
THREE FREEDOMS PLATFORM



Civic
Initiatives

freedom of association

freedom of assembly

freedom of expression

Three freedoms under a magnifying glass

Review of cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia

May 14-28, 2020

Freedom of association, assembly and expression

- The competition for co-financing media content in the field of public information of the city of Belgrade again served as a screen for transferring high amounts of funds to the account of suspicious media service providers as well as PR and consulting companies established in the recent past or just a day before the competition. In this regard, the results of this year's competition show that they were awarded a large amount of money, and research by independent media indicates close business ties of these legal entities with the ruling Serbian Progressive Party and pro-regime television Studio B. The case of the company "[Videoton](#)" is cited as a clear example of abuse, which was founded only a day before the announcement of the competition, and they were awarded with six million dinars. On the other hand, some media houses, such as the portal [Pištaljka](#), which investigates corruption, did not receive anything. The results of this competition are proof not only of the worrying attitude of the state towards the media, but also of the continuation of the practice of illegitimate use of public funds for financing the media close to authorities. However, to make the situation worse, this is not the first such case, as evidenced by the fact that the [Association "Alliance of Serbs from the Region"](#) of the ruling party MP Miodrag Linta in the previous four years received 20.4 million dinars on the basis of such competitions, and the media with a decades-long tradition, are left without funds.
- [474 professors, doctors and medical workers](#) appealed to the Ministry of Health, the Republic Prosecutor and the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) to react to the abuse of the national frequency for the promotion of quackery. We remind you that the owner of Pink TV, Zeljko Mitrovic, has on several occasions promoted a medically untested and unfounded procedure of "ozonation of blood" on that television, recommending it as an effective method of fighting the corona virus. The signatories of the appeal expressed concern over these irresponsible statements, emphasizing that they could mislead the citizens and seriously endanger their health. [The REM Council](#) met on the occasion of this case, but a decision was made not to impose a sentence on Pink TV. In the explanation of this decision given by the member of the REM Council, Višnja Arandjelović, it is stated: "The Doctors Kon and Jankovic, who were suspicious of ozone therapy, said that this therapy is not protocol in their treatment, but it is not forbidden." In this way, the competent institutions have once again decided to self-limit their competence and to allow the unhindered promotion of dangerous and pseudo-scientific methods, which flood the citizens with fake news and endanger their health.

- [The Regulatory Body for Electronic Media](#) published a report on the representation of political actors during the election campaign for the period 11-15 May, which resulted in extremely illogical and suspicious findings according to which the most represented political actor is the opposition "Alliance for Serbia" which does not participate in the upcoming elections. Such results have been brought up by a change in the methodology according to which any mention of a certain organization is considered its representation in public, which leads to those against whom a negative campaign is being conducted being "the most represented". This is a clear attempt to mask the real situation pointed out by all relevant domestic and international organizations, which point to drastic inequalities in the media representation of the government and the opposition.
- [The journalist of the TV N1, Dusan Mladjenovic](#) was for the second time targeted by insults and threats from the same man who accused him of being a "Shiptar or Balija who works on Albanian television". The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia and the Association of Journalists of Serbia condemned this attack and called on the authorities to [react urgently](#), and the lawyers of N1 television announced [the filing of criminal charges](#). Such incidents are not a coincidence, but the fruit of the atmosphere that has been created over the years by the the highest state officials who label N1 television and their journalists almost every day.

Other freedoms

- A group of seven civil society organizations (Belgrade Center for Security Policy, Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, Center for Contemporary Politics, Center for European Policies, Center for International and Security Affairs, European Movement in Serbia, Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights) [invited the Government](#) to take seriously the assessments of the report of the international organization Freedom House and urgently initiate social dialogue in order to overcome the crisis of democracy. The statement urges the authorities to evaluate Freedom House and other relevant, domestic, foreign and international relevant organizations, including the European Commission, in a serious way, instead of trying to methodically refute, selectively present information from individual reports in order to mask the real state of democracy in Serbia.
- [The Belgrade Center for Human Rights](#) protested against the inadmissible behavior of the security workers of the Asylum Center in Bogovadja towards children who live in that institution without their parents. According to them, the children were exposed to psychological and physical abuse, as evidenced by videos showing one of the security workers hitting a child with a fist and an object resembling a stick. Considering that the crime of abuse and torture was committed in that way, criminal charges were filed against the responsible persons with the competent prosecutor's office, with a request that all security workers who participated in this incident be fired due to the possibility of repeating the crime. This behavior indicates a worrying trend of using violence against the wards of collective centers, as evidenced by numerous incidents during the state of emergency. Also worrying is the announcement that the Ministry of Defense is planning a public procurement of two and a half tons of razor wire for fencing the centers for accommodation of migrants and asylum seekers. [Radio Free Europe](#) asked the authorities for answers for the purposes for which the wire is procured, but they did not receive an answer. On the other hand, the Ministry of Defense announced that [President Aleksandar Vucic](#) ordered the use of military forces in order to help members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in order to secure the migrant center in Sid. Such a move is justified by the interests of preserving the safety of the citizens of that area due to the alleged increase in the number of committed crimes by the protégés of those centers.

- [A group of civil society organizations](#), including the IDEAS Center for Research and Development, the Crisis Policy and Response Center (CRPC), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the Belgrade Center for Human Rights, Praxis, the INDIGO Children and Youth Group, and The Humanitarian Center for Integration and Tolerance (HCIT) warned of the frequent use of hate speech and xenophobic statements against migrants residing in Serbia. In their statement, they especially point out the enormous growth of the number of informal groups on social networks that serve to spread false news, but also hatred and intolerance towards migrants, and in some cases for open calls for violence. In recent months, there has been an intensification of rhetoric towards this category of people and public promotion of those who are trying to gain political points on this topic, which ultimately results in increased tensions in society and the potential danger of violence.
- Regarding the rejection of the [initiatives](#) for assessing the constitutionality of the Decision on declaring a state of emergency, the Belgrade Center for Human Rights announced that such a decision means devaluing the role of the National Assembly in declaring a state of emergency. The explanation of the decision states that the notification sent by the President of the Assembly to the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister that the Assembly was not able to meet was a sufficient basis for excluding the National Assembly from that process. It is also obvious from the explanation that the Constitutional Court wanted to absolve itself of responsibility, emphasizing that it "has no constitutional or other legal criteria on the basis of which it could question the notification of the Speaker of the National Assembly that the Parliament was unable to meet." The conclusion of the [BCHR statement](#) states that in this way the sovereignty of the citizens proclaimed by the Constitution, which is realized through their freely elected representatives, is called into question, bearing in mind that the entire Assembly is allowed to be suspended based on the opinion of only one MP.