threatening in the area where the WiB rally had been reported to the police and approved.

*The police, who were supposed to ensure that the action proceed unhindered, did not react adequately.*

**9/6/2021** – **Staša Zajović targeted by the regime media** - the regime media (Novosti, Alo, TV Pink, etc.) published false news about the stay of Staša Zajović in Cetinje, after the enthronement of Montenegro-Littoral Metropolitan Ioaniki (SOC). This false news was then taken over by all regime media in Serbia, putting Staša Zajović in a very negative context, with the comment that she was “a supporter of Milo’s hooligans”.

**10/22-23/2021** – On the night between Friday and Saturday, unidentified perpetrators spray-painted insults on the front door of the Women in Black office: *Whores in Black*, *Ratko Mladić* and five pieces of the nationalistic sign “Only unity saves a Serb”.

*Police made no attempt to find the perpetrators.*

*As even after two months, the police did not issue a notification on what actions were taken to find the perpetrator, or whether the perpetrators had been found, on December 27, 2021 WiB filed a criminal complaint against non-identified persons. On December 29, 2021, by decision of the First Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, the criminal charges were rejected on the grounds that “These offenses are not criminal offenses prosecuted ex officio.” They also stated that the criminal report does not show that “there was a significant threat posed to the peace of citizens”, and that for that reason it is not a criminal act that is prosecuted ex officio.*

**11/13/2021** – After the protest “*The mural must fall*”, which was held in Cvetni Trg square in protest against the celebration of war criminals, attacks by hooligans from the fascist “People’s Patrols” on all those who tried to remove graffiti dedicated to convicted war criminal Ratko Mladić and the actions of the police who protected the graffiti and arrested those who wanted to remove it, two unidentified perpetrators approached the Women in Black activists from behind and snatched the banner with the inscription “We will never forget the Srebrenica genocide.” They then fled and later burned it in the park.

A few hours later, a video appeared on social networks showing several people burning the canvas / banner at an unknown location. Although the news about this event, as well as the recordings of the arson were published in the media, no one from the Prosecutor’s Office or the police reacted or contacted WiB. On December 27, 2021, Women in Black filed a criminal complaint against unidentified perpetrators.

*The prosecution is silent, there is no information on what has been done regarding the criminal case.*

**11/29/2021** - The front door of the Women in Black office was strewn with insulting messages during the night: *Staća Ustasha*,

*Ratko Mladić, Ratko Mladić hero, Whores in Black, Fuck antifa, four signs with four S.* The incident was reported to the police, who conducted the investigation. As even a month after the event WiB did not receive a notification from the police about the actions taken to find the perpetrator, or whether the perpetrators were found, on December 27, 2021. criminal charges were filed against NN perpetrators.

*The prosecution is silent. There is no information on whether charges were pressed against the unidentified person(s) nor any further details about this matter.*

# A study of court proceedings and institutional abolition of violence

The trend of attacks on Women in Black activists has been on the rise since 2014, when the regime of Aleksandar Vučić gained complete control over all levers of power. There are different types of attacks at work, from insults and threats, which activists are faced with daily, to physical attacks. A common denominator in all these attacks is that none of them have been resolved. Obstruction of state bodies is visible at all levels.

**The police often ignore threats, insults and attacks that occur in their presence.** In several cases, when attacks took place during street actions, official police reports from those events noted that *“there was no disturbance of public order and peace.”*

**The Prosecutor’s Office generally does not respond to criminal charges filed for assault on activists.** Some of the applications have not been answered for more than a year. In the cases when the prosecution rejected the criminal charges, the justifications for such a decision did not contain the reasons, nor did the prosecution undertake any of the proposed investigative actions, or decide on the evidence submitted.

There are rare cases of attacks that managed to reach the court, but even then, the perpetrators were not punished, but released instead. An additional danger is the views expressed by the court in

its rulings, as they, as part of case law, indirectly provide guidance to other courts, prosecutors' offices and the police on how to proceed in similar cases.

## The case of Valjevo

As a representative case of this practice, we cite the case of actions of state bodies in connection with the attack on activists in July 2014, in Valjevo. This case is of great importance for understanding the level of institutional protection of human rights activists and peace activists, because it is a blatant example of violence that occurred in the presence of the police, and all courts in the country have ruled on the case.

On July 8, 2014 Women in Black activists organized a street action in Valjevo, commemorating the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. On that occasion, they were attacked by members of extreme right-wing organizations, and four activists and three police officers were injured in the attack. On March 16, 2015, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Valjevo, having conducted investigative actions, examined suspects, injured parties and witnesses, submitted to the High Court in Valjevo an indictment against eight persons for committing the crime of **inciting national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance**.

