
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. November 2019

Freedom of assembly

Students gathered at the ["1 in 5 Million" association](#) gathered in the Rectorate building to hold a press conference, because the deadline for making the final decision on the dubious PhD of the Finance Minister Sinisa Mali has passed. On this occasion, several persons, engaged as private security, were waiting for them in the building of the Rectorate, who, according to the students, treated them violently. It is recalled that during an earlier student protest, an incident broke out when members of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party stormed the Rectorate building and attempted to deal with the assembled students. These cases not only call into question the autonomy of the University, but also seriously damage the reputation of this institution.

On the occasion of the announced [guest appearance of President Aleksandar Vucic](#) on the national service, students from the association "1 in 5 million" announced that they would wait for him in front of the RTS building to ask him certain questions, and several hundred citizens gathered in front of the building to support them. On the other hand, supporters of the Serbian Progressive Party organized a counter-protest at the same place, which was followed by a series of different incidents. In addition to throwing insults at citizens and certain opposition leaders, several attacks on [students](#), citizens, and [cameramen](#) were reported, and one of the most serious incidents occurred when a group of men without any official badges prevented free movement of citizens. Organizing counter-protests by the ruling party is a dangerous practice reminiscent of very negative experiences of the past and further deepens divisions in society. What is particularly dangerous is the fact that preserving the safety of the president is handled by suspicious groups instead of government bodies which have that authority. This creates parallel centers of power, which further instills citizens with fear and distrust of institutions.

Residents of [Belgrade settlement "Stepa Stepanovic"](#) announced that the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) has filed lawsuits against citizens protesting against the construction of a church in the area where the Health Center was originally planned. Citizens have been protesting for years because the plot where the Health Center was supposed to be constructed has been given, free of charge, to the SOC, believing that

they were thus tricked into buying apartments in this neighborhood and that they were being denied basic conditions for a normal life.

The National Coalition for Decentralization faced restrictions on freedom of assembly by setting unreasonable conditions for obtaining a permit to set up a promotional booth. When applying to the Pancevo city administration for setting up the stand, in addition to the usual documents required, they were also required to submit a certificate from the Tax Administration Secretariat that they had no debts based on Pancevo's original tax revenues. This case is an eloquent example of restriction of fundamental freedoms in the light of European standards which clearly state that this right must not be unjustifiably restricted in any way, and in particular by not imposing redundant administrative requirements that are in no way directly related to the gathering itself. In this way, not only is the fundamental right restricted, but the already underdeveloped normative framework is implemented in a way that is essentially a negation of human and civil rights.

Freedom of expression

[Jure Zubcic](#) from Zadar, Croatia, a Social Democratic Party councilor and civic activist who was motivated by similar actions launched by the Human Rights House in Belgrade and Zagreb, known for remaking graffiti that read "Kill a Serb" in "Kiss a Serb" said he was a victim of [censorship](#) conducted by [Radio Television of Serbia](#). In that interview, Zubcic pointed to the pernicious hatred policy pursued by the media under the control of the ruling party in Serbia and its president, Aleksandar Vucic, as well as a similar situation in Croatia. According to Zubcic, that part of the interview was cut when it was broadcast.

[Uros Janjic](#), who suffered grievous bodily harm on June 21 this year by getting stabbed by five young men for wearing an antifascist T-shirt, has been called in for questioning as a suspect in the crime of involvement in a fight. It seems paradoxical to charge someone who has been assaulted and the only person who has suffered grievous bodily harm, and it is especially dangerous that such relativization of violence be carried out in the case of rampage by neo-fascists, while their victims don't have adequate legal protection.

Famous actor and director [Dragan Bjelogrljic](#) was the target of the pro-regime tabloids because of his recent statements made at a panel organized by the daily Danas and in the famous TV show "Vece sa Ivanom Ivanovicem", in which he presented his thoughts on the bad situation in Serbian society. Immediately afterwards, the pro-government tabloid "Srpski telegraf" began a dirty campaign against him and his family, stating that his son had "hit a man while driving and fled." The fact that the disputed texts were released to the public 14 months after the car accident, as well as the false statements about fleeing from the scene, is a matter of retaliation for public statement. Dragan Bjelogrljic is just the latest in a long list of public figures whose media discredit has been conducted simply because they have expressed a position that is not in the will of the current government.

