
THREE FREEDOMS PLATFORM

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION
FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION



Three freedoms under the magnifying glass

Review of the violations of the basic freedoms during the state of emergency in Serbia 13-15 April 2020

Freedom of association, assembly and expression

1. [The "Don't let Belgrade d\(r\)own" Initiative](#) responded to the attack on their activist Radomir Lazovic, coming from a fake Facebook page, "COVID 19 Serbia", which had previously published messages that had served to discredit journalists or opposition politicians. Facebook users in Serbia often come across posts coming from this page, given that they are a sponsored page, which clearly indicates that this is a well coordinated and targeted action. The Initiative recalls that the Twitter social network has deleted more than 8,000 fake accounts, the sole purpose of which was to promote the president of Serbia and the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, noting that the focus of the party's internet "bot" team has now apparently shifted to Facebook and that the platform is now it serves to spread hatred for political opponents. We would like to remind you that the editor-in-chief of the Beta news agency, Dragan Janjic, and journalist Ana Lalic were also the target of this page. Despite numerous reports, this page has not yet been discontinued, and no action has been taken by the authorities to determine who is behind it and who incites hate messages against people who think differently.

2. The Journalists' Association of Serbia (UNS) has announced that the issue of threats addressed to the "Direktno.rs" portal is on the Council of Europe (SE) [platform for the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists](#). As a reminder, a threatening content message was sent to the portal's address stating that "they should all be killed". Such a threat was preceded by the public labeling of the portal by Prime Minister Ana Brnabic and allegations of opposition leader involvement in its ownership structure. Following reactions from domestic and international associations, police said they had determined that the threat did not originate in Serbia, and that the identity of the person who referred it had not yet been discovered.

3. [The SBB company](#) has informed the public that a cyber attack has taken place on their site, which has led users of that cable and internet operator to face interference with the operation of the internet and cable television. The company said they were negatively surprised by the fact that, during the attack, their customers were receiving messages from a state-owned Telekom, a company that was spreading falsehoods at the expense of SBB, which is why they announced that these messages would be part of evidence in a lawsuit he will submit to the police and the High-Tech Crime Prosecutor's Office.

4. [The journalist, Ana Lalic](#), who was arrested for publishing a text about the events and situation at the Clinical Center of Vojvodina, is still the [target of attacks](#) by tabloids and fake social media sites. The latest in a series of such attacks is a paid advertisement highlighting her image and caption that she is working against Serbia's interests. Although she did not respond to previous attacks and tabloid headlines, journalist Lalic said she considered these ads an explicit security threat and would seek protection from the authorities and file lawsuits against all portals and sites calling for her lynch.

5. [The daily "Kurir"](#) continues its campaign against independent media and opposition organizations, calling them "the crown of profiteers who knowingly demolish the healthcare system for their own interests". This time again, the target of the attack is N1 TV director Jugoslav Cosic, and besides, the attacks are aimed at the owners of that television, Dragan Solak and Nikos Statoluppol, as well as representatives of the opposition Alliance for Serbia. These entities are also accused of allegedly attacking the head of the Crisis Staff, epidemiologist Dr. Predrag Kon and announcing his withdrawal from the Crisis Staff. Such a campaign of the daily "Kurir" has been going on for years and is a common way of their operation, which was certainly encouraged by the lack of reaction of the competent authorities who never responded to such inscriptions, nor, except in private lawsuits, did the "Kurir" bear any sanctions for such treatment.

6. [The Mayor of Leskovac, Goran Cvetanovic](#), said that any information released outside the official site of the city administration "will have consequences sooner or later and that it will be a shame on someone". He also warned reporters that they should not "chase exclusives" and therefore publish untested news, noting that penalties were doubled in the state of emergency. Such statements by government officials addressing open threats to journalists are unacceptable and constitute an attempt to intimidate and obstruct the work of the media.

7. Journalists reporting on the state and conveniences of the crisis caused by the corona virus pandemic face a serious limitation in their inability to attend Crisis Staff press conferences. In addition, they were not allowed to participate via video link, so they could not in any way make direct contact with members of staff. Instead, they have the option to email questions every day until 2pm. However, such a solution raises a number of problems, starting with how to choose the questions to be asked at the conference and avoiding reading certain questions, to avoiding answering questions. For this reason, the ["Fonet"](#) news agency has decided not to participate in such conferences until further notice and will no longer refer questions to the Crisis Staff address, which was supported by the editorial staff of the [daily "Danas"](#). This prevents the normal functioning of the media, but the greatest harm is suffered by citizens who will remain deprived of answers to important questions.