Evidence included footage of the suspects threatening and insulting Women in Black activists: *"We will kill you all, Muslim mother-fuckers," "Your seed will be destroyed," "We will slaughter you Ustashas","Whores of the Bali"," Oh, Sjenica, new Srebrenica, oh, Pazar, new, Vukovar "*, and the like. Also, all police officers who were questioned stated in their statements that the suspects insulted and threatened activists, physically assaulted them, and shouted slogans of hatred on religious and national grounds, citing the expressions they used.

The High Court in Valjevo, by the Decision of May 20, 2015, more than ten months after the event, rejected the indictment on the grounds that ***"... the victims are not members of the Bosniak people or Muslims, so there can be no talk of the crime of inciting national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance."***

This interpretation of the law by the court is ***in direct contradiction with the spirit of the law and the purpose of prescribing this crime***. It is obvious that the above-mentioned actions of the defendants are actions that are objectively suitable to provoke and incite national and religious hatred in a specific case. Also, the court used inappropriate terminology in the explanation, specifically the notion of *“opposing national, religious and racial grouping”*. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia emphasizes the unity and equality of all citizens, regardless of nationality, religion or race, and **defining nations, religions or races as “opposites” is in outright disharmony with the spirit of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia**.

The Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office appealed this decision to the Court of Appeals in Belgrade, but this court rejected the appeal as unfounded and confirmed the decision of the High Court. After that, the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office from Valjevo again conducted investigative actions and, after examining the suspects, the injured parties and witnesses, submitted on March 31, 2016, to the High Court in Valjevo a new indictment against seven people for committing the criminal offense of “Violent behavior at a sports event or public gathering”.

The High Court in Valjevo also rejected this indictment, stating in its justification: “... that the indictment is based on the same facts, as well as the previous indictment for the same event, which has already been rejected, that “ it is a decided matter, and that for that reason it is not possible to conduct the procedure again”.

It is indisputable that the court was bound by the factual description of the act, but not by the legal qualification in the indictment, and it can be concluded that the court, as provided by law, in any case assessed whether the described actions of the defendants concur with important elements of some other criminal offense. The Public Prosecutor could have challenged that fact in the appeal against the original court decision, but the Prosecutor’s Office failed to do so, and the decision to reject the original indictment became final.

The Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office in Valjevo appealed to the Court of Appeals in Belgrade against this decision, but the Court of Appeals rejected the appeal and upheld the decision of the High Court.

The actions of the judicial authorities of the Republic of Serbia in the case of attacks on activists Women in Black on July 08, 2014 in Valjevo, namely the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Valjevo, the Higher Court in Valjevo and the Appellate Court, violated the constitutionally guaranteed rights of victims to equal legal protection without discrimination under Article 21 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, as well as the right to equal protection before courts and other state bodies referred to in Article 36 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia. On June 23, 2017, Women in Black filed a constitutional complaint to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Serbia.

By the Decision of September 17, 2018, the Constitutional Court dismissed the appeal. The explanation states that the Constitutional Court, *"by inspecting the disputed acts, determined that they contain a detailed and clear explanation, based on a constitutionally acceptable interpretation of the law."* As further stated in the explanation, the Constitutional Court considers that there has been no violation of any right of the appellants, and in that sense there is no discrimination. In the opinion of the Constitutional Court, the plaintiffs were provided with access to judicial bodies and provided with equal legal protection. This decision and the reasoning of the Constitutional Court **overlooks the fact that the judicial authorities did not provide legal protection to the injured parties. The Constitutional Court reduced the right to "Equal protection of rights before the courts" to the mere fact that the judicial authorities act in a particular case, and completely ignoring the outcome of that action, which in this case was clearly absent.**

This exhausts all legal ways to prosecute the attackers. In practice, it has been shown that even in the case when the crime was committed in the presence of police officers, when there is a police video of the whole event, which is in the case file, the perpetrators can be released due to obstruction of the judiciary. **The oversights of the prosecution and the courts that have been stated clearly indicate that it cannot be a matter of incompetence, negligence or ignorance, but of a clear intention not to punish the perpetrators of the attack.**

## The Počuča case

The attitude of the judicial authorities towards the attacks on Women in Black is also reflected in the criminal proceedings against Radomir Počuča, a former spokesman for the Anti-Terrorist Unit of the Ministry of the Interior of Serbia. In March 2014, while he was in a high position as a police official, Počuča, through his Facebook profile, **sent out a call for lynching the activists of Women in Black.** The call for lynching was sent on the occasion of the latest action marking the 15th anniversary of the crimes against Serbian citizens and Albanian civilians in Kosovo.

