
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 Februar 2019

Freedom of Expression

[Marjan Ristic](#), MP of ruling Serbian Progressive Party continued to attack N1 television while conducting parliamentary work. Ristic attended a session of the Parliamentary Committee on Culture and Information on the election of two REM members, and, although he is not a member of that committee, he asked candidates questions alluding to the allegedly illegal work of N1 television on charges that they are conducting propaganda in Serbia.

[Vesna Malisic](#), editor-in-chief and journalist of the weekly NIN, was the target of the tabloids negative campaign because of her views on the political crisis in Montenegro following the adoption of Law on religious freedom. The tabloid campaign has been backed by numerous social media accounts, especially on Twitter, accusing her of "anti-Serb activity and NATO lobbying." On this occasion, the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability ([CRTA](#)) responded by supporting Vesna Malisic.

[Supporters of the Serbian Radical Party](#) and the security of their president, Vojislav Seselj, attacked activists of the Humanitarian Law Center and kicked activist [Natasa Kandic](#) out of the hall. Activists of the Humanitarian Law Center have been protesting against the promotion of the books of convicted criminal against humanity Vojislav Seselj which are denying the genocide committed in Srebrenica. [The Human Rights House](#) issued a statement demanding that the use of public resources be discontinued for the purpose of promoting war criminals and denying genocide crimes, bearing in mind that this incident occurred in the hall of the city municipality of Stari grad.

The Municipal Committee of the Serbian Progressive Party in Vranje has accused portal [„Info Vranjske"](#) of spreading falsehoods and anti-regime propaganda, announcing the formation of a legal team to handle the lawsuits against this portal. As an immediate cause for these attacks was the text published by the portal, which stated that four criminal charges were filed against the principal of Elementary School „Petar Devedzic” [Civic Initiatives](#) assessed it as an attempt to stifle media freedom and urged institutions to act in accordance with the Constitution and laws and not be subject of political pressure from the ruling party.

The leader of the Serbian Radical Party, [Vojislav Seselj](#), wrote a series of derogatory tweets calling for the rape of MP Marinika Tepic, with a number of derogatory words at the expense of the deceased journalist and editor-in-chief of the weekly „Vreme" Dragoljub Zarkovic. The authorities did not respond to these hatreds, but due to a violation of the terms of use, he was terminated on Twitter. However, this was followed by a new attack, this time on journalists of the daily „Blic", whom he did not want to answer the question about the alleged purchase of the car, but told them that "when he came to Blic he would leave bloody marks behind". Seselj has used hate speech in public for years and has been sending the worst insults and threats to political opponents, but so far there has been no reaction from the institutions, which leads to the conclusion that such actions have the tacit support of the ruling structures.

After a cable operator owned by Telekom canceled broadcasting [N1 television](#), dissatisfied citizens organized a protest in support of that television, demanding that all citizens who pay for Telekom's services be allowed to watch the television program. The organizers of the gathering and the speakers emphasized that refusing to distribute the programs of N1 television is an attractive application of suppression of media pluralism and called on the [EU institutions](#) to become more active in solving this problem. At the same time, the independent portal "Cenzolovka" announced that the Electronic Regulatory Body has rejected all reports against the pro-government television „Pink" because of the propaganda and the long-running campaign against the N1 television. A report from the Electronic Regulatory Body session pointed out that the hearing was attended by a representative of Pink TV and that, after the discussion, it was unanimously adopted that there was no room to initiate proceedings. The portal [„Cenzolovka"](#) recalls the extensive campaign launched by Pink television after President Aleksandar Vucic was admitted to hospital due to health problems, blaming journalist N1 Miodrag Sovilj, who had asked the president embarrassing questions earlier that day the Krusik factory affair. Cenzolovka concludes that this move puts REM once again in a position to support the ruling party and that it is high time that REM bears the consequences for the catastrophic situation and position of the media in Serbia.

Freedom of Association

[Fourteen civil society organizations](#) have filed a complaint against the Belgrade Bar Association with the International Bar Association on their invitation to the lawyers to enroll in the list of providers of free legal aid, which discriminated civil society organizations that provided legal assistance to deprived citizens for years. On this occasion, civil society organizations also addressed the Belgrade Bar Association itself, but this did not produce any results and the problem concerning the future work of lawyers employed in the non-governmental sector remained unsolved.

Freedom of Assembly

[Dobrica Veselinovic](#), an activist of the Initiative „ Don't let Belgrade d(R)own" , received another misdemeanor charge, this time for organizing a „[Justice for David" solidarity protest](#). This is just one in a series of proceedings against civic activists for organizing unreported protests. In this particular case, it was a protest that was a reaction to police brutality during a citizens' gathering in Banja Luka, which fulfilled all the criteria for a protest to be considered as a spontaneous protest. In this way, the government has for years been trying to stifle civic activism and prevent the actions of individuals who oppose it. [Veselinovic](#) was also sentenced to a fine of 100,000 dinars for organizing protests after the deaths of two workers on a construction site in Belgrade. We remind that more than 30 misdemeanor and criminal proceedings are being conducted against members of this Initiative for organizing and participating in public meetings.

[Dejan Bagaric](#), a member of the Youth of the Democratic Party, was questioned on suspicion of committing the crime of "destruction and damage to someone's" during a performance he held during a protest in Republic Square in October 2019. On this occasion, a group of young people painted parts of the Square in gold, alluding to the high cost of reconstruction of the area. For the same reason, students from the "1 to 5 million" association have been interrogated by the police.