
**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

18 December, 2020 – 14 January, 2021

Freedom of association, assembly and expression

- The N1 television crew [was forbidden](#) to enter the port of the church in Srbobran, where a memorial service was held on the occasion of the 79th anniversary of the Raid in Backa, when about 4,500 people were killed by Hungarian fascists, and most of the victims were Serbs, Roma and Jews. The Secretary of the Diocese of Backa, Vladan Simic, banned the journalists of this television from entering, with the message that they "have nothing to look for in the ports of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the territory of that diocese." He justified his actions with allegations about the manner in which N1 television reported on the events related to the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as the desire for everything to pass in peace, without N1 television reporting in the public interest. However, [research](#) by the Bureau of Social Research (BIRODI) shows that it is not true that N1 reports unprofessionally on events in and around the SOC, but that the tone of reporting on the SOC is 89.2% neutral, 6.7% positive and only 4.1% negative. In addition to representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church and citizens, this event was also attended by the President of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina Istvan Pastor and the President of the Provincial Government Igor Mirovic, [who did not apologize](#) or condemn the actions of the Diocese of Backa in the days after this incident. N1 television to the office of the Patriarch and the office of the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The president of the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS), [Zeljko Bodrozic](#), said that the ban was an act of inadmissible discrimination, and that it was obvious that the diocese of Backa had succumbed to propaganda placed through pro-government tabloids does not work in the interest of Serbia. His overall assessment is that the atmosphere in the public space is extremely poisoned and that such propaganda unfortunately affects an increasing number of citizens. Unfortunately, there is no unified condemnation of the ban on reporting on public events by all relevant media, political and social actors, which only proves that the division of society is so serious that even for such actions justifications and arguments are found, or at least tacitly supported by non-condemnation.

- [The trial](#) of those accused of setting fire to the house of journalist „Zig.info“ portal, Milan Jovanovic, was postponed again, this time because the court president "for technical reasons could not decide on the request for disqualification of the judge" filed due to allegations by the defense lawyer Slavko Zigic is biased. The range of reasons for postponing the trial is something that is rarely seen in court practice: starting with the private obligations of defense attorneys, isolation due to contact with a person positive for coronavirus, defense allegations that the amended indictment is incomprehensible, gangrene of the defendant's teeth, and at one point until the separation of the proceedings against the accused Igor Novakovic in relation to the proceedings against Dragoljub Simonovic, the former president of the municipality of Grocka and a high-ranking official of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party. Such actions are more than a clear signal that there is no will to end the procedure, but on the contrary, there is a strong will to avoid or relativize the court epilogue as much as possible, which sends a clear message that violence against journalists can go unpunished. [A similar case](#) is the repeated trial of four former members of the state security for the murder of journalist Slavko Curuvija due to the "illness of the president of the court panel". The postponement of the trial itself is not disputable to the extent that the reversal of the originally passed conviction due to "exceeding the indictment, introduction of unidentified persons as well as adding actions to the accused for whom they are not charged in the indictment" is disputable. Bearing in mind that this case is not over even after more than two decades, suspicions that this is a deliberate disavowal of the trial are gaining weight, as well as a feeling of general insecurity due to the lack of sanctions for murders, intimidation and attacks on journalists.
- The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia re-elected [Olivera Zekic](#) as a member of the Council of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM), and at a later session of that body she was elected [President of the Council](#). Its work, but above all inappropriate public appearances during the previous mandate, damaged the reputation of that institution and represented one of the key elements of disagreement between the government and the opposition during the inter-party dialogue conducted under the auspices of the European Parliament. The decision of the National Assembly to entrust the mandates to the same person again is a clear signal that no step forward has been made when it comes to the work of REM and regulating not only the situation within the electronic media, but also that there is no will to correct the extremely unfavorable situation. Stating that democratic procedures were violated in such a way that the election of the President of the Council was not on the agenda, [Slobodan Cvejic](#), resigned from the position of a member of the Council. In his address to the public, he stated that there are no longer elementary preconditions for working in that body and that he does not want to participate in undemocratic processes, emphasizing that his colleague Judita Popovic is probably right when he says that decisions about that body are made elsewhere. The issue of the work of this body will certainly be one of the central topics of the future continuation of the inter-party dialogue, but such moves do not contribute to converging positions and reaching a compromise solution that would be in the public interest. [Tanja Fajon and Vladimir Bilcik](#), as mediators in the inter-party dialogue, also expressed

concern, stating that in that way the much-needed trust in the work and independence of that body is being violated.