*“I don’t think this should take place ..., gentlemen hooligans, Delije, Grobari, Radovci, Firmaši, (supporters of rival football clubs Red Star, Partisan, Rad and Vojvodina, respectively, translator’s note) instead of spending songs with each other, and you are great patriots - unite and beat the hell out of those pussies, hammer them pussies”, wrote Počuča.*

Proceedings have been initiated against Počuča for committing a criminal offense “Security threats”. The epilogue of the three-year trial is an acquittal. The High Court in Belgrade passed a verdict of acquittal on December 14, 2016, and the Court of Appeals upheld the judgment on April 13, 2017. The views of the High Court, which it took in its reasoning and which were also accepted by the Court of Appeals, are worrying:

In the reasoning of the verdict, the court justifies the violence with the alleged patriotism of the accused: ***“The court accepted the defense of the defendant Radomir Počuča who was consistent, straightforward and detailed ... the defendant clearly stated in detail the main motives more of a patriotic nature than such that would indicate a motive for anyone to be endangered in terms of security.”***

The court does not see a threat in the statement of the defendant in question and says: ***“The written status does not contain a clear and unambiguous threat.”*** As one of the reasons for the acquittal, the court cites the fact that the Women in Black activists have been constantly attacked, since its inception, because of their views, and

their “*threshold of feelings of insecurity*” is higher, implying that the Women in Black activists are not subject to the same standards as other citizens of Serbia, but in their case threats and attacks must be more intense in order to exceed the “threshold of insecurity”, which is a necessary factor in the substance of the crime.

## The Leskovac case

On the example of the attack on activists in Leskovac in 2016, one can see the attitude of the prosecution towards the criminal charges filed by Women in Black. Feminist-anti-militarist action **“All for peace, knowledge and education, nothing for weapons”** was held on May 24, 2016 in Leskovac, on the occasion of the International Day of Women’s Actions for Peace and Disarmament, organized by Women for Peace Leskovac and Women in Black, Belgrade, with the support of activists of the Women in Black Network from several cities in Serbia. About 50 people participated in this gathering, which was duly registered and approved by the Leskovac Police Department. From the very beginning of the action until the end of the public rally, a group of people, some of whom were members of the right-wing organization Dveri, constantly tried to prevent and hinder the rally by insulting, threatening, shouting and disturbing speakers. The activists were repeatedly hit with eggs.

Women in Black filed **criminal charges against one identified person, Marko Cakić from Leskovac, as well as several other unidentified persons, due to a well-founded suspicion that they committed the criminal offense of “Preventing a Public Gathering”**. Along with the criminal report, a video recording of the entire event was submitted, which shows the perpetrators, as well as the incriminated actions. The prosecution was provided with several other pieces of evidence in the form of copies of statements and print screen posts on the social network Facebook, which indicate the existence of intent among the perpetrators, as well as a broader organization of activities aimed at preventing and obstructing the approved public gathering. It was suggested that witnesses be heard to confirm the allegations in the criminal report.

The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Leskovac rejected the criminal report on September 19, 2016, because ***“there are no grounds for suspicion that a criminal act has been committed for which it is prosecuted ex officio.”*** Apart from the information on the rejection of the criminal report, this decision did not contain an explanation or an assessment of the attached evidence. An objection was lodged with the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Leskovac, which rejected it with the Decision of October 10, 2016. The explanation referred to the Report of the Leskovac Police Department on the mentioned event, which states ***“that there were no disputable circumstances during the rally”***. The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office did not present any of the evidentiary actions proposed in the criminal report, the submitted evidence was not assessed, nor was any of the proposed witnesses heard.

## Case of criminal charges against WiB

On the example of the criminal report against the activists Women in Black for the protest in front of the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church in 2019, it can be seen that the Prosecutor is ready to promptly take action and conduct an investigation in the case of the accused Women in Black, even if the allegations of criminal charges are obviously unfounded.

On the occasion of May 28, the International Day for Women's Health and Reproductive Rights, Women in Black, in cooperation with the Women's Initiative of Serbia and the Center for Women's Studies, organized a street action ***My Body = My Autonomy***. The stage action was organized in front of the headquarters of the Serbian Orthodox Church, on May 28, 2019, with the presence of about twenty activists.

During the action, the participants carried banners, and several performances were performed. The gathering was secured by about 15 members of the police. There were no problems during the meeting. This gathering was covered by the media and several media published the news. (Free Europe, N1, Espresso, Beta ...). This was followed by the usual negative campaign on social networks and

in the right-wing media, against activists who participated in the action.

These are some of the titles: *“Women in Black Protested Against God and the Serbian Orthodox Church: A Terrifying Performance in Front of the Patriarchate!”* *“THIS IS HOW WE KILL CHILDREN: Women in Black sadistically humiliated the Serbian Orthodox Church, in front of the Patriarchate!”* In the daily newspaper “Večernje novosti”, under the control of the ruling party, an article was published, entitled *“THIS WILL NOT STAND: Demonstration of Insanity.”* The text calls on the judicial authorities to react: *“Judicial institutions should also answer the question of whether”* *provocation of religious hatred and intolerance was committed in front of the Patriarchate and prohibited by law, because banners were carried out calling for the destruction of the Church and persecution of believers and because the inappropriate use of religious symbols mocked the religious feelings of the majority of Serbian citizens.”*

At the peak of this campaign, a member of the Presidency of the organization Zavetnici, Milica Đurđević Stamenkovski, filed a criminal complaint with the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office against the participants in the rally. The criminal report states: ***“that with this performance the members of the NGO “Women in Black” committed elements of the crime of “inciting national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance”***, as well as that they mocked the religious symbols of the SOC during the performance.

