

Three freedoms under a magnifying glass

Review of cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia

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Freedom of association, assembly and expression

- After facing implicit threats from lawyer Svetislav Bojic for reporting on the trial of Predrag Koluviija, journalist Jelena Zoric came under [new pressure](#). Criminal charges were filed against her, precisely by Svetislav Bojic. This move followed after N1 television submitted a disciplinary report to the Belgrade Bar Association, due to the way in which Bojic addressed the journalist, which, taking into account the entire context of the case, can be understood as a threat. We remind you that lawyer Bojic, on two occasions threatened to the journalist Zoric, and after that a message appeared on the door of her apartment in which she is informed that the persecution will continue. On this occasion, the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia issued a statement stating that this case is an obvious example of abuse of legal regulations in order to create pressure and obstruct the work of journalist Zoric.
- Threats were also sent to the editorial staff of the [Zoomer portal](#) after the publication of an article entitled "We asked young people how they live in Kosovo." On that occasion, they were threatened via a direct message on the social network Instagram that they would "find out who wrote the text and that it will not go well". Regarding this case, the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia filed a criminal complaint with the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.
- A year after the editorial office of the [Kolubarske.rs portal](#) was broken into; the editor-in-chief of that portal [Darija Rankovic](#) is again the target, this time of verbal attacks in the text published on the Embargo portal which alludes to her unprofessional and chauvinistic actions. It is a common matrix of discrediting critical voices by the pro-government tabloids and their associates. In addition to these attacks, one of the most dangerous means that is increasingly used in dealing with critical voices is the placement of fake and inauthentic content. Such an inconvenience was faced by N1 television journalist [Natasa Kovacev](#), who found herself in the center of attention after the diocese of Backa did not allow her to enter the church port, and then inaccurate quotes of her alleged statement that the Serbian Orthodox Church is the biggest obstacle to the settlement of migrants in empty Serbian houses, appeared on social networks. This is a very dangerous method which seriously endangers the safety of the victim by abusing topics that polarize the public, instrumentalizing the part of the public that reacts extremely emotionally and aggressively, and making such victims a legitimate target of verbal attacks, which in some cases they can also grow into physical ones.
- The journalist of Nova.rs portal, [Vojislav Milovancevic](#) faced serious threats, mainly through profiles that hide their identity on the social network Twitter, after the publication of an article in which he referred to

the case of rape at the Orthodox Theological Faculty. Shortly after that, an organized internet campaign was launched, in which dozens of people participated, by writing insults but also by open death threats to this journalist. This, as in many other cases, is not about accidental attacks by individual users of social networks, but about coordinated actions that are agreed upon through communication platforms in groups that often number hundreds or thousands of members. We also remind you that Vojislav Milovancevic was also a victim of physical attacks when, during the protests in July 2020, he was inflicted with bodily injuries by hitting him in the head with a hard object while reporting from that gathering. In this case, as in many other cases, the competent authorities do not take verbal violence and persecution to which journalists are exposed seriously enough, as well as the possible consequences that may result from that. In most cases, the prosecution initiated proceedings, investigations were conducted, but mostly without an outcome and a court epilogue, and even when verdicts were reached, they were mostly mild and disproportionately low. For that reason, and motivated by recent and increasingly frequent threats to journalists, Reporters Without Borders demanded a more decisive reaction from the Minister of Culture and Information, Maja Gojkovic, but it is still obvious that there is no political will to create conditions for safe and unhindered journalistic work.

- The obvious intention not to end the proceedings is best shown in the case of the attempted murder of journalist Milan Jovanovic, in which the former mayor of Grocka, Dragoljub Simonovic, is among the accused as the organizer of the crime. After the trial was postponed several times due to a number of reasons, the main trial was postponed again this week. After the request for disqualification of Judge Slavko Zugic was rejected, the defense requested the disqualification of the President of the Second Basic Court as well as the President of the High Court, due to alleged bias. Prolongation becomes even more important if we take into account the fact that the acting judge Slavko Zugic will retire on March 15, and in case there is a change of judge, it is necessary for the whole process to start from the beginning
- GONGO organization [Association of Judges and Prosecutors of Serbia \(UST\)](#) welcomed the announcement of the High Judicial Council on the occasion of publishing a series of texts within the project "Judge who judges" published by the portal KRIK. It is said in the statement that by publishing the property cards of certain judges and the cases in which they acted, unjustified pressure and labeling of those people is being exerted. In its statement, the UST states that the High Judicial Council has an obligation to appoint a person who will respond publicly to all attacks by international organizations and domestic civil society organizations on behalf of that body, and thus protect the independence of judges. In this case, it turned out that there is an interesting link between different structures that is activated when it is necessary to oppose investigative journalists and the results of their work

