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# THREE FREEDOMS PLATFORM

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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 16-31. October 2019

#### Freedom of association

1. A "[Journalists Against Phantoms](#)" protest was organized in Belgrade by the Group for Media Freedom in response to the catastrophic position of journalists and the frequent [attacks on the N1 television](#). At this gathering there were provocations when several people distributed leaflets to the gathered people with the content directed against the N1 television. [The two contributors](#) said that they were merely stating their position, but a few days later they stated, that they had been manipulated by the person who had given them the leaflets and thought they were actually involved in advertising that television. Increasingly, methods of inciting people to provoke participants are used as a way of obstructing rallies, but luckily this time there was no negative consequences.

#### Freedom of expression

2. [Istvan Kaic](#), a fellow at the Institute for Public Policy and a media analyst, made a huge number of allegations and insults in his blog at the expense of media outlets and associations, as well as at a large number of journalists individually. The target of his attacks was primarily N1 television, which he accused of operating illegally because it was registered in Luxembourg as an offshore area. This attack follows repeated accusations by senior officials of the ruling party and several actions directed against that television. For this reason, Kaic devoted the most space to challenging N1 program director Jugoslav Cosic. In addition, Kaic expressed himself in a very rude and vulgar way about the journalist Miodrag Sovilj, whom he said was "another with an unhygienic past", and the journalists of this television station Igor Bozic and Emina Kovacevic were not spared also. In this outburst of heinous accusations, Kaic attacked other journalists. For example he called Snezana Congradin a "former heroin addict", and attributed similar epithets like "drug addicts", "druggies" and "alcoholics" to Tatjana Lazarevic

(KoSsev portal), Branko Cecen (CINS), Stevan Dojcinovic (KRIK), Zeljko Bodrozic (Kikindske), Vuk Cvijic (NIN) and Nemanja Rujevic (DW). The epithets of the "failed journalist" and the "book example of obsessive neurosis" were given to journalist Tamara Spaic and journalist Predrag Popovic. Such and similar speeches are not a coincidence or an isolated incident, but a continuation of an orchestrated campaign against all those who are critical of the current regime. Kaic also had the opportunity to further clarify his claims on nationally televised television (TV Happy).

3. During a [panel about retransmission](#) organized by the Ministry of Culture and Information, ruling party MP Marjan Risticovic said that the N1 and Nova S televisions were operating illegally. Risticovic has also made numerous accusations and insults at N1 television in his earlier parliamentary appearances, and the REM secretary general denied his claims, saying that these televisions have valid licenses to broadcast their program in Serbia in accordance with European rules on freedom of reception and retransmission.
4. Head of the city administration of Nis [Ljubisa Janic](#) physically assaulted „Nis Initiative" councilor Srdjan Nonic and on that occasion broke the phone from him that Nonic tried to shoot him in the official parking lot. The day before, Councilor Nonic was kicked out of the city hall building where he was filming hallways waiting for the mayor to appear at work. After the incidents, Janic first avoided answering journalistic questions, and afterwards [denied that physical contact](#) had taken place, even though the video clearly shows that he was not telling the truth. This case shows that high-level officials are not only unwilling to face criticism but also sometimes exceed the limits of permissible behavior.
5. Professor of Faculty of Economics, University of Belgrade, [Danica Popovic](#) is again being targeted by tabloids and ruling party officials for her critical expression of government work. The attacks intensified after the topic of the dubious doctorate of Minister Sinisa Mali was returned to the public spotlight. Professor Popovic is accused of "plagiarism of translate" and of abusing the work of her recently deceased colleague. On the occasion of these attacks, more than one hundred Belgrade University professors and intellectuals [have signed a letter of support](#) for Professor Popovic calling for the tabloid's campaign to end. This case is a continuation of the practice of media persecution of public figures that have clearly identified themselves in the public as being in opposition to the current authorities.
6. [Supporters of the Serbian Radical Party](#) verbally attacked activists and torn a petition who asked for the ban for presence the party's president, Vojislav Seselj at the Book Fair. The petition was launched by writer and member of the opposition Free Citizens Movement, Zivojin Ivkovic, who believes that there is no room for hate speech conducted by a man who has been convicted of crimes against humanity, at the Book Fair. Despite the incident and subsequent intimidation by sending a group of men to visit the booth at which Ivkovic was exhibiting, the reaction of the competent authorities was absent.

7. [Ratko Dmitrovic](#), a journalist and former editor-in-chief of „Novosti“, attacked an assistant professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, Alexei Kishjuhas, by sending him a bunch of insults alluding to his ethnic background. Kishjuhas has been known for years as a columnist for the daily „Danas“ and a critic of the government, while Dmitrovic is said to be one of the most aggressive defenders of the current regime, who often attacks anyone who expresses criticism at the authorities.
  
8. [Aleksandar Obradovic](#), a worker at the Krusik factory who has been accused of giving confidential information after pointing out, as a whistleblower, the connection of the father of the police minister, [Nebojsa Stefanovic](#), to international arms trade, has been extended to house arrest. After a protest in support of Obradovic was held in Valjevo, State Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior Biljana Popovic Ivkovic, on Pink television, accused Obradovic of espionage and working against the state of Serbia. President Vucic also personally participated in the campaign against Obradovic, who denies Obradovic the status of a whistleblower, citing his mother's alleged high-level function in this factory and that this is his act as revenge for the fact she was fired as a director. This is a continuation of the practice of publicly [targeting people as traitors](#), but also an indication that institutions are incapable of protecting whistleblowers and enforcing the already flawed law governing their protection.
  
9. [„Serbian List“](#) from Kosovo accused Bishop Grigorja of being a "politician" and of being bothered by the policies of President Aleksandar Vucic, who is credited for "unity" and "prosperity" of the Serb people in Kosovo and Metohija. The reason for such attacks was the statement of Bishop Grigorija that it is not normal for one to boast of the result of over 90% of the votes won and that this is not good for a society. Bishop Gregorije has been the target of earlier attacks by officials from the ruling party officials for publicly stating his views on President Vucic's award from the Serbian Orthodox Church and for the support that Church gives to Vucic's politics.