The performance used priestly robes and a lamp with the clear intention of ridiculing the priestly vocation, disparaging the priestly service, as well as the role and importance of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbian society as a whole. It is also stated that: “members of the Women in Black carrying a banner with the inscription *“The Church glorifies war criminals”* directly accused the Serbian Orthodox Church of promoting war and violence, creating a public image of the Serbian Orthodox Church as an illegitimate and socially undesirable organization which is related to the most serious crimes. The perpetrators thus with direct intent provoked hatred, intolerance and other negative emotions among members of other denominations and ethnic groups towards the Serbian Orthodox

Church.” For this crime, prescribed by Art. 317 of the Criminal Code, imprisonment for a term of six months to five years is prescribed.

The Law on Public Assemblies, as one of the reasons for ordering the police to terminate the assembly, states in Article 8, paragraph 2: “Gathering is not allowed when the goals of the gathering are aimed at encouraging and inciting armed conflict or using violence, violating human and minority freedoms and the rights of others, or encouraging or inciting racial, national, religious or other inequality, hatred and intolerance”; **If the allegations from the criminal report were true, the members of the police would have stopped holding the rally, which was previously duly reported and approved.** As they did not do that, it can be concluded that nothing that did not comply with the law happened during the rally. As this street action was well covered by the media, there are numerous reports, as well as videos, and the Prosecutor’s Office was able to inspect them and get acquainted with the content, as well as the fact that there were no elements of the crime.

The criminal report itself is based on a misinterpretation of the nature of the crime. It alleges that the use of the mantle during the performance insulted Orthodox believers is meaningless, because **the use of church uniforms for the purpose of expressing opinions is not prohibited by law.** There are numerous plays and films in which the church uniform is used, in order to express certain views, and the procedure was never conducted because of that. Even more meaningless are the allegations that the message on one of the banners, “The Church glorifies war criminals”, insults Orthodox believers and spreads hatred towards them.

**The Serbian Orthodox Church, as an institution, and its priests, do celebrate war criminals, and there is a lot of evidence for that,** which we have written about in previous dossiers. We will cite only one example, and that is the return of convicted war criminal Vladimir Lazarević to Serbia, after serving his sentence according to the verdict of The Hague Tribunal. In his part, an official reception was organized at the airport, which, in addition to the ministers of the Government of Serbia, was also attended by high officials of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Despite these facts, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office, although it could have rejected the criminal report, decided to initiate a pre-investigation procedure and order the police to take statements from the participants in the gathering.

In the period from July 2 to 8, 2019, eight activists were questioned in the police premises: Staša Zajović, Snežana Tabački, Daša Duhaček, Biljana Stojković, Violeta Djikanović, Miloš Urošević, Mirko Medenica and Goran Lazin.

Even three years after the statements were made, there is still no information on the stage of this procedure. There is no statutory deadline for the decision of the Prosecutor's Office, in certain cases the Prosecutor's Office has not made a decision for several years.

**This is a form of pressure, because the interrogated persons are kept in suspense, indefinitely.**

Street actions, which are one of the main ways in which Women in Black acted, were obstructed by members of the police. By their actions or inactions, they make it much more difficult to hold actions and enjoy the right to freedom of assembly, guaranteed by the Constitution. On the example of the obstruction of the gathering held in 2018, on the occasion of the anniversary of the beginning of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one can see the attitude of the police and how they understand their role.

## **The case of Police obstruction**

The gathering, which marked the 26th anniversary of the beginning of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was held on April 6, 2018, from 12-13h, organized by Women in Black, in Belgrade, in Knez Mihailova Street, near "Russian Tsar". The public event was duly reported to the competent Police Department. Upon arrival at the venue, the activists noticed Simo Spasić from the Association of Families Kidnapped and Killed in Kosovo and Metohija. He himself was standing some 30 meters below the place where the meeting reported by WiB was planned. He spread out a large canvas. Shortly after the arrival of Women in Black, he approached them at a very disturbing distance of only one meter, and addressed them all the time through a megaphone, insulting and slandering them. He also

addressed passers-by: “Look at these traitors, these are foreign mercenaries.” The participants in the gathering in the organization Women in Black did not react, they stood holding banners, while in front of them on the ground were laid canvases with messages of peace and solidarity with the victims. Simo Spasić tried to cover the canvas Woman in Black with his canvas.

Women in Black tried to hold the rally by moving about thirty meters away, but the attacker followed them with a megaphone. Unable to continue the planned performance, they interrupted their gathering ahead of time and left the venue.

