
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
1-16. Januar 2020

Freedom of Expression

[Belgrade's Pride Info Center](#) was the target of attacks by some protesters who participated in a protest because of the Law on Religious Freedom in Montenegro. On that occasion, hooligans were banging on [the front door of the premises](#), destroying property and shouting slogans calling for violence against LGBT members. The slow reactions of competent officials as well as inadequate, and sometimes the absence of sanctions against the perpetrators of such offenses result in frequent attacks on the premises of the Pride Info Center. We recall that similar incidents occurred during two major public gatherings in 2019 and also a more serious reaction was absent.

Unknown burglars abounded the office of portal "[Kolubarske.rs](#)", but no other damage was done, apart from a search of drawers and scattered papers. [Editor of portal](#) Darija Rankovic said she believed that the attack was underpinned by local officials and that the purpose of the burglary was to intimidate journalists. The allegations are supported by the fact that the journalists of this portal mostly dealt with the investigation of corruption, misuse of budget funds and suspicious public procurement, which caused them to be targeted by the authorities. The attack was condemned by [NUNS](#) and [UNS](#), and the perpetrators have yet to be found.

The commissioner of the Serbian Progressive Party for the city of Nis and the owner of the Copernicus television, [Zvezdan Milovanovic](#), insulted reporters of the portal „Juzne vesti" for publishing a text about party employment in that city. After the text and photos of the correspondenc on a Viber group in which members of the local SNS commission spoke about which party members would get the job, were posted Milovanovic sent more insults to a „Juzne vesti" journalist and threatened to file a lawsuit. In recent years, it has been a common practice in Serbia that officials who dislike objective writing of journalist, enter into open conflicts with them without choosing words, often using insults and threats.

[The news agency "FONET"](#) has protested against the discriminatory decision of the Belgrade City Administration because they were not notified or invited to report on the control of works in a Belgrade street by Mayor Zoran Radojicic. The editorial board of „FONET” indicates that in this way the Law on Public Information and Media has been violated, which prohibits all forms of media discrimination. Unfortunately, it is often the case that government officials selectively invite the media, preventing them from pursuing the purpose of journalistic work, which is to report to citizens on topics of public interest.

Famous basketball coach [Dusko Vujosevic](#) fenced off his interview with Mondo.rs because, according to him, everything he said about current president Aleksandar Vucic was thrown out. Vujosevic is known as a keen critic of the ruling party, and his conflicts with President Vucic have been around since the time when Vujosevic was head of the sports association and coach of the Partizan Basketball Club.

The Ministry of Culture and Information instituted misdemeanor proceedings against the weekly ["Vreme"](#) for covering the front pages of tabloids that were full of photographs and information about the abduction of a minor girl from Nis. The controversial content was within a text that addressed the issue of norm violations by most pro-government tabloids. The ministry explains the move by allegedly violating the law by the editorial staff of weekly "Vreme", because the texts showed the front pages of those tabloids against which proceedings had been initiated for violation of the relevant regulations. Such a case is not common in relevant comparative practice and represents a dangerous relativization and equalization of the guilt of those who report that a journalistic ethics violation has occurred with the guilt of those who have [directly violated their regulations](#).

Freedom of Assembly

After the case against [Radomir Lazovic](#), an activist of the "Don't let Belgrade d(r) own" initiative, was instituted for printing graffiti "A crime scene" on the fence of the Belgrade waterfront construction site, it was announced that the court had ordered his arrest. Lazovic and other activists of the initiative repeatedly participated in organizing protests seeking answers who is responsible for the demolition in Savamala, but with the exception of dozens of misdemeanor proceedings initiated against them, the investigation of the case in question did not produce any results. Given the number and frequency of proceedings against members of this Initiative, it can be determined with a high degree of certainty that it is a systematic attack and a conscious restriction on the freedom of assembly of citizens in order to silence those who ask questions that the regime has no answer to.

After their basketball game, [Red Star supporters](#) staged an unannounced protest in front of the Montenegrin embassy in Belgrade and on that occasion lit the flag of the Montenegro. Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia condemned the act, there was no response from the competent authorities so that no person was arrested or prosecuted in this case. Statements by state officials, as well as senior officials of the ruling party, are proof that there is no political will to investigate this offense. The incident occurred shortly after a large-scale protest against the Law on Religious Freedoms in Montenegro, which also included incidents such as attacks on the local Pride Info Center.