[Correspondent of "Vecernje novosti"](#) from Vranje, Jelena Stojkovic, received threats that she and her child would be killed, after writing an article about a footage of explicit content featuring an elementary school student in that city, that has spread. According to her, she received the threats from the mother of the girl from the mentioned case, although during the publication of the text, no identity or any other

information that could reveal the identity of the student were revealed. On this occasion, the [Western Balkans Regional Platform](#) also came forward, condemning this security threat.

[A negative campaign against N1 television](#) continued, aimed at discrediting that television station and intimidating journalists, and the latest occasion was the appearance of the leader of the Kosovo Self-determination movement, Albin Kurti, in the show "Pressing", hosted by N1 program director Yugoslav Cosic. It was Cosic who was one of the labeled subjects, as during the broadcast of that show, leaflets with the image of Albanian Prime Minister Eddie Rama and Yugoslav Cosic were thrown in front of the television station by unknown persons, with the inscription "there is some secret connection". The continuity of these attacks is [a serious attack on freedom of expression](#), and the greatest concern is caused by the chronic absence of response from the state institutions, who, after several attacks, did not reveal who was behind these actions, despite numerous appeals from organizations of journalists to investigate and arrest those responsible for the attacks.

[Aleksandar Obradovic](#), a whistleblower from "Krusik", who pointed to the Minister of Interior father's connection to the international arms trade, remains in house arrest. In an interview with the daily "Danas", he said that the top authorities are involved in the arms trade and that they are responsible for the collapse of that factory, as well as that the money from that trade mainly ends up in private or party funds. Instead of raising the level of whistleblower's protection, the government resorts to banalizing the notion by advertising people through the tabloids who present themselves as whistleblowers, but who are actually presenting inaccurate and false information about opponents of the government and their work.

[Journalist Biljana Lukic](#) has been the victim of insults and threats after a photo montage of her alleged tweet that justifies the suffering of Serbs killed in the detonation of Nis Express buses during the war in Kosovo, was spread on Twitter. This is a case of a new form of intimidation of prominent individuals who are vocal opponents of the current regime, which can have very dangerous consequences. Again, there was no response from the competent authorities.

The research, which says that [a large number of respondents](#) do not trust the public media service, was followed by a response by Radio Television of Serbia, which called the daily "Danas" an "opposition tabloid" and "Informer's twin brother". In this way, the public service acted like all those political actors who had been attacking the Danas newspaper in recent years, accusing their journalists of unprofessional and pro-opposition activities.

[The pro-regime tabloid „Informer“](#) continues the organized campaign against director of TV N1, Yugoslav Cosic, with the latest in a series of attacks attempting to indicate [that Cosic is receiving money](#) from foreign embassies and Albanians from Kosovo for his work. The article, entitled "Yugoslav Cosic gets € 249,862 from Siptar's" states that hundreds of thousands of euros have been paid to Albanian companies and the US Embassy in the past year on account of business consulting services. On this occasion, MP Marjan Risticvic also spoke, expressing doubt about the legality of these jobs and asked if Cosic paid tax on those revenues. [This orchestrated campaign](#) against Yugoslav Cosic aims to discredit the N1 television, and now it is becoming a common practice to do so in such a way that the individuals are targeted as foreign mercenaries.

Freedom of association

[Ratko Dmitrovic](#), journalist and former editor-in-chief of the „Novosti" newspaper, appealed for the adoption of a law declaring all non-governmental organizations whose work was (partly) financed from foreign sources “foreign agents” and all employees of such organizations “foreign agents” ". Dmitrovic is known as someone who often attacks anyone who in any way expresses disagreement with the current regime, and by such statements he contributes to reinforcing the narratives about the "traitorous" structure and mission of civil society organizations.