
**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

25 September-8 October, 2020

Freedom of association, assembly and expression

- The president of the association of single parents and single-parent families "Together", [Alma Junis](#), was labeled as the organizer of prostitution "which acquires money and wealth by exploiting single mothers and wives". On that occasion, a group of civil society organizations, media and journalists from Novi Pazar reacted, demanding that the authorities urgently identify the persons who initiated the chase and prosecute them for that. In their statement, they pointed out the importance of the work of this organization, primarily in the field of providing psycho-social and legal assistance, and called on the citizens to report the Pesterpress.com page, on which the disputed content was published.
- The phantom portal "Prismotra.net" continued the series of publishing texts labeling civil society organizations, media, journalists, politicians and activists. In the last 10 days, several such texts have been published. The first of them deals with the topic "[who are the foreign spies in Serbia](#)", and the text accuses Nikola Burazer, director of the Center for Contemporary Politics, Emina Muminović, editor of the portal "European Western Balkans", Aleksandar Ivković, project assistant at the Center for Contemporary politics and Nikola Cuckić. The same portal also published a text accusing the Director of "CEKOR", [Natasa Đereg](#), of recruiting people for the sect, as well as of being a high-ranking member of the sect called "Art of living". The text also states that Natasa Đereg takes money from the citizens of Subotica for fake medical services. The organization "[Libertarian Club - LIBEK](#)" was also the target of the attack. They are accused of recruiting young people through lectures, seminars, but also by providing scholarships and with help by professors at certain faculties. Among other things, they are accused of spreading anti-Serbian propaganda and suspicious financing from foreign sources.

- [Director Zlatko Paković and actors](#) in the play “Srebrenica. When we killed, get up” which was recently played at the Center for Cultural Decontamination, they were the victims of a fearful campaign by tabloids and nationalists. The reason for the attacks is, among other things, the scene in which the Serbian flag is placed on the floor, and the names of the victims of the genocide in Srebrenica are written on it. A large number of death threats and insults were sent to them via social networks, and the target of the attack was the [Helsinki Committee for Human Rights](#), which organized the performance. The Helsinki Committee said that an urgent reaction from the authorities was necessary, and that the goal of these attacks was to prevent further performance of this play in Serbia, but that they would nevertheless do everything in their power to continue performing this play. [The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia](#) also issued a statement, emphasizing that this incident is a consequence of the atmosphere of violence and intolerance, for which the government bears the greatest responsibility, and that the fact that Serbia has never essentially faced mistakes made in the past contributes to that. The chase against the actors continued through the [phantom portal "Prismotra.net"](#) in which the actors who played in this "sick play against Serbia" were presented. This case clearly indicates the harmful consequences of war-mongering rhetoric, which is dominant in pro-government tabloids and which contributes to an enormous increase in intolerance towards different opinions, even when it is expressed in the form of a theatrical performance. This is proof that not only is the society in Serbia not ready to face mistakes, but also that freedom of expression is endangered.
- [The European Commission's progress report on Serbia](#) pointed out that systematic cooperation between civil society organizations and the state is still not at the desired level and that additional efforts are needed to create an enabling environment for the work, development and financing of civil society. The report states that CSOs were subjected to numerous pressures in the course of their work, but cites as a special case the publication of a list of 57 organizations and individuals that were subject to scrutiny by the Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing. The overall picture was not significantly changed by the adoption of guidelines for the inclusion of CSOs in working groups for drafting regulations and public policies, primarily due to the fact that in practice there is no significant improvement in attitudes towards proposals and amendments coming from CSOs. In the end, it is concluded that a Council for cooperation with civil society has not been formed yet, nor has a national strategy and action plan been adopted that would contribute to a better environment for civil society.
- The European Commission's report also found a worrying situation in the [area of media freedom and freedom of expression](#), concluding that no progress had been made in these areas. The key problems in this area are attacks on the media and journalists, exclusively the promotion of the ruling party and economic insecurity of the media. When it comes to pressures and attacks on journalists, special concern is expressed for the situation in the local media, and the case of journalist Ana Lalic, who was arrested during the state of emergency for publishing a text about the bad situation in the Clinical Center of Vojvodina. The key problems in terms of economic sustainability are non-transparency in terms of media ownership and unfair distribution of funds from the state budget and local government budgets, both in terms of project co-financing and when it comes to advertising. When it comes to the professionalism of reporting, it is concluded that "the editorial environment favors tabloidization, which does not lead to the improvement of journalistic standards." The problem of the limited reach of a small number of media, which does not favor the government but opens the space for different views, is pointed out, as well as the problem of the functionary campaign in favor of the ruling party. Such findings, in conjunction with detected problems in the area of justice and the rule of law, point to a

worrying trend of deteriorating conditions for free action, not only of civil society organizations, but of any social or political actors.

- [The Belgrade Center for Security Policy \(BCSP\)](#) reminded that even two months after the publication of the list of organizations and individuals that should be under the special control of the Administration for Anti-Money Laundering, that institution did not give the public an answer to the question why extraordinary data collection was ordered on the financial transactions of these organizations and individuals. The statement emphasizes that the publication of the list was a clear and unequivocal pressure on the work of civil society, but also on all others who are critical towards government policies. Having in mind the harmful effects that the list produced, primarily in terms of the reputation of those who were on it, there is a justified interest of the public and the obligation of the Administration to explain on the basis of which criteria and indications those organizations and persons are marked as suspicious. It would be very irresponsible to cover up this case because it has already caused serious harassment in the public, which rightly expects an outcome, whether it is about identifying irregularities in the work and funding of these people, or public announcement that organizations and people on the list were unjustified suspects.