
THREE FREEDOMS PLATFORM

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION
FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION



Three freedoms under the magnifying glass

Review of Violations of Freedom of Association, Assembly and Expression in Serbia 1-15. September 2019

Freedom of expression

Journalist [Darko Mitrović](#) reported to the authorities the threats he received through the social network Instagram telling him that he would "meet him in the dark". Although he received and reported the first threat in late August, police have not yet identified the perpetrator. The request for an urgent investigation into this case and an end to the persecution of journalists was also highlighted by [Reporters Without Borders](#), who issued statement saying that attacks on journalists should not be tolerated. The threats that journalists are facing are a daily occurrence in their business, and this practice has been particularly exacerbated by the increasing number of attacks by the authorities and people in power on particular media or journalists individually.

Journalist [Suzana Trninić](#) has been fired, and her contract of employment cancelled by "TV Prva", and her TV show called the "Responses" on TV Prva cancelled, and that was one of the few shows on TV with national coverage that included guests not only supporting the current government. In her show, she presented "the other side", which could be heard only occasionally, especially if they criticized the current regime. On the occasion of her dismissal, Suzana Trninić stated that she was not surprised by what happened, because it was clear from the new editorial policy that she had no place on that television. This is not the first time that a program has been taken off the air, mainly programs of eminent journalists working on this TV station, as it was the case which was the case with cancellation of the last episode of the show ["Evening with Ivan Ivanović"](#). A dramatic change in editorial policy came after this television was bought in December 2018 by [Srdjan Milovanović](#), a brother of a senior official of the Serbian Progressive Party.

TV "PRVA" also cancelled the show ["Život priča"](#), authored and hosted by Tatjana Vojtehovski, a journalist who actively criticized the actions of the current government. Vojtehovski was often the target of [attacks and threats](#), which led to the arrest of one person at the end of 2018, and one month before the show was cancelled on Television. The president of Serbia, [Aleksandar Vučić](#), stated that the show was conducting "the most brutal campaign against him", but stated that no one has ever "made a problem" because of those attacks.

Professors at Gymnasium in Bela [Crkva Marija Petrovic Stankovic and Mirjana Mitrovic](#) lost their jobs after they refused to participate in a “botting” action (writing comments on news portals for the benefit of the ruling party and against political opponents) and going to rallies of the ruling party. Professor Mitrovic said she was instructed by the headmaster to address the Mayor of the Municipal Assembly, Marjan Aleksic, who later asked her to become involved in promoting the Serbian Progressive Party. After she refused, she lost her job. Former director Mirjana Pancic Budzek said she withdrew from the post because she suffered pressure because of her refusal to hire people on the criteria of party affiliation, and that she suffered the most pressure from Mayor Darko Bogosavljevic.

Freedom of association

[The Zajecar Children's Center](#), which deals with the inclusion of children with Down Syndrome and Paralysis, is threatened with expulsion from premises they use under a lease agreement concluded with the City of Zajecar. Although the contract was concluded for a period of 10 years, the city government in 2017 sent a [request to the association to vacate the premises](#) for allegedly “inappropriate use”. The proceedings are currently pending before the Court of Appeal, and the pressures continue on a daily basis. The reason for this is the clash between prominent activist Selena Ristic-Vitomirovic and current mayor Bosko Nicic. According to her, the current mayor promised her more than 10 years ago "that all the doors in Zajecar will be closed, and that she will sit on a stone and beg". Mr Nikic is a longtime mayor who is not unfamiliar with the practice of moving to parties who are in power. In the last elections in Zajecar, he based his campaign on representing the opposition to the Serbian Progressive Party, and shortly after the elections ended, he joined the party and became a member of the SNS Presidency. In this way, the pressure of the authorities on the work of CSOs is continued and additional uncertainty is introduced as it opens the door to the denial of acquired rights based on arbitrary interpretation and politically or personally motivated animosity.

Commission for the Implementation of the Competition for the Financing of Public Interest Programs in the Field of Consumer Protection for 2019. [rejected the application of the civil society organization "People's Parliament"](#) because of the improperly filed application, stating that "the application pages were not linked". The "People's Parliament" is a CSO which in the period 2016-2019. Implemented a project - consumer advisory center in Southeast Serbia, helping citizens realize individual consumer rights. Based on their activity and assistance, numerous consumer protection procedures have been initiated in Serbia.

[The Ethics Committee of the State Prosecutors Council](#) has initiated disciplinary proceedings against Goran Ilic, Deputy Republic Prosecutor and Deputy President of the State Prosecutors Council and three other members of the Chamber based on texts in the tabloids accusing them of associating with members of criminal organizations. The proceeding was initiated after the release of photos of alleged guests at the birthday party of one of the defendants, Stanislav Dukic. In this way, the conduct of media proceedings and public speaking continues to exert pressure on members of the "Association of Public Prosecutors and Deputy Public Prosecutors of Serbia" and "Judicial Research Centers" who are under attack by GONGO organizations for expressing critical views on the state of the judiciary system of Serbia.

Freedom of assembly

[Dobrica Veselinovic](#), one of the prominent members of the "Don't let Belgrade d(r)own" initiative, received a 20-day prison sentence following a verdict by a misdemeanor court for organizing protests after the demolition of the facilities in Savamala, even though he had previously paid a fine. This case is a continuation of attempts at institutional intimidation and pressure on activists, as evidenced by the numerous legal proceedings initiated against civil protest organizers aimed at effectively restricting freedom of assembly.

Immediately on the eve of the [Pride Parade](#), which was held this year under the slogan "I do not renounce", a group of nationalists tried to prevent the rally. This group wore slogans with content which was directed against members of the LGBT community, and on that occasion, there was a conflict with members of the Gendarmerie. The event itself took place without major incidents, especially due to the fact that Prime Minister, Ana Brnabic, attended and the presence of a large number of police officers providing the rally was evident. [The organizers](#), on the other hand, claim that they have received a large number of complaints from citizens that prevented police members from participating in the Parade, as well as inappropriate comments they have been exposed by law enforcement agencies.

[Students gathered in the "1 in 5 Million" Association](#) have occupied the building of the Rectorate of the University of Belgrade and demanded the urgent removal and cancellation of the doctorate of finance minister Sinisa Mali, which many academics and university professors claim was plagiarized. During their stay in the Rectorate building, a group of supporters of the ruling party gathered in front of and inside the building, insulting students, and there were attempts to physically interrupt the gathering. As stated by the participants of the counter rally, they came to the place at the invitation of the people of the Serbian Progressive Party. After numerous verbal assaults on participants of civil protests by top state officials, the practice of attempting to physically obstruct the assembled citizens is becoming increasingly widespread, seriously jeopardizing not only the freedom of assembly but also the physical security of the participants.