
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 March 2020

Freedom of Expression

1. According to a report published by the international organization "[Freedom house](#)", Serbia is in the category of partly free countries. Serbia, along with thirty more countries, is in the group of countries with the largest decline in freedoms in the last ten years. The report states that "In Montenegro and Serbia, independent journalists, opposition leaders, and others viewed by the authorities as enemies have faced harassment, threats, and sometimes violence." These results show that the trend of suppression of fundamental rights continues and that the passive attitude of the competent authorities results only in a further deterioration of the already bad situation. Prime Minister [Ana Brnabic](#) said she does not agree with this assessment, and that media freedom was never at a higher level and that there are media in Serbia that are openly critical of the government.
2. The Council of the Electronic Media Regulatory Authority put the work of [N1 and Nova S televisions](#) under the control during the election campaign. Doubt about the good will of this move is caused by the fact that the minutes from that session have not been published yet, as well as a very strict explanation stating that this is a usual measure in accordance with the law and by-laws. Considering the frequent attacks on these televisions, as well as the fact that it is still not possible to watch the N1 program through controlled cable operators by the "Telekom", the measure seems to be another form of pressure on the reporting and operation of that media company.

3. The false announcement that a [Pride Parade](#) will be held in Leskovac has motivated several hundred mostly young people to protest and demand a ban on the alleged rally. The journalist of the portal "Jugmedia", Dragan Marinkovic was also attacked on the occasion. A few days later, a 25-year-old young man from Leskovac was arrested for the attack, and further proceedings were initiated. Police was also targeted by the hooligans at the protest, and messages of violence and lynching the members of the LGBT community were also shouted. Apart from one arrest, there was no more serious reaction from the authorities, which once again sent a message that homophobia could go unpunished.
4. [The Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina](#) (IAJV) has warned the public that the associates of the association are again exposed to attacks and labeling and that the state shows a willingness to tolerate violence. IAJV executive director Veljko Milic is described as a "devil's advocate" and an associate of a "separatist organization" who regularly sues "real patriots". The target of the attack was IAJV program director Dinko Gruhonjic, whom Goran Davidovic, for the wide public known as the Fuhrer, labeled Serbia's enemy. The practice of labeling journalists has been going on for many years, even decades, but the state has not yet shown the minimum will to protect those journalists who do their jobs professionally and objectively inform the public.

Freedom of Association

1. [The Office for Cooperation with Civil Society](#) responded to a report by Civic Initiatives on shrinking the space for work of CSOs to act and expressed their concern about the threats with which the CSOs are facing. They also stressed that they do not dispute the importance of stronger ties and better cooperation between the non-governmental sector and state bodies. On the other hand, they also point to certain restrictions regarding certain areas, such as freedom of assembly and expression, which are the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior, and Ministry of Culture and Information. They conclude that greater involvement of civil society is needed to advance the process of making important decisions and documents.
2. [The Association of Journalists of Serbia](#) announced that the largest number of members of the selection boards who decide on the allocation of money for project co-financing are those associations that regularly defend Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. It is the Comnet Association of Electronic Media (ComNet) and the Professional Journalists Association of Serbia (PROUNS). The statement said that the formation of 67 committees has been confirmed so far, and that the largest number of their members, 38 of them, has been appointed on the proposal of these associations. In this way, the existence and functioning of traditional media associations is devalued, and the non-transparent and dubious financing of media projects impairs the financial sustainability and operation of the media, especially at the local level.

Freedom of Assembly

1. The Serbian government has adopted a recommendation to ban all public gatherings indoors with more than 100 people, due to the risk of the spread of the Korona virus. At the same time, the [Prime Minister](#) and top state officials continued to carry out media activities that are an illicit form of election campaign, the so-called official's campaign. For this reason, the CRTA filed a complaint against Prime Minister Ana Brnabic, but she explicitly stated that she would not cease such practices. The said ban on public gatherings does not apply to this type of event, and it is to be expected that they will be used more frequently as a means of promoting the ruling party.