
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 20-23 April 2020

Freedom of association, assembly and expression

1. [Reporters Without Borders' annual report](#) on the state of media freedoms in the world recognized Serbia as a country where media freedoms were endangered in the previous year, which made Serbia 93rd on the list, which is three places worse than the previous year. [The explanation states](#) that during the last eight years of the reign of Aleksandar Vucic, first from the position of Prime Minister and later President of the State, "Serbia has become a country where it is often dangerous to be a journalist and where fake news is becoming more visible and popular." It also points to an increase in attacks and a sharpening of rhetoric against journalists, primarily by government officials. In recent times, such assessments have been more grounded than before, especially since the introduction of the [state of emergency](#) and the adoption of measures such as centralizing information or banning journalists from attending press conferences. When it comes to attacks on journalists, they have been mostly coming in recently by their colleagues from pre-regime media, particularly from Dragan Vucicevic, editor-in-chief of the Informer newspaper. The latest target of [his attacks](#) and insults is Fonet journalist Tamara Skrozza, to whom Vucicevic sent sexist and other offensive words. A representative of the Reporters without Borders, [Paulina Ades-Mevel](#), also spoke on the issue, recalling the arrest of journalist Ana Lalic, as well as the almost daily attacks on N1 journalists.

2. The journalist from the TV B92 [Oliver Jakisic](#) asked Crisis Staff member Dr. Darija Kisic Tepavcevic why she was a member of a delegation that visited the largest focal point of the corona virus, explicitly stating that a male should have gone instead. [The Journalists against Violence group](#) responded to this outburst and said that the question posed was "a tragicomic and offensive act of cutting expertise and knowledge, but also a distasteful comparison of an epidemic with a state of war." Widespread sexism in the public space contributes to the survival of prejudices about women's lower ability to take on responsible jobs and to occupy the highest positions.

3. [The Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia](#) has announced the submission of a report to the Regulatory Electronic Body (REM) against Pink television for the broadcasting articles promoting the administration of untreated drugs and the use of untested methods of treating corona virus by incompetent persons. They point out that in this way there were gross violations of the Law on Electronic Media as well as the Rulebook on the Protection of Human Rights in the area of media services. In their statement, they remind REM that they are required by law to take legal action against media service providers or a responsible person if their act has the characteristics of a crime, emphasizing that overdraft is prescribed by law and punishable as a criminal offense. Such treatment has not only jeopardized the public interest and health of the citizens who follow the program of the aforementioned television, but also the reputation of the medical profession, whose work has repeatedly been undermined by the owners of Pink television. For this reason, the Chairwoman of the Committee for Expert Issues and Expert Supervision of the Regional Medical Chamber of Belgrade, Olga Vasovic, [requested the Serbian Medical Chamber](#) to take all necessary steps in order to protect the medical profession and stop its degradation by non-professional persons who uses television with national frequency.

Other freedoms

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

1. [The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights "A11"](#) said that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers were unlawfully and arbitrary detained on the basis of discriminatory criteria. The statement said that the rights of nearly 9,000 people were violated in this way, and that they would therefore file a complaint with the Commissioner for Protection of Equality against the Government of the Republic of Serbia. They also announce that they will file an initiative to initiate the constitutional review procedure of Article 3 of the Emergency Measures Regulation, which stipulates restrictions on the movement of asylum seekers and migrants, but also urge the Ombudsman and the National Torture Prevention Mechanism to immediately initiate the legality and regularity review process operation of all asylum and migrants centers.

2. Initiative A11 announced that the European Court of Human Rights has instituted [proceedings against the Republic of Serbia](#) for the risk of violating the right to life and prohibiting inhuman and degrading treatment of Roma living in the informal settlement of Cukarica in Belgrade. It is a settlement with about 70 families, with no basic living conditions, no drinking water, electricity or organized garbage collection. The United Nations recommendations particularly highlight the difficult position of marginalized social groups as well as the State's obligation to pay special attention to their protection during the corona virus pandemic.

3. [Autonomous Women's Center](#) announced that the number of calls and messages to their SOS Service for providing psychological and legal support to women suffering from violence tripled in the last month, that is, from the declaration of a state of emergency, but on the other hand that there is decreased number of the extensions of emergency measures against abusers. Activist Sanja Pavlovic points out that the most frequent cases are psychic, but there are cases of economic violence that are becoming more and more frequent. A psychologist at SOS Women's Center Novi Sad also points to this problem, pointing out that quarantine further enhances this type of violence, taking into account the constant physical proximity to the abuser. Although the number of reports has increased in the last month, the highest number of cases of violence against women remains unreported, which is also mentioned in the statement of the Coordination

Body for Gender Equality of the Government of Serbia. It is felt that the specific needs and positions of vulnerable categories have not been taken into account when enacting measures against the corona virus. This is also the case regarding to the situation of women who are exposed to violence, bearing in mind that the Government has not yet responded to the request of the Autonomous Women's Center to include safety and specific needs of women and children among the priorities in the adoption of measures.

4. The Chinese company “Zidjin”, formerly Bor Mining and Smelter Basin, [has suspended](#) the worker Kristina Petkovski for allegedly violating preventive measures against the corona virus, but also fined 12 other employees who worked with her in the same sector, as well as four branch executives. The reason for punishment is the failure to report the change in the health status of her family member. For this reason, Kristina Petkovski was suspended for three months, during which she would receive a third of her salary, and another 16 workers were fined, while the head of the department was dismissed. According to Zarko Radulovic, the president of the Smelter-Bor Trade Union, worker Kristina Petkovski regularly informed the supervisor about the health of her family member, and after confirmation of the presence of the corona virus, she stopped coming to work, which was known to her executives. In addition, “Zidjin” sent 25 employees who were in contact with Kristina Petkovski into self-isolation, citing the recommendation of an epidemiologist. CINS editorial staff had access to documentation showing that epidemiologist Javorka Sekulić pointed out that employees should not be sent for self-isolation, bearing in mind that an infected family member of Petkovski did not live with her in the same household as they did not have contact with after the onset of the first symptoms. This threatens the rights of individual workers, one of the categories most severely affected by the corona virus pandemic.

5. [Employees at the Institute of Oncology](#) have denied the statement of Health Minister Zlatibor Loncar that fewer than 10 people were infected at the Institute of Oncology. Nurse Biljana Kostic said in a statement to the Nova.rs portal that the number was much higher, that is, in the gynecological ward of 20 nurses, 15 of them were infected, as well as some of the doctors. She points out that they became infected during their shift, as well as working without adequate protective equipment since the start of the pandemic, which is confirmed by her colleague Gordana Panajotovic, who continues to do the work even though she was in contact with the infected colleagues. Apart from the fact that this situation in medical institutions worries the whole public opinion, it is also worrying that the testimonies of the employees largely suppress the statements of the officials who speak at the Crisis Staff press conferences, which justifiably gives the impression that information is being withheld from the public, which only deepens distrust in the work of the competent authorities and the measures they take, but also threatens the rights of employed medical workers.