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# THREE FREEDOMS PLATFORM

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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 30 April- 4 May 2020

#### Freedom of association, assembly and expression

1. [Journalist of the Nova.rs, Ana Lalic](#), who was arrested for publishing an article about the poor condition of the Clinical Center of Vojvodina, received an official decision from the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad that all the criminal proceedings against her are suspended. Although her innocence has been formally established, [Prime Minister Ana Brnabic](#) has not yet come forward with statement, who has previously accused her of delivering fake news. Shortly afterwards, journalist Lalic noticed that someone had cut the tire on her car, which, given that she had not used the car for five days, as well as frequent threats, indicates a possible connection with the chase against her for weeks so she reported the case to the police. [The editorial board of Nova.rs](#) has announced that in case something happens to journalist Ana Lalic, the responsibility will be on the state and its top officials, and that this case will be found in one of the European Commission's future progress reports on Serbia. Concern for her safety was also expressed by the [Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina](#), which demands from the competent authorities to urgently determine whether her safety is endangered and to take appropriate measures.

2. Serbian Progressive Party MP, [Aleksandar Markovic](#) has verbally attacked a number of media outlets for allegedly campaign against President Aleksandar Vucic during the corona virus pandemic. In his address to the National Assembly, he explicitly mentioned N1, TV Nova S, TV Sabac, Vreme, NIN, Nedeljnik, the portals Direktno.rs, Istinomer, Raskrikavanje, as well as CINS, BIRN and KRIK. During his statement he mentioned the journalist Dinko Gruhonjic, for whom his colleague, also a deputy, prof. Dr. Marko Atlagic called it a "traitorous thug". [The Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina](#) has warned that in this way the reputation of the Parliament is being tarnished, and it creates a proving ground for attacks on journalists. In their statement, they conclude that it is the duty of MPs to familiarize themselves with the Serbian Journalist Code and the Constitution guaranteeing media freedom, as well as the notorious fact that objective information does not constitute as opposition operation and that politicians must not view journalists as political enemies.

3. Shortly after the hacking attack on [the Portal 021](#) site and the attack on comments and reactions left by the readers, control was restored and the site was normalized. From this portal, they point out that they were the targets of constant attacks by bots on polls and comments on this portal, which is why they will have to introduce new methods of protection.

4. [Radio DIR from Ruma](#) asked the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Culture and Information and the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia why their journalist was prevented from asking a question at the Crisis Staff press conference, emphasizing selectivity in selecting journalists allowed to ask questions. They also recalled that their journalist was previously banned from attending the conference. This case is just one in a series that depicts an unprofessional attitude towards the media and irresponsible behavior that prevents the smooth operation of the media, which results in poorer information for citizens.

5. [The Association for the Protection of Constitutionality and Legality](#) reported that a reporter of radio DIR from Kikinda, had been attacked for filming a group of men who had been broadcasting messages against opposition politicians. On that occasion, journalist Darko Varadjanin had permission to film, but an unknown man hit his phone, punching his arm, insulting and cursing. Police have made an official note regarding the incident, but it is not yet known whether proceedings have been initiated against the perpetrator. This incident is compounded by the fact that it occurred during the performances of the ruling party activists who, in violation of the prohibition of movement, endanger the safety of citizens by using pyrotechnics. It is necessary for the competent authorities to react urgently and protect the safety of citizens, as well as journalists who report on these events.

6. One of the biggest challenges of introducing a state of emergency is ensuring that citizens are adequately informed at the local level. Reporters from local newsrooms were often faced with the inability to obtain a statement from the heads of the competent institutions, nor to obtain official information from those institutions about the status of the corona virus pandemic. Such a problem is especially pronounced in [Valjevo](#), where after only seven days, online conferences were canceled, at which journalists could ask questions to members of the local Crisis Staff. Bearing in mind that timely information is one of the most important elements of the fight against the pandemic, in this way this fight is further complicated and opens space for spreading fake and unverified news.

7. Several opposition parties, movements and initiatives have requested the [Electronic Regulatory Body](#) to initiate a revocation of Radio Pink's license for participating in a negative campaign against an opposition leader by releasing seven-minute recordings of curses and insults at the expense of Dragan Djilas. In this way, logistical support is provided to the activists of the ruling party, who every night, violating the curfew, protest against the opposition, endangering the safety of people and property by using large quantities of pyrotechnic devices.

