

CSO activities related to the COVID-19 response

16-22 June

The announcements of the pandemic and the measures taken by the Serbian government to fight against the COVID-19 virus have changed the work of civil society organizations. The monitoring included 145 civil society organizations from all over Serbia. Most CSOs, almost a third, are involved in humanitarian work, while fewer than 15 organizations carry out their regular activities. In addition to humanitarian work, other areas that can be categorized as organizational activities are: monitoring, information, psychosocial support and advocacy. When it comes to individual activities within these areas these are: providing legal assistance, human rights monitoring, providing psychological assistance, dealing with health care, networking, education and fundraising. Slightly less than half of the organizations are active in Belgrade, and other CSOs are located throughout Serbia.

It is particularly important to emphasize the importance of working with the most vulnerable groups, through information on the poor current situation and the possible consequences of the pandemic on the groups concerned such as people with disabilities, women, children and the elderly, as well as migrants and the homeless.

Although the state of emergency in Serbia was lifted on May 6 according to available data the organizations will continue to organize their activities in the way they did in the state of emergency, especially bearing in mind that the consequences of the pandemic will be felt by their users in the coming period.

The following are the activities of some of the organizations that have been implemented in the past period:

MONITORING

- **The Bureau for Social Research (BIRODI)** conducted [monitoring](#) of the reporting of central news programs on televisions with national frequencies in the period from March 4 to 15, and from May 8 to June 18, 2020. Also, BIRODI monitored the actions of election actors during the state of emergency, ie the COVID pandemic. Ne of their main conclusions on election reporting in the dailies is that in 2012 there was a competitive environment, as the two electoral lists around the Democratic Party and the Serbian Progressive Party were more equally represented than the others that were smaller but more positively represented. Today, eight years later, their monitoring on the same sample of dailies with national TV coverage shows that we have an election campaign in which we have one public official (President of the Republic) and president of a political party who is the dominant actor in non-analytical and uncritical reporting in dailies.

- **The Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID)** published a short [Instruction for Voters](#) a few days before the elections. As announced, together with IPSOS Serbia, CeSID organized a [parallel vote count](#), and was also the first to publish turnout estimates and election results on election night 2020. During Election Day, CeSID and Ipsos Serbia published turnout estimates five times (cross-sections) (at 09:00, 11:00, 14:00, 17:00 and 19:00), while the first results were available around 20.45 after which they were updated live.

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- **The Initiative for Economic and Social Rights- A11**, together with 53 other civil society organizations, issued a [statement](#) entitled "Protection against discrimination on the break". They expressed deep concern about the current non-functioning of the system of protection against discrimination in Serbia, given that the institution of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality was completely blocked due to the failure to elect a new commissioner in a timely manner. In the statement it is said that a number of organizations that filed complaints for protection against discrimination were informed last week that the procedures for complaints will continue only "after the election of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality." The mandate of the previous commissioner for the protection of equality expired on May 27, 2020, and as stated in the letters, "this independent body has no deputies with legal authority to act." It can be expected that the citizens of Serbia will be without adequate protection against discrimination for months, because the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality is elected by the National Assembly by a majority vote of all deputies on the proposal of the committee responsible for constitutional issues, and Serbia is about to have parliamentary elections and after that the constitution of the National Assembly and competent committees, it is stated in the announcement

- **The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights** in Serbia held a [conversation](#) on the occasion of the research on the attitudes and values of high school students in Serbia. The author of the research is sociologist Marija Radoman. The analysis included the prevalence of values and attitudes related to gender relations, abortion, homophobia, ecology, nationalism and attitudes towards the Roma minority, as well as attitudes towards the past and wars of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia. The aim of the research was to determine whether there were changes in the attitudes of high school students in relation to the previous research conducted by the Helsinki Committee in 2011. The responses of high school students in this study are viewed in an international and local social context.

- **Team 42** from Leskovac, on the occasion of frequent allegations in the media that some employers used the state of emergency and "delivered" dismissals to their employees via SMS, referred citizens to the provisions of the Labor Law regarding the preparation and submission of dismissal decisions in their [blog](#).

-**The National Coalition for Decentralization (NKD)** from Nis again [published](#) the announcement "Elections have arrived; the airport debt remained in Nis". According to the statement, the NKD request that the debt of the City of Nis to the Ministry of Defense be regulated before the elections (June 21, 2020), in connection with the land that was stolen together with the Nis airport two years ago, has not been fulfilled. They state that there is a great danger that due to the blockade of institutions in the post-election period, starting from July 29, 2020, the City of Nis will be forced to pay a daily interest in the amount of 6,313 euros to the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Serbia. The act of donating the Nis airport will cost Nis residents even more in this way, because, only for interest (without repayment of the debt principal), Nis will allocate four times more money a year than for the entire agricultural sector.

