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**THREE FREEDOMS  
PLATFORM**



**Civic  
Initiatives**

freedom of association

freedom of assembly

freedom of expression

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## Three freedoms under a magnifying glass

### Review of cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia

14-27 August, 2020

#### Freedom of association, assembly and expression

- After the institutional pressure on civil society organizations, which is reflected in the publication of the list by the Directorate for the Prevention of Money Laundering, which includes associations and individuals in relation to which the verification of their money transactions in the last year is required, support for this process was provided by the GONGO organization [National Avant-Garde](#). Although the government representatives denied that this was targeted pressure, the fact is that the list includes precisely those associations and individuals who have been critical of the work of the current regime in recent years. In this way, they are inflicted serious non-pecuniary damage, primarily by supporting deep-rooted prejudices that the civil sector is an extended arm and associate of the foreign factor and their intelligence services. In its statement, the GONGO organization National Avant-Garde calls on the authorities to check and review their work and money flows, justifying it by referring to the provisions of the Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing. Based on these facts, it is obvious that this is a synchronized action of state bodies, GONGO organizations whose task is to legitimize such actions, but also the actions of tabloids that should provide media support to this process. We remind you that more than 270 associations and individuals have signed a joint statement announcing that they will use all legal means at their disposal, and that these pressures will not hinder them in the fight for a democratic and free Serbia.
- The phantom portal "Prismotra.net" published a text in which the association and activists of the ["Center for Ecology and Sustainable Development- CEKOR"](#) are accused of being informers of foreign services whose task is to work against the interests of Chinese investments in Serbia, which is why they conclude that CEKOR "the economic killers of Serbia". Apart from the organization itself, which is accused of cooperating with the "Bosniak intelligence service", the text also targets the activists of that association, Natasa Djereg, Zvezdan Kalmar, Nikola Marusic and Pera Markovic. [The legal representative](#) of the CEKOR association pointed out that this is a text that damages the reputation of this association, but also that there are elements of intimidation, which is why they should prepare adequate reactions in the coming period. This association became the target of attacks, among other things, due to criticism of the company Electric Power Industry of Serbia, which rejected every request for access to information of public importance, about the work of that company. [In its second text](#), this portal published the

names and amounts of donations that CEKOR allegedly received, accusing them of acting for "anti-Chinese propaganda". The text also accuses CEKOR of not dealing with any environmental damage from the consequences of the NATO bombing, as well as the problem of the Smederevo Ironworks, at a time when "its owners were Americans". In the end, it is concluded that this organization received money for non-existent projects, but also that their activists often travel abroad to carry in their bags the money they receive from foreign services, which is not recorded in their reports. This case is one in a series of tabloid attacks on all those associations that are committed to transparency in their work and which demand answers from the competent authorities to questions concerning the safety, health and general well-being of the citizens of Serbia. Lately, the matrix of attacks, which are mostly organized with the logistical help of phantom sites and portals where unsigned texts are published, is becoming more visible, which makes it even more difficult for disinterested bodies to find the people behind the attack and why such actions go unpunished.

- [Journalist and editor of "N1" television](#) Branislav Šovljanski had a flat tire on his car near the apartment where he lives. An unknown perpetrator punctured the tire on his car with a sharp object with five stab wounds, which confirms the suspicion that it was not a coincidence or a combination of circumstances. Journalists of "N1" television are the most frequent targets of cruel tabloid campaigns, but also open threats that they receive through social networks, and lately more and more often live. It is worrying that almost without exception, there is no reaction from the competent authorities and that none of the attackers will be prosecuted, which indicates, at the very least, the negligent attitude of the state authorities, which only encourages the attackers to further actions. There is a noticeable trend of increasing the number of threats addressed to journalists, so that in just one week during August; as many as [five cases of attacks on journalists](#) were recorded.
- [The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia](#) condemned the discriminatory attitude of the acting director of the General Hospital in Novi Pazar, Meho Mahmutović, to independent journalists and the media in that city due to the frequent practice of not inviting journalists to press conferences. During his last address to the public, Mahmutović invited only two journalists close to him, thus denying the right to freely and professionally perform work to other journalists, and citizens the right to objective and timely information. This dangerous practice of distinguishing between "eligible" and "unsuitable" journalists is extremely harmful and threatens freedom of information, but is especially problematic in situations where the state is facing a virus epidemic and thus narrowing or virtually closing communication channels by those who are most called upon to provide an answer to the public. Due to the obvious violation of the Law and unprofessional attitude towards the media, NUNS publicly supported the initiative of doctors seeking Mahmutović's removal, considering him most responsible for the poor work of the General Hospital services during the corona virus pandemic. The non-governmental organization [Sandzak Committee for Human Rights](#) also condemned such actions of the authorities, but also more and more frequent attacks on media representatives.
- After the announcement of the dismissal of 200 workers from [Radio Television of Vojvodina](#), due to the reduction of budget expenditures for that media house in the amount of 201 million dinars, representatives of the culture and art union "Independence" held a protest in Novi Sad and announced intensification of actions in the coming days. Namely, during the month of July, 56 people were fired, and according to the announcements, another 200 people who were hired through private employment agencies will lose their jobs. In that way, in addition to the existence of the employees themselves, the further work of that media house is also called into question, especially in terms of creating and broadcasting content in minority languages, having in mind the already existing staff shortages in those areas. The union pointed out that laying off workers is especially unfair during an epidemic when the state helps companies not to lay off workers. [The Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina- NDNV](#) expressed concern over the position of their colleagues who work in the minority newsrooms of RTV in a protest letter they sent to the management of that house. The letter also states that the absence of

cooperation between the management and the employees in order to overcome this problem is inadmissible, which is why the employees do not have any official information about the events in the media house where they are employed. NDNV has announced that it will inform all relevant international partners about this situation, but also that it will provide free legal aid to all workers who need it.

- Environmentalist and civic activist [Dragana Arsić](#) was attacked by the phantom portal "Prismotra.net", which accuses her of false activism and unprofessional attack of the Public Company National Park "Fruška gora". The text accuses Arsić of financially damaging the bank in which she worked in the past, and that she now acts as an exponent of political parties "which devastated Fruška gora in the past". It is also stated that its "systematic, continuous and deliberate attacks" are allegedly financed by the organization Trag, which is stated to have started its activities in 1999, at the time of the NATO bombing. In the end, it is concluded that her main role is to present untruths at the expense of that public company, but it is never stated what she stated untruthfully in her statements. The Prismotra.net portal obviously got a very important role in labeling political dissidents of the government and persecuting civil activists, which is also contributed by the lack of interest of the authorities to find out who is hiding behind these phantom portals.
- After many years of institutional and non-institutional struggle, numerous protests and barricades in which the rivers in the area of Stara Planina are preserved, the locals have officially managed to ban the construction of mini hydro power plants in those areas. Residents of Rakita and activists of the initiative ["Let's Defend the Rivers of Stara Planina"](#) organized a joint action of removing pipes from the river, in which they were supported by numerous citizens and activists from other parts of Serbia. [Many years of efforts, courage and success](#) of the inhabitants of this small place in Serbia are the best display of the real power of citizens who are associated in order to solve common problems and defend the basic human right to a healthy and safe environment.