
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. October 2019

Freedom of association

1. Just before the football game began, Red Star hooligans stormed the premises of the [Pride Info Center](#). The incident was preceded by a gathering of fans at Terazije Square and a joint departure to the stadium where the match was played, and as they passed the ["Pride Info Center"](#) several bottles and cans were thrown at the window and door of the premises. The organization is often targeted by homophobic attacks, and the last such incident occurred in February this year following the protest ["Kosovo is Serbia"](#) when there was no police response after a security call because "no property was destroyed".
2. [The GONGO Association of Judges and Prosecutors of Serbia \(UST\)](#) has filed a motion to dismiss State Prosecutors Council member Stanislav Dukic, allegedly for his public statements challenging the legitimacy and representativeness of the UST. In addition to Dukic, the UST has requested the removal of four other members of the State Prosecutorial Council: Radovan Lazic, Sandra Kulezic, Svetlana Nenadic and Goran Ilic. Dukic was the target of an attack before, and at the request of the Republic Public Prosecutor Zagorka Dolovac disciplinary proceedings were initiated against him on the basis of tabloid allegations that he was related to people from the criminal milieu. The work of the GONGO Judiciary Association is further damaging the already alarming situation in this area.

Freedom of assembly

3. A [protest gathering of taxi drivers](#) which has blocked the busiest streets in the city [took place daily](#) in the capital of Serbia. The reason for this protest is the alleged illegal operation of association Car Go, which puts [taxi drivers](#) in an unequal position. Members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs said the protest was duly reported. Here, we point to the unequal treatment of

the police, which in the past year, in the case of spontaneous protests by citizens who stopped cars dissatisfied with the increase in the price of gasoline, delivered hundreds of misdemeanor reports to citizens, although their gathering lasted less and to a lesser extent affected the daily lives of citizens. Representatives of the taxi associations announced the radicalization of the protests and the blocking of bridges and major roads in the coming period, but shortly thereafter [decided not to block the highway and bridges](#), but only Slavia Square. During one of the protests, there were [several incidents of minor intensity](#) due to the taxi driver's confrontation with the outraged citizens, after which several persons were detained. After two weeks of strike, on Tuesday, October 15, the strike was terminated [after a meeting with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic](#), who, beyond its Constitutional powers, promised to solve the problems in accordance with the laws.

4. After students gathered in the "1 in 5 Million" Association [painted the squares](#) on the Republic Square in gold alluding to the fact that the gilding of the Square would cost less than its reconstruction) and painted the front door of the RTS in pink, students' representatives were interrogated on the basis of [criminal charges](#) filed against them by RTS Director Dragan Bujošević and the Directorate for Construction Land and Construction of the City of Belgrade. We remind you that numerous complaints have been filed against students in the previous period, and that the entire state summit led by President Aleksandar Vucic participated in the campaign to discredit them.
5. During the protests in Topli Do against the construction of a small hydroelectric power plant, there was a [physical confrontation](#) between residents who have been protesting for months and the private security that the investor hired to stop the protests and continue work on the small hydroelectric power plant construction project. The incident was preceded by fencing of construction sites by workers and security personnel. After months of protests, the investor announced that he was [abandoning construction](#) and would demand compensation from the state.
6. There is continued pressure on civic activists who organized or participated in protests in Serbia. A prominent representative of the [initiative „Don't let Belgrade d\(r\)own”](#), Radomir Lazovic, was first fined 100,000 dinars after which this sentence was modified to 60 days in prison and a distraint, appraisal and sale of movable property at the address of his residence was also determined. More than 30 proceedings are being conducted against the representatives of the Initiative for participating in the protests. In this way, the selective implementation and interpretation of the Law on Public Assembly continues and the freedom of assembly is narrowed by imposing unjustified and unreasonable sanctions against protesters.
7. Local Front activist from Kraljevo, Branislav Senicic, [was arrested](#) on a warrant issued against him for failing to pay a fine for allegedly destroying a billboard during the 2017 presidential campaign. Senicic was convicted of spilling black paint on an illegal billboard featuring the then

prime minister and presidential candidate, Aleksandar Vucic. He was detained while performing administrative duties in the presence of a large number of citizens.

8. During the promotion of the "Book of Belgrade" by Deputy Mayor Goran Vesic, a large number of [dissatisfied citizens](#) gathered in front of the Progres Gallery. Before, during and after the promotion, several incidents were recorded, primarily in the form of verbal altercations of dissatisfied citizens and members and officials of the ruling party to which Vesic himself belongs. After the end of the promotion, when leaving the gallery, [there were pushes and minor conflicts](#) between Vesic's security and the citizens. Following the promotion, Pink TV published a video of the alleged burning of Vesic's book, and for that act Goran Vesic indicted directly the former mayor and one of the opposition leaders, Dragan Djilas. On the other hand, [representatives of opposition organizations](#) who attended the rally accused Vesic and his security of [violence against citizens](#).