The gathering was secured by several members of the police, partly in uniform and partly in plain clothes. From the very beginning of the rally and the moment when Simo Spasić started with aggressive verbal attacks, WiB kept asking the police to protect them and enable the rally to take place. The police refused, explaining that Simo Spasić also reported the rally and that is why they cannot do anything. On several occasions during the rally, as Simo Spasić's behavior became more and more arrogant, the activists addressed the police asking for protection, but they did not get it. The police officers justified themselves by saying that they had been ordered to do so and that there was no crime or misdemeanor committed.

Article 8, Item 2 of the Law on Public Assembly states that **public assembly is not allowed “when the objectives of the assembly are aimed at encouraging and inciting armed conflict or use of violence, violation of human and minority freedoms and rights of others, or encouraging or inciting racial, national, religious or other inequalities, hatred and intolerance”.**

The only goal of Simo Spasić's overall behavior was unequivocally to interfere with the rights of others, in this case citizens who came to the gathering of Women in Black, to exercise their right to free assembly. **Article 18 of the Law on Public Assemblies mandates police officers “To prevent or interrupt the gathering if the circumstances referred to in Article 8 of this Law occur on the eve of the gathering or during its duration.”**

Police officers violated the law, refusing to act when the circumstances provided by law arose, even though they were warned

about it several times. Due to these circumstances, on April 20, 2018, Women in Black filed a **complaint about the work of the police**. Although the legal deadline for deciding on the complaint is 60 days, the session of the Commission, at which the decision on the complaint was made, was held only on January 30, 2019, seven months after the deadline. The commission rejected the complaint as unfounded.

By (not) acting, the police have shown that they absolutely do not understand the right to freedom of assembly. A representative of the Public Order and Peace Administration said that the job of the police was “to ensure that none of the participants be physically attacked and that property not be damaged.”

The right to freedom of assembly, as defined by international documents, primarily the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as domestic legal sources, the Constitution, the Law on Public Assemblies, and the Criminal Code, implies the **obligation of state bodies not only to provide physical and integrity of property, but also the smooth running of the public gathering**. The case law of the European Court of Human Rights has, in numerous judgments, very clearly established this broader interpretation of the right to public assembly, emphasizing that the enjoyment of the right to freedom of assembly presupposes the possibility of expressing the message of assembly in an unimpeded manner.

This behavior of state bodies is characteristic of Serbia, where state bodies insist on fulfilling the form, neglecting the essence of a certain right. In this particular case, the **application of the law was in fact a demonstration of endangering that right**, because only the physical maintenance of the assembly was achieved, while all other elements of freedom of assembly, which include, as defined by the Law on Public Assembly, “free expression, exercise and the promotion of beliefs and goals, other freedoms and rights”, were prevented by threats, obstruction and other forms of violent behavior. **The lack of reaction of the police to such events indicates that the state authorities are complicit in restricting the right to freedom of assembly.**

## Police cordons around WiB – violation of the right to freedom of assembly

One of the forms of police obstruction of public gatherings organized by Women in Black is the aggressive indication of the police that these are dangerous rallies. The police act in a way that makes everyone uncomfortable and thus discourages everyone from supporting the rally or joining it. The manner in which members of the police secure WiB rallies greatly jeopardizes the exercise of the right to freedom of assembly. At each rally, police officers surround activists by isolating them from public space and preventing others from joining the rally. The police even restrict the right to participate to all those who did not join at the very beginning. In this way, the police are actually violating the right of citizens to freedom of assembly. **The police justify this approach with the danger of a physical attack, but this justification does not hold water because the police have other ways to ensure security.**

As an example of such illegal actions of the police, we cite the rally held on February 26, 2022, which was organized by Women in Black in protest against Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Knez Mihailova Street in Belgrade. On that occasion, about a hundred people gathered, including a large number of citizens of Ukraine and Russia who live in Belgrade. At the very beginning of the protest, the police surrounded some of the participants who were standing next to the canvas with the inscription **"Women in Black Against War"**. In this way, they separated this group of participants from others. They did not allow anyone to approach this group and only the most persistent managed to break through the "cordon" of the police and join Women in Black.

The organizers of the rally drew the attention of the police to the fact that such behavior separates the participants of the rally and thus impedes its holding. Police responded that it was a "high-risk gathering". When asked by the representative of Women in Black, if it is really a high-risk group, why then only "protect" only a part of the participants, while the other part is unprotected, the answer was that we "must not interfere" and tell them what to do. Police officers continued to disrupt the rally in this way until the very end.

# Human Rights Defenders in the Media

## Analysis of reporting on *Women in Black* - Summary

Starting from the assumption that the presence (or absence) of certain topics or groups in the media is inexorably an indicator of the importance that is being attributed to them, of their influence or power, the basic aim of this research was to look into the ways the media report on events involving human rights defenders, in this case *Women in Black*. The aim of the analysis of media reporting on *Women in Black* and the activities and events related to them was, therefore, to establish *the extent* to which these events are present in the media, *how* they are reported, and *the way* in which the organization itself is presented. In other words, the aim of the research was: to look into the incidence of texts in the media concerning *Women in Black*, strategies of their representation and the media image of this activist group.