8. [Editor-in-chief of the portal "Embargo" Predrag Jeremic](#) said that the clans in the judiciary were trying to stifle the media, responding to a verdict against the daily "Srpski telegraf" because of the unfounded and offensive texts about prosecutor Stanislav Dukic. We remind that Republican Public Prosecutor Zagorka Dolovac initiated a disciplinary proceeding against [Stanislav Dukic](#) and several of his colleagues, based on texts in the tabloids stating that "underground people" were guests at Dukic's birthday party. In addition to Dukic, Judge Danica Kosovac was the target of the attack. Representative of the well-known GONGO sssociation "Monitoring, Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Transparency" Mario Spasic also attacked the two prosecutors and judges, calling the verdict a scamming of the media. The practice of conducting tabloid campaigns against people who think differently has become a regular practice in Serbia, but lately their victims have been increasingly represents of the judicial branch, which is a particularly harmful and dangerous phenomenon.

Other freedoms

During the State of Emergency, Civic Initiatives will also report on violations of other human rights.

1. The Speaker of the European Parliament Delegation to Serbia, [Tanja Fajon](#), and the European Parliament Reporter for Serbia, Vladimir Bilchik, appealed to the Western Balkan countries to allow Parliament's smooth operation in overseeing the implementation of anti-corona virus measures. Fajon also points out that, regardless of the severity of the crisis, suspending democracy cannot be an option, and Bilchik had a similar message, recalling that Parliament has a key role to play because the institution represents the voice of citizens. Defense Minister [Aleksandar Vulin](#) responded to their remarks with inappropriate sarcasm, saying their lessons were valuable, but respirators would be more valuable to Serbia. It is recalled that the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia has not been sitting for more than a month and that it did not play any role in the decision to declare a state of emergency. The situation has not changed even after numerous messages from the domestic and international public, and the last in a row is the address by [Clément Voule](#), UN Special Reporter on the right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Freedom of Association, who stressed the need to strengthen the system of parliamentary and judicial control over the implementation of the adopted measures to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of the executive power. Former Commissioner for Information of Public Importance, [Rodoljub Sabic](#), pointed to such a practice in Serbia, stating that the Government and the President of the State exceeded their powers during the state of emergency. Namely, the Constitution explicitly stipulates that if the Assembly is unable to meet, measures which derogate some of the human and minority rights during a state of emergency are introduced by the Government, with the support of the President of the Republic, but that this does not in any way refer to the adoption of the any others decrees.

2. After more than 20 days in custody, [Jovana Popovic](#) from Kikinda was released but she will remain in home custody until the end of the proceedings. [Goran Zrnic](#) from Backi Brestovac was also released because of the expiry of the 28 days, according to the decision given to him, that the isolation would last and that there was no longer any possibility of repeating the act. In addition to the highly controversial detention of persons who violate self-isolation measures, especially given the complaints of international organizations recommending the reduction of the number of persons in such institutions, Skype trials are conducted daily, and the [representatives of the lawyers](#) and associations dealing with the protection of human rights are emphasizing, it threatens the right to a fair trial.

3. A video shot of an [apparent police brutality](#) against a person who violated curfew after 5pm appeared on Twitter. The video shows a police officer slapping a person several times in the back of a police vehicle. The Minister of Police, [Nebojsa Stefanovic](#) said that this was not the picture of the police that Serbia wants to have and that he ordered the Internal Control Sector to examine in detail the actions of a police officer.

4. The Association of Citizens Fem Platz pointed out the difficult position of persons in accommodation in social protection institutions founded by the Republic of Serbia or AP Vojvodina. There are almost 15,000 people in 57 institutions for adults and the elderly, as well as 17 institutions for young people and children. They emphasize especially difficult position of persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities who are exposed to multiple discrimination and specific manifestations of violence. They raise the question of how adequate disinfection of these facilities is ensured, point to the problem of overcrowded capacities and the inability to adequately ensure the safety of the employees and users. They also point to the unavailability of health care for women with disabilities and underdeveloped mechanisms to report the violence they suffer, especially those in residential care and who are forbidden from receiving visits because of the measures adopted.

5. The Belgrade Center for Human Rights has filed a criminal complaint against several unidentified Interior Ministry officials and members of the security services at the Krnjaca Asylum Center on reasonable suspicion of using excessive force and causing physical harm to multiple migrants stationed at the center. The criminal complaint states that on April 10, police officers entered the Center and forcibly took out male migrants, some of whom were subjected to violence and abuse, which left evident marks on the body. According to the Centre's residents, official batons were used in the violence, all of which took place in the presence of children housed in the Center, and they were not provided adequate medical care after the incident. Such conduct by members of the armed forces is unacceptable and it is necessary to urgently identify violations of the Centre's residents' rights and to adequately sanction those responsible for this incident.