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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 in Serbia 7-14 May 2020

#### Freedom of association, assembly and expression

1. As already mentioned in the previous report, for the first time since 2003, according to the [report of the international organization Freedom House](#), Serbia has fallen out of the category of free states. The main reasons for that are the strengthening of corruption and the influence of private power, the fear government of President Aleksandar Vucic, as well as the tight control of the media. The report states that the competent institutions ignore the findings of independent media dealing with investigative journalism, as well as that the institutions in whose jurisdiction the fight against corruption is further weakened, and that the initiated topics never received a court epilogue due to numerous scandals of government representatives. One of the main reasons for this regression is the abuse of the tabloids close to the authorities, which serve for a relentless fight against political opponents, but that the work of the Radio Television of Serbia is also a big problem. The conclusion of this report is that Serbia is from the category "partially consolidated democracies" fell into the category of "hybrid regimes".

Of particular concern is the reaction of government officials who, instead of taking the necessary steps to overcome the problems highlighted in this report, are trying to prove its inaccuracy, citing the alleged subjectivity of the person who participated in the writing. The Prime Minister Ana Brnabic stated that she had prepared a ["studious answer on 18 pages"](#) which would prove the inaccuracy of the mentioned report, but she also admitted that the Government would accept certain suggestions and try to change them. Given the trends of shrinking the space for action not only of the media, but also of civil society and independent individuals, such a report is not a surprise. What worries the public is the absolute non resistance to criticism by the authorities and the non-acceptance that the problems be realistically perceived and that their solutions be started.

2. The assistant editor-in-chief of the weekly "Vreme", Jovana Gligorijevic, was the [target](#) of an attack by a man who sent her a threat via the social network Instagram "that the day of payment is near". Unfortunately, this is not the first attack that Jovana Gligorijevic is facing, but they have been going on since 2016. On this occasion, the group ["Journalists Against Violence"](#) announced that they are requesting of the competent authorities to react urgently to these threats, and the Independent Association of

Journalists of Serbia and the Association of Journalists of Serbia also expressed concern about the event. A few days later, Novi Sad police [arrested](#) D.Z. due to the suspicion that he threatened the journalist Jovana Gligorijevic, but what causes surprise in this particular case is that the journalist Gligorijevic herself was informed about it from the media, even though she had previously communicated properly with the competent authorities. An atmosphere in which journalists are a legitimate target of attacks, insults and threats has been tolerated and even encouraged in Serbia for years, and the reactions of the competent authorities are the exception rather than the rule, which is why a large number of journalists still feel insecure while doing their job professionally.

3. Journalist Ana Lalic, who was arrested for writing about the difficult condition of the Clinical Center of Vojvodina, said that the Provincial Secretary of Health, Zoran Gojkovic, ordered the launch of an [internal investigation](#) in that institution in order to reveal the sources who provided to journalist Lalic information. According to her information, a three-member commission was formed by the director Edita Stokic, whose task is to investigate this case, as well as to determine who provided the public with information on the salary increase of the assistant director Nenad Erdeljan. [The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia](#) requested an urgent halt to the investigation, reminding that the legislative framework that protects "sources". Such actions clearly indicate that the case of Ana Lalic was not closed, although the competent Prosecutor's office rejected the criminal charges against her, but that in this way not only employees are intimidated, but also the journalist herself and other journalists who deal with investigative journalism. This practice is absolutely inadmissible and is one of the reasons why Serbia is constantly falling in rank in all reports dealing with the issue of media freedom.

4. [The National Coalition for Decentralization](#) conducted an online survey with users of social networks in order to get an answer to the question of the extent to which they are satisfied with the information during the corona virus pandemic. The results of the survey indicate drastic differences in terms of information at the national and local levels. Namely, as many as 61% of participants stated that they were fully or partially informed at the national level, but such an answer regarding information at the local level was given by only 32% of respondents, while 46% of them were dissatisfied. The results of this research are only the result of the restrictions faced by journalists in local media who were denied access to information, which led to insufficient information of citizens, but also the frequent occurrence of fake news and unverified information.

