

Three freedoms under a magnifying glass

Review of cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia

4- 17 December, 2020

Freedom of association, assembly and expression

- The editor-in-chief of the weekly “NIN”, Vesna Malisic, [was attacked](#) via the social network Twitter. The tweet with threats was written from a profile that does not bear the person's personal name, but based on previous experiences with a great deal of certainty, it can be assumed that it is about journalist Zoran Cirjakovic. Cirjakovic was fired from the Faculty of Media and Communications due to similar actions, and the target of his attacks were mostly journalists to whom he directed numerous and severe insults. The most common "motive" for his misogynistic actions was journalist Jovana Gligorijevic. The fact that such insults and threats are sent through the social network, as well as that the threats are subtly concealed thanks to the indisputable education and eloquence of the authors, in no way diminishes their danger and raises the question why the authorities still do not respond to such forms of violence, which, in addition to representing open threats and insults, in some cases represent obvious persecution and psychological abuse.
- The Working Group for the Safety of Journalists filed a criminal complaint with the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime regarding death threats addressed to Editor-in-Chief of CINS, [Milica Saric](#), on the social network Twitter. Such messages are motivated primarily by investigative journalism texts published on CINS website, as evidenced by the threat sent through their official Facebook page, which threatens that they are "Soros' mercenaries and that justice will come to them." The easy understanding of threats made through social networks and impunity for internet bullies has created a picture of legitimizing insults through these communication channels, which is why we are increasingly witnessing attacks and insults that are spared almost no one who deals with public affairs, especially those who are critical of the government.

- The phantom portal “Prismotra” continued to [publish](#) a series of texts discrediting mostly NGO activists. This time, due to accusations that they were working to hide crimes against Serbs, the executive director of Civic Initiatives, Maja Stojanovic, Ivan Djuric from the Youth Initiative for Human Rights and Milena Vasic from the Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights were attacked. Civic initiatives are accused of receiving money from abroad, and director Maja Stojanovic is also accused of allegedly participating in the election headquarters of Sasa Jankovic in the 2017 presidential elections. Ivan Djuric is accused of promoting the representation of Serbs as criminals and opposing the use of the term "Shiptars" in public and Milena Vasic is accused of never raising the issue of prosecuting Albanians responsible for the suffering of victims of Serbian origin as a lawyer. The CSO "Europolis" is also [under attack](#) by this portal, which they accuse of organizing trips for the youth to Croatia, more precisely Vukovar, in order to present Serbs there as criminals. Dane Pribic from Europolis is accused of that "operation", and the organization itself is accused of close ties with "extremist organizations" such as "Marx 21". Journalist of the “Radio Free Europe journalist”, Iva Martinović was not spared from [personalized attacks](#), for which they claim that there is a dilemma whether "Bosniaks or Shiptars" pay for it. The text states that she wrote 15 texts about "fictional" crimes in Bosnia and Kosovo, as well as that she often visits "anti-Serbian exhibitions", also recalling her views on the destabilization of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the destruction of the Dayton Agreement by Serbia. The frequency of these attacks indicates open support for the authors behind these texts, which the authorities obviously do not want to prosecute.
- The example of journalist Milan Jovanovic from Grocka, whose house was set on fire two years ago while he and his wife were sleeping, shows that [verbal threats and attacks](#) can very easily turn into physical ones and leave serious and long-lasting consequences. Former president of that municipality of Grocka, Dragoljub Simonovic, is accused of ordering that crime, and he has been successfully avoiding appearances in court for years, which is why even after two years, the case is not even close to getting a final epilogue in the form of convictions. In this regard, the main trial was postponed this month and rescheduled for January 11, due to the alleged illness of the defendant and the absence of one of the defense attorneys. Procrastination with the implementation of this process is a clear indication that there is an interest in forgetting this case in public, and it certainly deepens the uncertainty and anxiety in which journalist Milan Jovanović lives after his house was set on fire. When this case is viewed in the context of the frequent silence on attacks on journalists, it is clear that it is not just a matter of general inefficiency of the judiciary, but of a systematic avoidance of solving the problem of conditions in which journalists do their job.
- [90 civil society organizations](#) signed a joint statement expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of reforms Serbia had to implement in the EU accession process, as well as with increasing violations of basic democratic principles and human rights, increasing hate speech and rising violence against individuals, journalists, the media, political dissidents and civil society organizations. The statement cites the following as a key issue: "The pandemic has exposed the dysfunction of the political order, and the results of the Serbian government in 2020 in key areas for progress in the EU accession process indicate a lack of sincere political will to implement the necessary changes." After arguing about the state of democracy, political pluralism, exclusion or

marginalization of many social groups and the consequent decline of distrust in institutions, civil society organizations expressed readiness to be partners of the state in solving current and upcoming challenges, but demanded that the government provide basic conditions for continued cooperation such as respect for fundamental freedoms and democratic principles.