



Three freedoms under the magnifying glass

Review of the violations of the basic freedoms in Serbia

29 May-11 June 2020

Freedom of association, assembly and expression

- [The Balternativa movement](#) states on its website that it is launching a long-announced petition to ban NGOs in Serbia. The text invites citizens to support their petition with signatures and announces that their members and activists will organize signature collection throughout Serbia. According to the petition, "it aims to ban the work of non-governmental organizations that pose a risk in the past for the national security of the Republic of Serbia". They specifically ask the Republic Public Prosecutor to initiate a ban by the Constitutional Court the work of five organization: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Open Society Foundations, Fund for Humanitarian Law, the Center for Cultural Decontamination, the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies and Women in black. This movement was previously known for its public appearances in which it verbally attacked activists and civil society organizations, calling them "traitors and foreign mercenaries." [Serbian Radical Party](#) of the convicted war criminal Vojislav Seselj also advocates banning the work of certain civil society organizations in his election campaign. They are proposing a Prohibition Act of state funding for non-governmental organizations, for which, as they stated, from the republic budget it allocates more than ten billion dinars every year. According to them, citizens should not pay "NGOs that openly engage in anti-Serbian policies and subversive activities." Such a dangerous rhetoric dating back to the 1990s is an unequivocal attack on freedom of association and contributes to an even greater narrowing of the space for the work of civil society organizations, but an open call for verbal attacks on organizations and their activists.
- [The citizens' association Sumadija Center for Civic Activism](#) from Kragujevac informed the public that, even after the end of the crisis caused by the corona virus, the Clinical Center Kragujevac, and their director, Predrag Sazdanović, continued with the inadmissible practice of the discrimination of media and journalists. As they say in their statement, calls for reporting from the event organized on May 28, in gratitude to donors who helped work during the pandemic The Clinical Center with money, equipment or other means was not sent to the editorial offices of all informative media in Kragujevac, nor to all correspondents of national media, but only selected, obviously, according to the criteria established personally by director Sezdanović. Just to remind due to the state of emergency, most of the Kragujevac journalists could not reach relevant information, especially

from CC Kragujevac, which was the case with many independent media in other cities in Serbia. Apart from the fact that this act violated the article of the Law on public information and the media regarding discrimination against the media, this act harms citizens the most, who remain deprived of information of public importance.

- [The Civic Front](#) announced that the activist of the United Movement of Free Tenants from Nis, Jana Krstić, was verbally attacked on the Nisava quay by unknown young men who stopped her and threatened her because of the T-shirt with the logo of the initiative Don't let Belgrade d(r)own. This verbal attack happened in the same place where, also because of the anti-fascist T-shirt motives, a year ago, a group of neo-fascists stabbed student Uroš Janjić with a knife. Jana Krstić is one of the most recognizable activists of United Movement of Free Tenants who participated in numerous protests, manifestations and actions. The Civic Front called on the competent authorities to express an unequivocal reaction when it comes to this case, emphasizing their rather mild, even in the case of the incident with student Uroš Janjić, which, according to them, is the reason for many incidents in Nis. It is especially worrying that in Serbia in the recent months there is more visible spread of the idea of hatred and violence with elements of fascism with a noticeable absence of reactions of the competent authorities.
- Sociologist and researcher of the Bureau for Social Research (BIRODI), [Zoran Gavrilović](#), after being a guest on the show Pressing on N1 television, was the target of threats and insults on Twitter. The show in which Gavrilović was a guest together with the member of the Council of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM), Olivera Zekić, talked about the media scene in Serbia, the work of REM, as well as the ban on the pre-election video in which President Aleksandar Vučić is with a child. Let us remind you, this is not the first time that Gavrilović or BIRODI are the target of verbal attacks and threats due to the independent performance of their work. Examples of labeling of civil society organizations and individuals for the work they perform have become more frequent in recent months, and quick reactions from the competent authorities are most often absent. What is worrying is the fact that such attacks often come from government officials in the highest state positions, who view civil society organizations as their opponents.
- [N1 television](#) reported that their site and application were the target of a cyber attack, after which they were unavailable for some time. According to experts, the attack had "the same signature" as previous cyber attacks earlier this year. Let us remind you, the N1 site was also the target of DDoS attacks on several occasions in January. By the way, DDoS are attacks with thousands of computers aimed at overloading a web server, network or some other part of the infrastructure and thus preventing access to their users. It is important to mention that N1 television and its journalists are often the target of verbal attacks and insults in the pro-regime media, and often these attacks also come from the highest state officials.
- An unknown man confiscated the phone of [KRIK journalist](#), Bojana Pavlović, after she photographed the son of the President of Serbia, Danilo Vučić. in the company of a member of the Partizan hooligan group "Janjičari" Aleksandar Vidojević, whom the police associate with the Montenegrin criminal clan, watching a football derby. According to KRIK, after she took the photo, Pavlović was stopped by three men who introduced themselves as police officials. Pavlović also introduced herself and showed her journalist ID, but they told her that she had to wait for the police patrol and that she would be detained. They demanded that she delete the photos from the phone, and two other men joined the police. The journalist said that she was on assignment and

asked to call the editor, and one of the newcomers took her phone from her hand, to which the police did not react. After insisting that they tell her why her means of work were taken away, the man who did that said that he did not have to explain anything. Vidojevic, among others, then approached the group and said that they should return the phone to the journalist, which they did. [Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia and the Association of Journalists of Serbia](#) demanded from the competent authorities to urgently determine who intercepted the KRIK journalist Bojana Pavlović and confiscated her equipment, as well as to protect her in the performance of her work due to the suspicion that her safety is seriously endangered. It should be reminded that the KRIK editorial office has already been exposed to insults and attacks by the highest state officials precisely because of the text with one of the photos of the president's son and the man whom the police associate with the Montenegrin criminal clan.

- [The Association of Judges and Prosecutors](#) issued a proclamation to judges and prosecutors on the occasion of the upcoming elections of the highest judicial bodies, appealing to members of the judiciary to approach them conscientiously, professionally and with dignity. In their proclamation, they point to the negative impact of the formation of parallel judicial bases run by NGOs that are not representatives of judges and prosecutors, but part of the NGO sector with various activities and projects that cannot be directly linked to the judiciary. In its public appearances, this GONGO organization most often dealt with verbal attacks on the work of independent and renowned civil society organizations dealing with the judiciary and their representatives, but also professional associations, such as the Association of Prosecutors of Serbia, thus trying to discredit their work.