- **The Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights (YUCOM)** stated that despite the objections of the profession, the draft [Action Plan for Chapter 23](#) will soon be revised before the Government of Serbia. Criticism coming to Belgrade from Brussels, which refers to the situation in the judiciary and stagnation in the fight against corruption, has been focusing on the same problems for years. This is also the case this time with the "non-paper" report of the European Commission on the situation in the negotiation chapters 23 and 24, which has not been officially published yet, but parts of which, thanks to the European Western Balkans portal, have reached the public. "The pressure on the judiciary remains high. Government officials, some of them at the highest level, as well as MPs, continue to comment regularly on ongoing

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investigations or trials, as well as individual judges and prosecutors. "Articles in tabloid newspapers target and tend to discredit judges and prosecutors," it is written in non-paper, says YUCOM.

- **The Belgrade Center for Human Rights** issued a [statement](#) on the occasion of the World Refugee Day, which is celebrated on June 20. In their statement, they draw the public's attention to the vulnerability of the refugee population, especially in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, and note that state institutions in Serbia have an obligation to provide protection to all refugees, in accordance with domestic and international regulations. According to the UNHCR, 79.5 million people have been forcibly displaced worldwide due to persecution or conflict. Children make up 40% of this population. Unfortunately, protracted conflicts and massive human rights violations around the world indicate that no significant improvements can be expected in the near future. On this occasion, the Belgrade Center also launched the [#stanimojedniuzdruga](#) campaign. Through a series of videos of public figures, refugees, representatives of the UNHCR and the Belgrade Center for Human Rights talk about their personal experiences, the problems that refugees face, the challenges and opportunities they have in society and the environments in which they live.

- **The National Convention on the European Union** issued a [statement](#) regarding the attack on the members and founders of the National Convention. The statement issues that the National Convention strongly condemns and demands an urgent reaction from the police and the prosecutor's office due to a series of announcements that threaten civil society organizations, investigative journalists and activists who point out the failures of the authorities and competent bodies in combating organized crime. The reason for the announcement is the broadcasting of videos in which the researcher of the Belgrade Center for Security Policy (BCSP), Sasa Djordjevic, is unfoundedly accused of threatening the president, as well as the video produced by the so-called portal Prismotra, in which BCSP, the founder of the National Convention on the EU, is referred to as a "NATO lobbyist". Both announcements were made after pointing out specific omissions in the actions of the competent institutions.

- **The Youth Initiative for Human Rights** warns and [reports](#) on the participation of war criminals in public life, believing that it is an insult to the victims, a threat to peace in the region and a handbrake for the processes of democratization and Europeanization of the country. A review of the participation of criminals in the election campaign, as well as those linked to crimes, shows that they follow an identical political matrix, regardless of which party they support, and share common themes and values: denial of crimes, delegitimization of The Hague tribunal, opposition to Serbia's EU membership and inciting hatred and intolerance towards the peoples of the region.

- **Transparency Serbia** has published an [analysis](#) of the elections and the costs of the election campaign. The transparency of the financing of all participants in the pre-election campaign for the elections scheduled for June 21 is at a very low level, with an average score of 1.4, out of a possible maximum of five, the analysis states. Transparency Serbia states that such low transparency is a consequence, first of all, of the non-existence of a legal obligation for all participants in the election campaign to publish data on sources of income and campaign costs during its duration. Serbia has rules on the financing of election campaigns, which provide for the publicity of certain information. This is achieved through the publication of reports on election campaign expenses. However, the main problem is that these reports are submitted only 30 days after the announcement of the final election results.

- **The Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA)** [monitored](#) turnout throughout the Election Day and published data regularly. The 2020 parliamentary elections are the worst elections that the CRTA has observed so far in terms of the quality of election day and, to an even greater extent, the entire election process - concluded the CRTA Observation Mission, which observed election day in a representative and random sample of 500 polling stations, which enables reporting on compliance with the law at all polling stations. Based on the preliminary analysis of the Election Day, the percentage of polling stations where irregularities and incidents were recorded ranges from 8 to 10 percent, which is twice as much as in the 2016 and 2017 elections.

- **The SHARE Foundation** published its last [monitoring report](#) before the start of the election silence on June 19. As expected, in the sixth and last week of the campaign, there was increased advertising on the Facebook pages of parties and leaders - 359 active sponsored posts were recorded. In line with much of the campaign so far, opposition Facebook pages dominate with advertising. Nearly 7,000 tweets were posted in the previous seven days on the region's Twitter sky with the hashtags # elections2020 and # boycott2020, which is twice as many as in the previous week when a little more than 3,000 tweets were written. A complete analysis of Twitter and other data collected from Facebook and online media during the campaign will be presented in a final report, which will be released the week after the election, along with visualizations of the data collected.

HUMANITARIAN AID

- **The Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation** announced on the International Refugee Day, June 20 that their Divac Foundation is marking with [twenty-one currently active projects](#) that improve the quality of life in the local community in Šid, Obrenovac and Sombor. There are currently 5,000 migrants in 18 reception centers, and more than 3,000 people are involved in the projects. During the COVID 19 pandemic, the Foundation provided the three reception centers with the necessary hygiene items for 2 months, and as the need for increased hygiene is constant, assistance with the hygiene items needed for another 2 months will be sent to 5 reception centers.