The analysis was conducted on a targeted sample of 532 media texts, published in the period between 1st January 2016 and 1st September 2017 on informative internet portals. In order to form the sample, a specialized search engine for informative sites in Serbia *naslovi.net* was used, which allows browsing all news items published on the sites that are included in the base. The sample comprises *Glas javnosti*, *Danas*, *Blic*, *Kurir*, *Večernje novosti*, *Politika*, *B92*, *RTS*, *Dnevnik*, *Press*, *Mondo*, *Insajder*, *RTV*, *Srbija danas*, *Glas Amerike*, *BBC*, *Svet*, *Dojče vele*, *Alo*, *Studio B*, *Sandžak press*, *E-novine*, *Beta*, *Borba*, *Vranjske*, *Vesti online*, *SEEBiz*, *Jug press*, *Radio 021*, *Sputnik*, *Vreme*, *Nedeljnik*, *Svet plus*, *Pravda*, *Euroactiv*, *XXZ magazine*,

*Beta video, Akter, Južne vesti, Novi magazine, Šumadija press, Free Europe, Telegraf, Al Jazeera, BK TV, Pirotске vesti, Jugmedija, OK radio, RTV Novi Pazar, Radio 101, RT Kragujevac, Sandžak haber, Glas Zapadne Srbije, Peščanik, Prva, N1 Info, NoviSad.com, Newsweek, In-foKg, Moj Novi Sad, Nedeljnik.* The daily newspaper *Informer* is not included in the base of this search engine, so that it was incorporated additionally through personal internet archive.

Compared to the total number of published texts, the largest number was published by *B92* – 45 (8%), followed by *Blic* 39 (7%), *N1* 38 (7%), *Novi magazin* 35 (7%), and *Informer* 33 (6%). Then come *Danas* 29 (5%), *Radio Television Vojvodina RTV* 25 (5%), *Radio Television Serbia RTS* 25 (5%), *Mondo* 25 (5%), *Free Europe* 20 (4%), *Kurir* 20 (4%), *Radio 021* 15 (3%), *Telegraf* 15 (3%), *Politika* 13 (2%), *Večernje novosti* 13 (2%), *Pravda* 13 (2%), *Beta video* 13 (2%), *Vestionline* 12 (2%), *Alo* 12 (2%), *Insajder* 11 (2 %), *Srbija danas* 11 (2 %), *Al Jazeera* 10 (2%), *Dnevnik* 7 (1%) and *Studio B* 6 (1%). All other examined media published on average less than 1% of the total of published texts. The number of published texts leaves the impression that *Women in Black* is recognized as a relevant organization. At first sight, this could lead to the conclusion that the social importance of the issues this group addresses has been acknowledged. However, the rubrics in which these texts are published (predominantly “The Chronicle”, a category intended for reporting on crime, and not on issues of broader social importance, and “The News” ), this impression is almost immediately altered. Although agency news should serve as a basis for further research and deeper analysis, a considerable part of the media space is devoted to transmitting agency news. If adapted agency news items are included into this category, then they make up 54% of the published contents on the average. A closer look on texts in the categories “Other medium” (4%) and “Unlabeled” (5%) reveals that agency and/or adapted agency news items are also dominant in them.

Most media attention was devoted to “the Počuča case”, with 34% of all published texts in the observed period. This was followed by: reporting on the protest about “Operation Storm” in Zagreb, on 4th July 2016 (6% of all published texts), on actions on the occasion of marking the anniversaries of Srebrenica in 2016 and 2017 (6%), on

the attempt to interrupt the panel on Women's Court at the Faculty of Political Sciences (FPN) (5%) and the action on the occasion of the commemoration of the anniversary of the killing of two members of the Guard in Topčider (5%).

This research also devoted great attention to the analysis of media reporting of the trial of Radomir Počuča because of his post on his Facebook profile. Not only because this event attracted the utmost media attention, but also because the manner of reporting condensed the strategies of representation of *Women in Black*, the outcome of which is the image of this group in media space. The strategies of representation of *Women in Black* should be observed in the context of the attitude of the media toward the issues WiB addresses, the accountability of the state and society for the wars of the 1990's and the crimes committed at that time, namely the strategy of denial of that past. Striking, even at first sight, is the absence of deeper analysis and a more systematic research of this topic and placing the events into a broader social context, related to the right to freedom of assembly, freedom of public expression of opinion and prohibition of hate talk. This leads to the conclusion that the media in general failed to recognize the social importance of this event. In the case of Radomir Počuča, the gap between acceptance of the concept of human rights, be it merely in principle (with the question remaining to which extent it is really understood) and the threats sent to an activist group precisely because of the public expression of their opinions is bridged by various psycho-social strategies aimed at denying this contradiction and justifying Počuča's act. Počuča's interpretation of his own post on his Facebook profile as "opinion and attitude" was reported by the media in the most part without critical distance. A consequence of media neglect are the threats to *Women in Black* directly related to its public engagement is the de-contextualization of the very event and reducing it to a conflict between "two sides" (Počuča and *Women in Black*), an isolated incident and individual behavior. Thus, looking into social mechanisms, values and concepts that make such events possible has been avoided. The dominant focus in reporting was on the personality of Radomir Počuča and his version of the event, which further reinforced that framework. The second form of denial refers

