Freedom of association, assembly and expression

1. The Slavko Curuvija Foundation filed a complaint with the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) against Television Copernicus TV K: CN for broadcasting a show by a high-ranking official of the Serbian Progressive Party and MP, Vladimir Djukanovic. The shows "At the End of the Day with Djuka", "Good Morning with Djuka" and "In Connection with Djuka", whose author and host Vladimir Djukanovic are broadcasted or have been broadcasted on that television. It is worrying that Djukanovic uses the show to deal with political opponents, but also the fact that in the show on May 4, 2020, the host directly called for the burning of pyrotechnic products and thus for the violation of the existing laws of the Republic of Serbia. As stated in the announcement of the Foundation, Television Copernicus, by broadcasting these shows, endangered information in the public interest, but also violated the provisions of the Law on Electronic Media and the Rulebook of REM on the protection of human rights in the field of media services.

2. A fake front page of the weekly "NIN" appeared on social networks these days with a photo of an opposition leader with the aim of discrediting this media. The editorial staff of "NIN" said in its statement that there is no doubt that the ruling party is behind such an attempt to discredit their media and its sympathizers who are spreading it on social networks. As a reminder, this is not the first time that fake front pages of this weekly have appeared in public, while journalists and members of the editorial board are often the target of attacks by the highest state officials.

3. After KRIK published a research story about the war in the Balkan underground between the “skaljarski” and “kavacki” clans, which contains data that were unknown to the public, a large number of government officials and high officials of the ruling party reacted by attacking this newsroom. The reason for the attack was a picture of the son of the President of the Republic, Aleksandar Vucic, with a member of one of the clans, which is only a small part of the text, but government officials accused the KRIK editorial office of attacking the president's son. We note that nowhere in the text is the claim made that the president's son is a member of any clan or any similar accusation. The organized campaign of attacks on investigative journalists came from the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Finance and a number of the ruling party officials, followed by announcements in pro-regime tabloids and televisions with national frequency. It is especially worrying that Radio Television of Serbia, as a public service of citizens, published condemnations of the government
representatives, but did not publish KRIK’s story, and thus endangered the objective informing of citizens. Another unfounded accusation against this newsroom is that it works for the opposition, which is a standard reaction of the government, which views independent and investigative journalists as political opponents. This is not the first time that KRIK has been the target of attacks after the publication of its research stories, which have a large number of readers, and what is worrying is that such attacks most often come from the highest state officials.

Other freedoms

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

1. Freedom House, an organization that deals with human rights and the promotion of democracy in the world, published its latest report "Democracy in Transition", in which Serbia lost the epithet "partially consolidated democracies". After analyzing the situation, Freedom House ranked Serbia lower on its list, putting it on the list of countries that belong to "hybrid regimes". This term implies states in which democratic institutions are weak and in which there are significant challenges in defending political rights and civic freedoms. This report lists problems regarding human rights violations and narrowing of civic space, on which civil society organizations in Serbia have been warning about for years, such as the weakening of institutions, especially Parliament, pressure on the media and the stifling of criticism. The report emphasizes the worrying situation in Serbia, concluding that Serbia is abandoning democratic principles, which is evident in many other reports of relevant international organizations.

2. In the previous few days, information appeared in the media, and it could be clearly seen in the videos published on social networks that groups of citizens appeared in Belgrade and cities throughout Serbia, lighting torches from the roofs of buildings and activating other pyrotechnic devices, during evening hours, during the ban of movement introduced by the Decree on measures during a state of emergency. Therefore, the Belgrade Center for Security Policy, together with eleven other citizens associations, submitted an initiative to the Ombudsman to initiate a procedure to control the legality and regularity of the work of the Ministry of Interior, regarding police actions on performances of some group of citizens with torches and pyrotechnic devices, as well as in connection with the permits for movement at the time of the ban on movement. In his answer, the Ombudsman stated that due to all the above, he initiated such an initiative himself. We remind you that the police did not react in many cases in the previous days when groups of citizens, from which the government distances itself, although it is clear that their performances were a kind of support for the ruling party, violated the ban on movement. The police did not react even during the gathering of the opposition, which was also held during the ban on movement. It is only noted that the police reacted after a rally in support of the opposition leader, Dragan Djilas, when four people were arrested and convicted. That this is a selective action of the police is also shown by the fact that at the very beginning of declaring a state of emergency, the Ministry of Internal Affairs presented data that it punished thousands of citizens who violated the ban on movement, several of whom were criminally charged.

3. When it comes to restricting the right to freedom of movement, it is one of the most drastic in Europe, concluded the Belgrade Center for Human Rights, after considering measures to restrict and ban freedom of movement in European countries. To remind you, Belgrade Center for Human Rights submitted to the Constitutional Court an initiative to assess the constitutionality of the Decree on Measures during the State of Emergency, as well as the Order on Restriction and Prohibition of Movement on the Territory of the Republic of Serbia. In their statement they emphasize that "frequent changes in the scope and time limit of the ban on movement, as well as the illogicality of the introduction and elimination of measures, have created confusion among citizens who often had trouble aligning their behavior with the restrictive measures which is shown in cases where citizens were punished for violating the ban on movement".
During the state of emergency, there were deviations and restrictions of numerous human rights of Serbian citizens, guaranteed by the Constitution and ratified international agreements, and the question remains whether the state acted contrary to the Constitution and international law when it comes to freedom of movement.

4. A video appeared on social networks showing a young man breaking into the Reception Center for Migrants in Obrenovac in a car. The Initiative for Economic and Social Rights A11 condemned this violent intrusion and called on the authorities to respond to the event, but also to react to "other individuals and groups that publicly incite and spread national and religious hatred and intolerance." The Commissariat for Refugees also condemned this incident, reminding that all migrants in Serbia, who have been isolated in reception centers since the introduction of the state of emergency, want to leave Serbia as soon as possible. The young man is currently under arrest and it remains to be seen how the Prosecution will characterize this case. It is especially worrying that this incident is only one in a row in the past few months due to the fact that anti-immigrant rhetoric is extremely present in the public in Serbia, which often comes from certain political parties.