- [At the same session of the REM Council](#), another controversial decision was made, both because of its content and because of the manner of its adoption - without prior discussion. Based on that decision, Scepán Prascevic was elected a member of the RTS Management Board, although he had no previous experience in the field of media work. Slobodan Cvejic, who resigned after the session, did not take part in the voting, as did member Judita Popovic, who considered it inappropriate to decide without a prior discussion on the received candidacies. According to her, the fact that the remaining six members unanimously supported the election of Prascevic unequivocally indicates that the decision was previously made elsewhere. This procedure also shows the absolute lack of will to overcome the divisions and problems that exist in the socio-political life of Serbia.
- Journalist of TV N1, Jelena Zoric, who reported from the trial against Predrag Koluviija, suspected of illegal marijuana cultivation on an agricultural farm in Jovanjica, received [threats](#) from one of Koluviija's lawyers, Svetislav Bojic. On that occasion, Bojic suggested that she be precise in reporting, emphasizing that "whoever resented Pedja (Koluviija) did not do well". Such a message unequivocally represents a threat and an attempt to influence the reporting of journalist Zoric, who reported the case to the Criminal Police Directorate. Also, the company Adri news doo, which is engaged in the production of television content for TV N1, sent a [disciplinary report](#) on this occasion to the disciplinary prosecutor of the Belgrade Bar Association, Dejan Nikolic. The public pressure was obviously not enough for lawyer Bojic to stop making implicit threats, so the day after the first incident, he approached Jelena Zoric again to tell her "how Predrag greeted her very, very much". Such actions also indicate the absence of fear of the reaction of the competent authorities, which is usually absent, especially in cases where those who make threats do not do so explicitly or with the use of physical force. Unfortunately, [the threats continued](#) after these incidents, so that on January 2, Jelena Zoric found a piece of paper on the door of the apartment where she lives, which read "This will last until it is over. It is impossible to escape from that. " All these events indicate that the security of Jelena Zoric is seriously endangered, which is why it is necessary for her to receive police protection.
- The KRIK portal came [under attack](#) from the High Judicial Council and the Protector of Citizens due to the "Judge Who Judges" project, in which the property card of individual judges was published, as well as details from the cases in which they judged. The High Judicial Council condemned the publication of this database, which they believe was made tendentiously and puts judges in a negative context. The Protector of Citizens, Zoran Pasalic, went a step further, emphasizing that in this way, "targets are drawn on the foreheads" of judges. Such attacks point to a misunderstanding of the position and role of both the judiciary and investigative journalists. The judiciary is independent and any pressure on it is undesirable and forbidden, but judges and prosecutors are not excluded from the field of investigative journalists and their interest in the work of judges is absolutely legitimate and contributes to the public interest by providing citizens with information about that branch of government.

- The website of the [Prismotra.net](https://prismotra.net) portal has been suspended after months of persecution of journalists, activists and all those who are critical of the situation in society in Serbia. This portal is known for spreading slander, lies and unverified information in order to discredit the people they wrote about, using a dictionary that marked the public in 90s in which dissidents are marked as foreign mercenaries, spies and enemies of Serbia and the Serbian people. On the other hand, even though the site has been shut down, the Twitter and Facebook accounts of this page are still active, so we can expect continued media persecution. Unfortunately, despite the numerous and almost daily published untruths, no one has yet responded because of that and the public is still without information about who is behind this project.