
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
15-30 September 2019

Freedom of Expression

After a guest appearance by a senior official of the Serbian Progressive Party on [N1 television](#), posters dawned in Belgrade, quoting: *Republic of Serbia- Goodbye, N1- Welcome to Luxembourg*. The goal of these posters was a public desecration of this television, that Djukanović has accused of doing suspicious business, because the state of Luxembourg is listed as the seat of the company. In this way, a long tradition of labeling TV N1 as a foreign interest representative, to which President Aleksandar Vucic, contributed with his statements, such as - *American N1 television*, along with a huge number other senior government officials and members of the ruling party, is continued.

Freedom of Association

The Board of Directors of the Belgrade Bar Association decided to delete [Blazo Nedic](#) from the lawyer's directory due to an alleged conflict of interest. Nedic pro bono serves as President of the *National the Association of Mediators of Serbia* and one of the registered legal representatives of *Partners for Democrats changes Serbia*. In an open letter to the public, he emphasized that there is no legal basis for such decision and that it is part of an orchestrated campaign against him and NGOs. It should be noticed that one of the reasons for the attacks on the CSOs was the start of implementation of the Law on Free Legal Aid, which allows these organizations to do the work of representing citizens. One number of lawyers had no understanding for this.

The KRIK media portal wrote about the work of the GONGO Association called the [Center for the Investigation of Corruption \(CIC\)](#), whose primary role is the defense of the interior ministry and to discredit organizations and individuals who express themselves critically about the work of Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Nebojša Stefanović. KRIK reporters have discovered that the CIC founder, businessman Aleksandar Papić, is a close associate of Minister Stefanović. One the CIC target was also the director of the Belgrade Center for Security Policy (BCSP) after the publication of texts about the dissatisfaction of police members with their material status as well as about suspicious public procurement within that ministry. Another target is Veljko Mijailović, the president of the Police Union of Serbia. In 2018, they participated in the monitoring of local elections, with special attention devoted to research the assets of opposition politicians. KRIK reporters tried to find CIC editors at the registered address, but found that it was a private apartment that has nothing to do with the association.

A few days before the Law on Free Legal Aid enters into force, a [Lawyers Committee of Human Rights-YUCOM](#) pointed out on unresolved issues that would have negative effect on the application of the law in practice. No register of legal aid providers has been established so far, and the issue remains open whether will the local government units, responsible for requests of assistance, receive appropriate permits from the ministry. The issue concerning associations and CSOs who are providing free legal assistance, has been challenged in public before, and the deficiencies in the Law that regulates the area, do not contribute to overcoming problems to a sufficient extent and leave room for new problems.

[19 civil society organizations](#) issued a public warning to the State Prosecutors Council, the Republican the Public Prosecutor and the High Judicial Council to stop state enslavement in the judiciary. The reason for the reaction is the initiation of disciplinary procedure by the Republic Attorney General against members of the State Prosecutors Council based on media inscriptions and accusations published in the pro-governmental tabloids concerning the connection of SPC members with people from the criminal milieu. Not arguing the need for an emergency examining of all doubts regarding the impartiality performance by individual members, CSOs point out the problem of conducting investigations through and on the basis of media reports. They also point out the problem of the removal of procedures from institutions thus damaging the reputation of these institutions, as well as targeting members who publicly criticize the situation in the judiciary, as in the case of the deputy Republican Public Prosecutor Goran Ilić.

Freedom of Assembly

Prominent member of the initiative *“Don’t Let Belgrade D(r)own”* [Dobrica Veselinovic](#) had a feud with a policeman when he tried to take a video record of the Presidency building at moment when the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, was supposed to leave it. Veselinović was more than 30 meters away from the entrance to the Presidency building, when a non-uniformed police officer approached him without showing any official identification, and not explaining which regulation was violated by taking a record of the building, nor on what basis

the person was required to suspend recording. The controversial event occurred just before the protest of the association *“Defend the rivers Stare planine”* on the occasion of the illegal construction of mini hydropower plants. Necessary note, two weeks ago Veselinović received a summons to serve his sentence even though he had duly paid the misdemeanor sentence. Also, members of the Initiative have so far received several dozen applications for organizing civil protests.

Students gathered in the [„1 in 5 million” association](#), locked up in the rectorate building, continued the blockade started on September 13th. They stated that they felt unsafe after being publicly criticized by Minister Mladen Sarcevic and President Aleksandar Vucic, who called their requests meaningless, accusing them of not being students but political activists who are obstructing other students in normal schooling and violate the autonomy of the University of Belgrade. This kind of rhetoric is well known to government officials, and have been used by them since the beginning of student protests in the rectorate building. The situation has culminated with the arrival of party activists of the ruling party who tried to prevent students protesting by attacking them, both verbally and. Once again, students blocked the Rectorate because of their dissatisfaction with the university avoiding to make a decision on the validity of the controversial doctorate of Finance Minister Siniša Mali.

After an agreement was reached on breaking the blockade Belgrade University, between Rector [Ivanka Popovic](#) and a representative students gathered in the *„ 1 out of 5 million”* association, President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic made a number of inappropriate comments on the work and behavior of the rector and students, ironically saying that it would have been good if the rectorate “wouldn’t work for another fifteen days”. He called the students' requests “idiotic” and belittled them due to their dressing and length of study. Rector Popovic has come under attack from state officials after saying that the incursion of SPP activists constitutes a violation of the University's autonomy. Due to validity of the controversial doctorate of Finance Minister Siniša Mali, she said that “procrastination in decision making violates the University's reputation”.