to various formulations of the alleged exaggerated risk assessment for *Women in Black*, as perceived by the organization itself (also reported by the media without any distance, in texts that are, if not identical, then very similar), in order to stifle the “patriotic outlook of this people”. In this process, the demands to assume responsibility for the injustice inflicted upon others in the name of the state and the society of Serbia are labelled as “aggression and provocation condoned by the state”. Violence becomes a defensive reaction, and the ultimate effect is excluding all responsibility for any violent act whatsoever at present or in the future and in this case, toward *Women in Black*.

The interconnection between threats directed at *Women in Black* and the topics they address, as well as the importance of viewing them in the context of their public engagement is ever more visible in reports about their other activities. It is clear that it problematizes the dominant discourse of collective self-victimization, where the Serbs are seen as “if not the only, then the greatest victims”, which can be traced in the reactions they convey. For instance, in media reports on the action on 10th July 2017, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 1995 genocide over the Bosnian population in Srebrenica, and when, at the same time, the *Association of the families of the kidnapped and killed in Kosovo and Metohija* organized the action of erecting “a Serbian Wailing Wall” in Republic Square, with the names of the killed and missing Serbs from the area of the Drina valley, these two actions were, as a rule, contrasted in newspaper texts (and thus indirectly polarized). In this way, what Asman refers to as “competition among the victims” is being established, with the recognition of the suffering on one side inevitably leading to the obliteration of the suffering on the other, and a historic situation is turned into a game with an *even score*. This is one of the usual strategies of denial of crime (also) in this area where the only thing that matters is memory of the crimes of the others that are used to obliterate and/or justify the crimes committed in the name of one’s own social collective. And without a broader contextualization of the activities of *Women in Black*, which is generally missing in the media, the action of commemorating the Srebrenica genocide, instead of calling for recognizing the victims, based on

the principle of individualization of victims, solidarity and respect of every human being irrespective of their allegiance (which is in the essence of all activities of this group), is converted into denial of Serbian victims. On the other hand, when reporting on the protest against praising the military action "Storm" in August 2016 (therefore, an action that draws attention to the expulsion of the Serbian people from Croatia in August 1995), most of the media in their headlines and news leads completely omit the fact that *Women in Black* is also among the organizers, but rather place focus on the ban on this rally and attack on the participants of the protest. In such a constellation, the "Croats" on one side, are confronted with a divergent group of "citizens", "protesters", thus disguising the fact that for the most part, the participants of the protest were also Croatian citizens, (and presumably, of ethnic Croat origin), and that the action itself was beyond the framework of an organicist concept of ethnic groups (nations) as "natural", undifferentiated and polarized unities with clearly positive or negative denotation.

The reaction to the problematizing of the dominant ethno-nationalistic political matrix and national identity that rest on the opposition to a homogeneous "antagonistic Other", whose important part is also selectivity in approaching victims, is the construct of *Women in Black* as some kind of "internal enemy". By explicitly and implicitly questioning the motives of *Women in Black*, and relating their sources of financing to problematic money sources or activities of countries (primarily USA and the European Union) perceived as enemies, they are labelled as "enemies of the state", "traitors" and "mercenaries", "whose sole goal is to accuse Serbia and the Serbs of some alleged genocide in Srebrenica and war crimes in Croatia, BH and in Kosovo". This is an "extremist association", and the aim of their "detrimental activities" is "to represent the Serbian people as criminals", "which is why the banning of this group is sought out all the more frequently". They are the ones who "hate their own people", "domestic scum", "a group of genuine enemies if Serbia, always prepared to provide space for the enemies of the Serbian people". On one hand, a combination of the absence of deeper analysis of the topics and the de-contextualization of the events they write about is dominant in the reporting of the *mainstream* media; on the oth-

er, open animosity toward *Women in Black* has reached the lexical level, distortions, sensationalism, use of the plural instead of the singular, melodramatic language, as well as deliberate emphasizing of elements that are considered to be crucial for headlines and news leads, typical of the so-called tabloids media, create an environment where (ever direct) violence towards this group (and also towards all others who share their views), is not only taken for granted and considered, normal, but also desirable.

## Afterword

The bearers of bad news have never been appreciated. This is even more true for those who, along with the bad news, have brought a demand to the community to reconsider and accept their share of responsibility for the evils that have occurred or will occur. And this is especially true for the bearers of bad news.

