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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  
1-15 December 2019

### Freedom of Association

1. Fourteen civil society organizations filed a [complaint](#) against the Belgrade Bar Association regarding their announcement that the lawyers who applied for free legal aid working in civil society organizations would be subject to an assessment by the competent bodies of the Bar Association. This is an attempt to intimidate those lawyers who work in the non-governmental sector and who are accused of unfair competition with their colleagues. The complaint states that the process of deleting lawyers who are statutory representatives of NGOs has begun, which limits their right to work in the public interest.

### Freedom of Assembly

2. The ["1 in 5 million" association](#) demanded that the police detect and prosecute those responsible for assaulting a student and a member of that association, Srdjan Markovic, or else they would stop reporting protests that have been taking place every Saturday in Belgrade for over a year. We recall that Markovic [was attacked](#) by a man filming other participants in the protest, but police did not provide identity information or whether a criminal complaint was filed against the person.

### Freedom of Expression

3. [Journalists of N1 Television](#) were forbidden to report from the session of the Assembly of the Municipality of Vrbas at which the citizens of Ravno Selo wanted to address the councilors and introduce them to the problem of faulty water in that village. This case is not only a violation of the right to the undisturbed work of journalists, but also a violation of the principle of publicity of local self-government bodies. The frequency of such procedures that selectively and arbitrarily decides who is and who is not fit to do their job is worrying.

4. For the first time since its establishment, [the weekly newspaper NIN](#) came out without a cover photo. Given that the central theme of the issue was the "Krusik" affair, the editorial board's initial decision was to put a photo of President Aleksandar Vucic from the arms fair, which provoked public backlash. Within hours of the announcement of the new issue, an extremely intense campaign was launched against the newspaper, which included senior Serbian Progressive Party officials. The fact that the shot in the photograph contained a shotgun was enough to accuse [the NIN of calling for the assassination of the president](#). The editor-in-chief of NIN weekly, Milan Culibrk, denied such allegations and explained that the controversial photo had been repeatedly published by the Tanjug news agency and emphasized that the pressures they were exposed to would not prevent them from continuing to write about the events at the ["Krusik" factory](#).
5. After the affair concerning the front page of the weekly newspaper NIN, posters with [a fake NIN cover](#) and the title "Zvezdan Jovanovic formally awarded NIN Award" appeared in Novi Sad with a picture of the man who was convicted of the murder of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic. In addition, a fake photo was posted, depicting the editor-in-chief presenting the award to Jovanovic. The purpose of this terrifying campaign is to reinforce the tabloid speculation that this week's controversial front page was a call to murder, and to discredit the weekly, thus stopping writing on the Krusik affair and numerous other affairs that have been catching the public's attention lately.
6. [Minister of Education](#), Mladen Sarcevic verbally assaulted a N1 journalist after she asked him who is responsible for the very poor result of Serbian students in the PISA test. Instead of answering, the minister replied to the journalist that she "did not listen in the class" and "that she would certainly do very poorly in the PISA test", after which he left the press conference. Arrogant behavior towards journalists who ask him uncomfortable questions is not new to Minister Sarcevic, who, for this reason, left the show on N1 television six months ago.
7. [Aleksandra Jankovic Aranitovic](#), who is on trial for insulting Aleksandar Vucic and his children through the social network Twitter, is still in custody. Her lawyer, Aleksandar Olenik, pointed out that this was a classic abuse of detention, a measure used to ensure the presence of a defendant at trial, which in this case is used as a punishment for political opponents.
8. [Aleksandar Obradovic](#), a whistleblower who introduced the public with potential abuses of the Krusik factory where he is employed still remains in house arrest, after more than two months. His lawyer filed a motion for termination of house arrest for the third time, saying that there were no longer legal grounds for detention, which should be decided on December 18. In the meantime, Aleksandar Obradovic has been awarded by the Human Rights House in Belgrade on the occasion of International Human Rights Day.
9. [Igor Juric](#), founder of the Tijana Juric Foundation attacked the Child Rights Centre on Twitter, asking whether they were "putting the wind in the back of the murderers of children" through their actions. This attack was triggered by a joint initiative of several civil society organizations and representatives of the professional public aimed at the Constitutional Court, demanding that the constitutionality of the adopted amendments to the Criminal Code be questioned. These amendments introduced a sentence of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. Mr. Juric's guest appearance on Radio Television of Serbia was followed by numerous negative

reactions addressed to the Child Rights Centre and other CSOs. Among them, Pavle Bihali, founder of Levijatan movement, known for nationalistic statements and spreading nationalistic hatred and intolerance stood out. The aforementioned public appearances were followed by [death threats](#) to individuals from organizations, which forced them to file criminal charges. Threats of death and lynching on social media continued after the appearance of the [program director of Civic Initiatives](#) on N1 television with Igor Juric. This only contributes to the [ongoing stigmatization](#) of the civil sector, which is often targeted by a section of the public that describes them as traitors and foreign mercenaries.

10. [The Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia](#) organized a protest on the anniversary of the attempted murder of their colleague Milan Jovanovic. His house was set on fire in December 2018, and several shots were fired at the front door of his home. Former Grocka mayor Dragoljub Simonovic has been charged with organizing the attempted murder. A year later, no verdict was rendered in this case, and one of the reasons was the frequent adjournment of the trial due to the alleged absence of the accused Simonovic. This sends an extremely bad message that journalists are not adequately protected and that an attack on their physical integrity can take place without prompt and adequate punishment.