## Other freedoms

1. [The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia](#) reminded the public regarding the continuation of the election process that the illegal Rulebook of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media will be applied in the continuation of the campaign, which stipulates that the rules prescribed during the election campaign apply without exception to public media services. a legally non-binding recommendation applies to commercial media. This solution greatly affects the already endangered legitimacy of the election process, especially since the said Rulebook remains in force despite the opinion of the Ministry of Culture and Information stating that the Law on Electronic Media does not recognize the difference between public media services and other media service providers. An additional problem is the wording used by the Rulebook, which instead of equal representation of political actors introduces the criteria of representation "in proportion to the importance of political parties or candidates", which undoubtedly favors the ruling party.

2. A group of civil society organizations submitted to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Serbia an [initiative](#) to assess the constitutionality and legality of the Order on Restriction of Movement at Open Approaches and Facilities of Reception Centers for Migrants and Asylum Centers In their statement they say that restricting the movement of users of reception centers is an unfounded and disproportionate restriction of the right to liberty and security of persons and their deprivation of liberty. It is also stated that after the lifting of the state of emergency, no state of emergency was declared in any special area in Serbia, which is why there is no legal basis for issuing an order that would restrict the movement of certain persons in a certain area. In this way, the agony of the users of these centers is prolonged, in which there are often no basic hygienic and sanitary conditions, and this solution prevents their communication with legal representatives, psychiatrists and psychologists and other persons whose help they need. For that reason, the civil society organizations, the submitters of the initiative, call on the Constitutional Court of Serbia to issue a decision initiating the procedure for assessing the constitutionality and legality of the above mentioned Order.

3. [The previous week](#) was also marked by a series of incidents and bizarre moments that mostly took place on the steps of the National Assembly. The first in a series of such events was the appearance of an opposition leader, Bosko Obradovic, who expressed his dissatisfaction with the government by entering into a [verbal conflict](#) with deputies and ministers of the ruling party, and at some moments there was a milder physical conflict. Shortly afterwards, Bosko Obradovic joined the hunger strike of his fellow MP and former member of his Dveri movement, Professor Miladin Sevarlic, who decided to take such a step due to the alleged high treason of the interests of the Republic of Serbia in Kosovo and Metohija. However, as the reason for his strike, Obradovic cites the illegal continuation of the election process and the change of the election legislation during the election process, demanding that the Constitutional Court declare the constitutionality and legality of those actions. In response to his action, ruling majority MPs [Aleksandar Martinovic and Sandra Bozic](#) also went on a hunger strike, demanding that the authorities prosecute Obradovic for physically assaulting their colleague MP, Marjan Risticvic. The polarization of the society in terms of the attitude towards these events reached its peak after more than a [thousand supporters of the ruling party came in front of the Assembly](#), contrary to the ban on public gatherings, in order to support the strike of their deputies. On that occasion, in addition to verbal conflicts with opposition supporters, there was also a physical incident when a supporter of the Serbian Progressive Party hit a member of the opposition Democratic Party in the face, after which he was arrested. After these events, the Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade initiated evidentiary actions against MP Bosko Obradovic, which served as an excuse for

[Aleksandar Martinovic to end his hunger strike](#). On the margins of these events, the news passed that Professor Sevarlic also [gave up on the hunger strike](#), stating that Obradovic and Martinovic made his act meaningless and put him in the background. The epilogue of these events is that Bosko Obradovic continued his hunger strike, joined by his colleague [Ivan Kostic](#), emphasizing the demand to postpone the elections until fair conditions are created, with the addition of which requires respect for the Constitution and Resolution 1244 regarding the Kosovo issue, as well as the protection of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its dioceses in Montenegro. Based on these events, it is clear that tensions in society have reached a dangerously high level and that it is necessary for the political struggle to return to the framework of the normal and permissible.