Magical power, attributed to women in folk beliefs (rationally explained by the fact that women create life), combined with patriarchal imbalances of power, resulted in the persecution of those women who in any way transgressed against patriarchal patterns: the most famous form of such repression of women manifested itself in centuries of persecution of witches, which lasted until the 18th century in western Europe, and until the 19th century in the Balkans.

The European civilization has recorded the repression of exceptional women since its very dark beginnings: The Trojan War is also marked by the figure of Cassandra, the bearer of bad news. The line of repression stretches from her (daughter of Priam and Hekabine, who foresaw the downfall of Troy and was declared insane, and was severely punished after the fulfillment of her prophecy), all the way to Hannah Arendt (even accused of anti-Semitism) and, to consider local circumstances, the “witches of Rio” (who denounced the criminal nature of Balkan nationalisms, and were accused of being traitors to Croatian national interests). A patriarchal community (and then in a peculiar way a community marked by the decay of patriarchy) does not tolerate women who bring bad news and call on the community to come together and take responsibility for the evil that has happened, is happening or will happen. Such, according to

traditionally defined gender roles, disobedient women, become the subject of suspicion, contempt, hatred and repression.

Bearing all this in mind, it should be clear that the repression of Women in Black, as evidenced by this publication, is nothing new in the history of our civilization (and that civilization in this respect is no different from other traditions and civilizations marked by patriarchy).

What have Women in Black done and what are they doing to bring on the troubles discussed in this book?

From the very beginning (in 1991, which coincides with the year in which the wars that led to the disintegration of the former common state began), they began to bring unrest to the community, which was supposed to be homogenized on the national consensus of Greater Serbia. And it actually was to a significant extent! Suffice to remember the flowers with which the tanks of the Yugoslav People's Army (which was just ceasing to be Yugoslav) were seen off on the way to Vukovar!

Contrary to the consensus based on militaristic national sovereignty, Women in Black publicly challenged patterns of gender, kinship and ethnic normativity. Instead of mourning only their victims, the victims of their own community, as is the case in the patriarchal community, they demonstrated political disobedience by expressing (which they still do) regret for all victims, especially those who became victims due to activities aimed at creating Greater Serbia, i.e., for victims who, according to the standardized national consensus, were to be either neglected or declared collateral damage on the way to the realization of the national project of "all Serbs in one state", "Karlobag-Karlovac-Virovitica", "Serbia to Tokyo").

Furthermore, they established networks of commemorative solidarity and friendship with the communities of those "others", with communities identified by the national consensus as hostile, as well as with groups of "others" in their own community, thus becoming traitors and enemies of that community, those that violate the unity and desired congregational spirit of the Serbian national being. As opposed to those who create and maintain such concord (namely,

"nationally conscious intelligentsia", neo-Stalinist and neo-quisling political actors, clerical-fascist circles, but also ordinary men and women who succumbed to the media-mediated establishment of national consensus), Women in Black subversively destroy that unity.

Women in Black have not been forgiven and are not being forgiven for bringing discord into the community by violating the congregational unison and for warning, like Cassandra, of the forthcoming evil that they do not want to see and do not want to face, they warn of the need to face evil and crimes committed in the name of our own community ("Not in my name!", "Let's not be deceived by our own people, nor by others!").

As Athena Athanasiu nicely systematized in her book *Combat Grief*, Women in Black have established an antithesis to the necrophiliac militaristic culture of death, shaken the foundations of mourning on which a woman's eligibility as a mother in a nationalist community rests, lamenting the ineligible, others and different: mourning enemy victims and their mothers, wives, sisters, daughters; Women in Black have built alliances with those denounced as superfluous and unnecessary, and have transcended the mere humanitarian dimension of activity by supplementing it with critical emotionality and active reciprocity. Women in Black are not forgiven for insisting on the traditions of anti-fascism and the belief that the unrealized potentials of multicultural coexistence are still present in Yugoslavia and that it is possible to live beyond ethno nationalist purity and fixed identities and roles. Finally, they cannot be forgiven for their active support of anti-war rebels, deserters and conscientious objectors.

Their occupation of public spaces must provoke resistance from those who insist on the already mentioned national consensus and homogenized congregation. Bringing otherness to the community, they encounter the repulsion of the protagonists of homogenization, and since these protagonists are bearers of power and authority, this repulsion turns into complementary repression of state and non-state actors: repression of Women in Black is carried out by (formal or informal) control of the state apparatus, but also that

part of society which was subject to the siren call of the national community ghost.

The call for collective responsibility upsets all those who would like to forget the recent past marked by crimes committed by our side (or even primarily by our side), and even more by those who tend to relativize these crimes or justify them, considering their protagonists' national heroes. And to the question whether that call falls on fertile ground or is stifled by a veil of ignorance, the answer lies ahead of us, in the future. But one thing is certain: only a community that accepts that call, and faces the dark sides of its past and its present, has a chance to survive. Others will inevitably face the same fate as Troy.

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