

THREE FREEDOM PLATFORM

TO PROTECT THE SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Considering that the European Commission noted that there are elements of a captured state in the entire region of the Western Balkans, which implies a state in which the authorities abuse public resources for private purposes, and for several years in the Progress reports on the progress of the Republic of Serbia, noted that progress has not been made in establishing a viable environments for the development of civil society and efficient dialogue with the state,

Bearing in mind that international institutions and organizations, such as the European Economic and Social Committee, Freedom House and the Global Alliance for Civil Participation - CIVICUS, point to the worrying trends of narrowing the space for civil society in the Republic of Serbia,

Considering that the Government of the Republic of Serbia has not adopted the Strategy for creating an incentive environment for the development of civil society in the Republic of Serbia, that the administrative, professional and financial capacities of the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society of the Government of the Republic of Serbia are weakening year after year, to the process of EU accession does not benefit substantive reforms, that the space for debate and dialogue between the public and the civil sector is narrowed at the daily level, that GONGO¹ and PONGO² organizations become the sole interlocutors in public discussions whose comments are accepted, and that in the Social and Economic Council of the Republic Serbia does not conduct active social dialogue,

Emphasizing the particular concern that civil society organizations are subjected to more and more frequent attacks in the pro-regime media, as well as attacks on the physical integrity, reputation and honor of their activists and their property, without the proper reaction of the authorities, and the condemnation of such developments from the highest levels of government in the Republic of Serbia,

Civil society organizations in the Republic of Serbia are launching the Three Freedom Platform for Civil Society in the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter: the Three Freedom Platform). The Three Freedom Platform is an open platform for the functioning of civil society organizations in order to protect and promote the freedom of association, freedom of assembly and the freedom of

¹ GONGO (*Government-organized non-governmental organization*) is nongovernmental organization established or sponsored by the Government with the aim of advocating for Government's political interest

² PONGO (*Party-organized non-governmental organization*) is nongovernmental organization established or sponsored by the political party with aim of advocating of party's political interest

information. These three freedoms provide space for the development of civil society and the active participation of citizens in public life.

The Three Freedom Platform will act as a joint block of civil society organizations (associations, professional and professional organizations, foundations, endowments and all other forms of association, including informal groups of citizens) to protect endangered freedoms and create conditions for the smooth participation of citizens in public affairs through development civil society.

The general goal of the Platform is to contribute to the democratization of society, the building of a rule of law and the active participation of citizens in the creation and implementation of social and economic reforms through the protection and full application of three freedoms: association, assembly and information.

The specific objectives of the Platform are:

- Establish a common channel of communication with representatives of the authorities in the Republic of Serbia and representatives of international institutions in order to fulfill the requirements contained in the Platform;
- Providing mutual legal assistance, media and professional support in the protection of property, physical integrity and interests of each signatory of the Platform and its members;
- Empowering citizens through information and involvement in monitoring the fulfillment of requests contained in the Platform;
- Communication and coordination with the growing number of different civic movements that are representing the attitudes and problems of different social groups in order to make the problem and demands of citizens more visible to decision-makers.

Requests to decision makers are as follows:

1) Requests to the Government and the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia:

- Ensuring the full exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly of all citizens, including in particular the urgent stoppage of campaigns and narratives of government representatives against organizers and participants of various protest gatherings of citizens and civil movements, as well as an objective consideration of protest requests, in particular those relating to pointing to a violation of the regulations of the Republic of Serbia by civil servants and holders of public office;
- Urgent taking of measures to ensure international standards for the protection of the freedom of the media and the right to freedom of information, including the change of existing practices that denigrate the key principles of media legislation, as well as the

appropriate change of regulations, in accordance with the reports and recommendations of domestic and international organizations;

- Conducting essential public debates and wider dialogue on key social issues and involving citizens, civil society organizations and professional public in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, the Law on State Administration, the Law on Local Self-Government, the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia, the Guidelines for the cooperation of the Negotiating Team for the conduct of negotiations on the accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union and negotiation groups with representatives of civil society organizations, the National Convention on the European Union and the Serbian Chamber of Commerce after the submission of the Screening Results, Guidelines for the involvement of civil society in the process of passing regulations;
- Objective consideration of the attitudes of civil society and professional public regarding the adoption and implementation of key reforms guaranteeing three freedoms (change of the Constitution, independence of the judiciary, right of the public to know, electing of members and the position of independent institutions, media regulations, decentralization, laws and other acts refer to civic participation);
- Applying criteria for involving civil society organizations in decision-making processes based on expertise, authority in the local community and the number of successfully implemented projects in order to halt the practice of replacing legitimate and relevant interlocutors with newly formed organizations with close authorities and / or political parties (GONGO and PONGO organizations);
- Public and unequivocal conviction of oppression, media campaigns and verbal and physical attacks on activists of civil society and journalists;
- Ensuring compliance with the legal mechanisms of the Republic of Serbia that enables the application of all the aforementioned requests at the local level.

2) Requests to the European Union:

- To monitor more effectively the reforms in the field of rule of law in the countries acceding to the EU, including the Republic of Serbia, by using the so-called Pribe report methodology, to provide an independent and comprehensive analysis of mechanisms that jeopardize democracy and lead to the capture of the state through the abuse of public resources and state institutions for political purposes;
- To establish a common permanent monitoring mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Guidelines for EU support to civil society in countries in the process of joining and combat the narrowing of the space for the work of civil society in the Republic of Serbia, together with the Council of Europe and the Organization for

Security and Co-operation in Europe, and informs the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the public about find outs;

- To take additional concrete and decisive steps by the end of 2019 in order to prevent the trend of narrowing the space for the work of civil society in the Republic of Serbia.

3) Requirements to international organizations:

- To publicly condemn any attack on civil society organizations in the Republic of Serbia committed by the officials and the other representatives of the authorities, as well as attacks on their property and the physical and psychological integrity of their members;
- To objectively consider its decisions on providing support to the Government of the Republic of Serbia in areas where the Government violates the proclaimed principles of international cooperation, especially those related to transparency and participation of public in decision-making.

Platform signatories:

1. A11-Initiative for Social and Economic Rights _____
2. Autonomous Women's Center _____
3. Belgrade Centre for Security Policy _____
4. Belgrade Centre for Human Rights _____
5. Catalyst Foundation _____
6. Centre for Cultural Decontamination (CZKD) _____
7. Policy Centre _____
8. Centre for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA) _____
9. Civic Initiatives _____
10. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia _____

11. National Coalition for Decentralization

12. Our Endowment

13. New Optimism

14. Partners Serbia

15. Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation

16. Serbia on the Move

17. Trag Foundation

18. Transparency Serbia

19. YUCOM – Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights

20. Youth Initiatives for Human Rights