8. The World Day of Media Freedom was marked by the [Ministry of Culture and Information](#) with a statement emphasizing the importance of objective information and in which they remind the media of their obligation to truthfully inform citizens. This statement, which is basically correct, seems inappropriate if we keep in mind that the Ministry did not react to the case of illegal arrest of journalist Ana Lalic, to the promotion of quackery by a number of media, as well as in many other cases when the safety of journalists was endangered. The state of media freedom is reflected in numerous reports from domestic and international organizations, and this position is further derogated by the state of emergency, as stated in the report of the [Balkan Civil Society Development Network](#). It states that the measures applied by the countries of that region during the crisis were not always proportionate to the threats and that they were not in line with international standards, such as the introduction of censorship in order to allegedly fight against fake news. [The Trade Union of Journalists of Serbia](#) also pointed out the particularly difficult

position of journalists, inviting colleagues to join the action "Five minutes of thunderous silence". [The action](#), which includes turning off the tone and darkening the screen in the period from 12:00 to 12:05, was supported by the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia, the Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina and the Branch Trade Union of Culture, Arts and Media "Nezavisnost". Endangerment of freedom of information and public expression was again recorded this year by [Reporters Without Borders](#), which ranked Serbia as 93rd out of a total of 180 countries on the list of media freedoms for 2020, which is a decrease of three places compared to last year.

## Other freedoms

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

1. [As a response to the performance of citizens](#) consisting of slamming pots in order to express dissatisfaction with the way the government acts during a state of emergency, supporters of the ruling party continue with [performances](#) involving the use of pyrotechnics as well as the broadcasting of offensive messages at the expense of one opposition leader. Such an action caused problems, starting with the fact that the use of torches endangers security, but also that the residents of certain buildings became victims of unknown men who enter them without authorization and often clash with the residents. An additional problem is that the actors of these incidents violate the ban of movement on a daily basis, as well as the participation of some of the ruling party officials, such as the [Mayor of Palilula municipality of Nis](#), Aleksandar Zdravkovic, but above all the fact that there is a lack of response from the competent authorities, which only intensifies the feeling of insecurity among citizens. One of the most worrying cases occurred in Novi Sad, when members of the Ministry of Interior legitimized and shortly after released [a group of 15 men](#) who took part in such a performance "because they had movement permits", although it is clear that they violated several legal prohibitions. On the other hand, citizens are often left to themselves, which was the case with the residents of a [building in Novi Sad](#) who refused to let unknown persons climb onto the roof of the building to make a performance. The fact that the citizens no longer expect the reaction of the authorities, but rather rely on other participants to protect their own and their families' safety, is the case of the residents of a building in the Belgrade settlement of Karaburma, who threatened individuals who tried to enter their building, that they will [call journalists of "N1" television](#). Such cases, as well as the traditionally slow or no police response, only encourage the creation of deeper social divisions and an atmosphere in which hooliganism is acceptable and citizens are left to defend for themselves against violence and the destruction of their property.

2. Activists of the ruling party brought sound systems across the street from the building of the [opposition leader Dragan Djilas](#) and released footage accusing him of being a thief which terrified his children. This action is a continuation of a multi-year campaign against him, which was mainly conducted through pro-government tabloids. In this way, the political struggle went beyond all boundaries of normalcy and grew into open persecution of political opponents. It is a particularly dangerous fact that after this act, the perpetrators fled to the [building of the city municipality of Vracar](#), which, in the absence of a reaction from the police, testifies to the fact that this is a planned action supported by state structures. The day after the incident, several hundred citizens, led by leaders of opposition organizations, [gathered](#) in the same place to support Dragan Djilas and protest against the inadmissible way of conducting political struggle. None of the members of the opposition or the ruling party received misdemeanor charges, even though they violated the ban on movement that applies to all citizens.

3. After the expert public pointed out the unacceptable practice of the trials via Skype, [the Misdemeanor Court in Becej](#) introduced an even more bizarre practice which implies that the defendants stand outside the court building during the trial, while the judge interrogates them from inside the building. This unusual solution, which offends the dignity of the defendants, comes from allegedly lacking in space that would allow respectful maintenance of physical distance among those present. It is absolutely legitimate to take care of the physical health of all participants, but it is necessary to provide conditions for the normal presentation of defense, but also respect for the dignity of the accused.

4. Citizens gathered around the [Dorcol Neighborhood Association](#) protested during the evening hours, during a ban on movement over attempts by the relevant city services to start construction of a trolleybus network, against which residents of this part of Stari Grad municipality held protests months ago. Police were present during the protest, but none of the present was detained. Such an attempt to carry out the constructions work is also a conscious intention to prevent the expression of dissatisfaction from the citizens with the abuse of a state of emergency, which is why they have decided to legitimately apply the methods of civic disobedience.