Freedom of expression

9. A day after KRIK released a picture of a "Serb List" representative from a meeting on the yacht of Bedzet Pacolli, the [family home of KRIK journalist Milica Vojinovic](#) was attacked. Although there is no evidence that the events are cause-and-effect, it is indicative that this is the second attack on the property of journalists of the portal after Dragan Pećo had the same problem two years ago, and the investigation did not produce any results, the perpetrators were not found and there is reasonable doubt that there is no will to resolve these and similar cases.
10. After more than 19 years of broadcasting, RTS has made the decision not to broadcast [„TV Mreža"](#) from independent production of the same name. The explanation states that such a decision was made after the expiration of the contract on the grounds that RTS already has a broadcast of a similar format in its own production - „Oko magazin". The director of the [independent production group](#) Vladimir Milić believes that the real reason is the potential political unsuitability because of the way that Production Company did its work until then.
11. [The editor of BIRN, Slobodan Georgiev](#), has been the target of many attacks and threats on social networks after President Aleksandar Vucic called BIRN in an interview with RTS for banning the „Serb List" campaign video during the election campaign in Kosovo. Georgiev received messages saying that he was "Haradin's or Thaci's Serb", that he "should be expelled" and similar. This is not the first time that the President of the Republic labels those journalists and portals that do not work in the way he considers acceptable, and it can be established that this is not an individual incident, but a manner of treatment of journalists and criticism.
12. Following a guest appearance on „Utišak nedelje" and talking about Finance Minister Sinisa Mali's controversial PhD, Professor Danijel Sinani was verbally attacked by Happy TV journalist

[Milomir Maric](#), who spoke about his "dubious last name" and falsely declared that Professor Sinani was teaching the ethnology of the Albanian national song, thereby inciting national hatred and intolerance. The target of Maric's attacks was also the Rector of the University of Belgrade, Ivanka Popovic, stating that her uncle was "the greatest Stalinist" and "a Novi Sad chief who destroyed the Belgrade press." [The Senate of the University](#) and the administration of the Faculty of Philosophy condemned the attacks, as well as the Ministry of Culture and Information, which called on broadcasters to respect the journalistic code and norms.

13. President of the Police Employees Union, Dejan Djukic, has filed a [criminal charge](#) against the well-known actor and prominent civic activist Branislav Trifunovic, for violation of Serbia's reputation, accusing him of having torn the Serbian flag during a play. The filing was preceded by a campaign launched against him by pro-government tabloids. Despite the fact that the complaint was filed for the alleged events that happened during a theater play, the absurdity of the situation is also contributed by the [testimony of the actor himself](#), who denies that the flag is being torn in that play at all. For years, Branislav Trifunovic has often been attacked by the tabloids because of his political views, as well as the fact that his brother is a controversial actor and president of the opposition movement.

14. High official of Serbian Progressive Party, Vladanka Malovic, [accused journalist](#) of "Deutsche Welle" and weekly newspaper "Vreme", Nemanja Rujevic, of being a "liar" and supporting the "fascist-tycoon" opposition alliance, whose representatives she accused of working with Albanians and foreign services to work against Serbian unity in Kosovo and Metohija. It is worrying that the dangerous practice of accusing journalist for acting against the interests of the state of Serbia, coming from the high SNS officials, has become a regular occurrence.

15. The "N1" and "Al Jazeera" news crews [were not allowed to attend](#) the ceremony of the inauguration of the Cibuk 1 wind farm, which was also attended by President Aleksandar Vucic. [The Presidency's intelligence](#) service said it was a decision by an investor who did not want to allow journalists to enter private property, and the decision was approved by the United Arab Emirates ambassador. The media that strive for objective reporting are increasingly unwelcome at numerous events, even when they are not political in nature, such as football matches, when the daily Danas team was twice denied accreditation by the Red Star football club. This practice indicates a continuous [violation of the Law on Public Information](#), which explicitly prohibits the discrimination of journalists and the media on any grounds.

16. [The campaign against N1 television](#) continued with the installation of a makeshift ramp and the inscription "You are leaving the Republic of Serbia, welcome to Luxembourg", alluding to the place of registration of this television, which state officials often accuse of working against Serbia's interests. The negative campaign continued with the insertion of hundreds of leaflets with the same message from men wearing surgical masks. [Jugoslav Cosic](#), the director of TV N1, estimated that the latest incidents were only an introduction to more serious actions against the television and that he was convinced that the provocations were organized from one center. On this occasion, the [Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia](#) came forward, and reminded

of the speeches of the highest government officials and marked them responsible for intimidation of this television.

17. [Worker at the "Krusik factory"](#) , A.O. who provided reporters with information about the alleged involvement of Minister of Interior Affairs Nebojsa Stefanovic's father in the arms trade has been arrested on charges of secrecy. The case of arms trafficking became the topic of international portals, after which an investigation was launched into how information leaks had occurred. Former Commissioner for Information of Public Importance, Rodoljub Sabic, pointed that the public remained deprived of more facts regarding the case. He also stated that referencing the disclosure of official secrets as a basis for arrest is anachronistic and that Prosecution's actions suggest the pressure on whistleblowers. In addition to the incomplete and insufficiently clear regulatory framework that regulates [internal and external whistleblowing issues](#), this practice further complicates and discourages citizens who might be in the role of whistleblower and identify and testify about criminal actions and acts.

18. The trial of Aleksandra Jankovic, [accused of sending threats and insults](#) to President Aleksandar Vucic and his children, began in Sabac. This express reaction of those in charge is not an indicator of the efficiency of the judicial system, but of the different standards used to protect the rights of persons in power or those close to them from those which apply when the rights of other citizens are threatened. This is supported by the huge number of unresolved threats against journalists and civil society organizations that are left without a closure.

19. The group "Journalists Against Violence Against Women" sent [public support to "Blic" journalist Ivana Jasnica Mastilovic](#) over a lawsuit filed against her by Mayor of Bruce Milutin Jelacic, who was accused of sexually harassing his associate Marija Lukic. Jelacic also sued the editorial office of Blic, which reported on his case for months, accusing them of damaging his reputation.